

**Minutes
Board Meeting
May 29, 2019**

Attendees: Ayana Verdi, John Verdi, Denise Liberi, Sarah Russo, Sandra Walder

**Call to order: 9.26 am
Quorum established**

Facilities:

Funds to purchase next door of current Highland house (1861).
The question was if either the school or the Verdi family would purchase 1861 Highland Avenue:

1. Bank stated that Verdi purchasing the property would be best option (lower interest rate, flexibility of financing). Verdis are pre-approved, but only a local credit union was willing to help offer financing due to the uniqueness/zoning of the property.
2. Verdis to refinance out of the first property (1851 Highland Ave), deed transferred to EcoSchool under a commercial loan - making it possible for Verdi Family to use "hero loan" program to purchase 1861 Highland Ave.
3. 100% loan to value for 1851 Highland Ave but at 6% interest rate.
4. Verdis have begun the process and contract with the seller was kicked back and the contract needed to be re-done which delays everything for at least 30 days. Seller is feeling frustrated and demanded additional concessions to continue home purchase process.
5. Appraisal might be lower than what the seller desires (\$225,000). The gap between appraisal and \$225,000 was addressed by owner and suggested that the owner could hold the mortgage - this action was raised as a Fraud concern from the lawyer. It is a difficult situation and lawyers are trying to figure out how to get the deal done.
6. The Verdi family is personally underwriting most of this process.
7. Owner wants a non - refundable deposit, but lawyer wants to put any money in escrow.
8. Students will not be permitted to use property after May 31 and EcoSchool will need to remove any stored items until the closing is complete.

Community Foundation of Brevard wants to help EcoSchool bring raised funds up to \$40,000 - however Ayana is in communications with Theresa Grimson about the difficulties purchasing the property. The goal is to be completely transparent. Theresa mentioned that the Community Foundation of Brevard will support the school no matter what.

Fundraising committee suggested that this house might not be of interest if the situation is becoming very complicated.

Options to move forward:

Updating space at 1851 is part of all Options A, B and C, which includes code, permits etc.

- Plan A: Continue forward with the Verdis purchasing 1861. School will lease property from the Verdis. Present the new contract to owner, after which the appraisal will be conducted. No bridge loan.
- Plan B: Continue use of downstairs classrooms of church and increase the rent to \$750. Negotiate to rent an additional room (total rooms should be 4). Outfit additional room with AC if needed at school expense.
 - Discussion regarding the church use include the following points: Continue use with church. However, previous proposal of the church to use upstairs classrooms is not working. Upstairs classrooms need stairs repair, AC, electrical etc. Elevator needs to be put it - \$50.000 - 100.000. Parents are against the idea to use school money to outfit the church as they feel these funds would be put to better use at 1851 Highland Avenue.
 - Discussion about upstairs rooms: Ideally the school could use the upstairs area recreation-use only. Cotter hall can not be used by the school anymore, which leaves the school without a room where all students from upper school can meet. There is currently no place for all kids to meet at the same time. A safe indoor recreation space is needed. The upstairs can be used without elevator if it is used as a recreation space only. Second half of Thursday school needs to be out of the church due to food pantry.
- Plan C: Updating space at Highland Avenue and renting other space that meets code as good as possible.

Upper school needs at least 4 classrooms for next semester.

The school needs a solid agreement, as the school is currently not renting but donating money to the church.

Brainstorming regarding current house and possibilities:

Current Highland house (1851) could be updated and more classrooms can be added. The back porch would have to be closed in to provide AC. The space can be used as a playroom, not a classroom. Conservatively \$10.000, but likely more. Some walls would need to be taken out to create more space. Screened in spaces in the outdoor, shade coverings. AC is needed for weather conditions. Outdoor space could be better used. The indoor spaces are more expensive and need to be addressed first.

Setbacks - almost going to property line. Needs to be approved by authorities. Pollinator garden could be a class unit.

Replacing the current structure with a new structure, starting with one floor and add later in time.

As a farm school we need to have a farm and currently we do not have the properties we need to have a farm. This year thought lessons: If school rents, the school is vulnerable and can be expelled at any time. Yoga garden can not be used for students any more. Plots of land need to be found, ideally for purchase to be independent. Oakwood apartments - lot is available for purchase?

Leaving EGAD is not a choice as it is part of the commitment to use and work with the community.

Discussion of other options in the area.

Board voted: yes to proceed with above plans A, B, C, in that order.

Ratio Educators: Kids and financial viability

Structure with current enrolled kids (not taking into consideration new kids) presented as following:

New 8:1 ratio. 7 kids cover the cost to pay for educator.

2 co-educators: NI (different ratio by law)

- Lorelei + co-teacher: K-3rd grade
- 2 co-educators: 4-6 grade
- 2 co-educators: 7-9

Many age ranges and many needs require to bring the range down with 2 educators to meet all needs. Co-educators are fully responsible educators. Staff educators need to be added but are not reflected in the ratio below. 14 kids per educator is not so good as the age spread and a variety of special needs take more attention. Attrition is considered in 8:1 ratio. New educators will not be automatically core educators and start with a lower salary.

Board discussion:

John wants to raise the student: educator ratio to increase money for school operation and to have funds for extra needs throughout the school year.

New calculation would be

Tuition calculation:

16 kids a \$8000 (average tuition)

= \$128.000 x 3 (age groups)

= \$384.000 in overall tuition for all 3 age groups (not including NI)

Average Educator salary for 6 educators:

= \$260.000

\$ 384.000 (overall tuition) - \$260.000 (6 educator salaries)

\$124.000 (for school operation money)

Facility needs continue to be a consideration, as all students would not fit into the church space, unless the additional 4th room can be rented from the church.

Higher student-teacher ratio (8:1) allows for some wiggle room in payment for incoming staff.

No vote was conducted by the board on this issue.

General school info:

New application seems to have a high interest in Homeschool Flex.

School is being very considerate of student/family needs - after past experiences- to be able to offer best educational environment possible for each child/family.

Educators: new educators and Savannah McCay.

Concerns that potential educator applicant pool does not have the breadth of experience and qualifications needed to balance out existing educator strengths.

Savannah:

The academic committee was informed about previous incidents of concern.

Feedback from core staff and academic committee:

1. Suggestion: Demote from core-educator status to assistant educator.
2. Release from employment.
3. Probationary period.

Discussion covering potential applicant pool, Savannah's strengths and apparent dedication to EcoSchool and students. Pattern of behavior to be addressed through increased reflection, observation and professional development. Core staff will help to rewrite educator code of conduct clearly outlining consequences to actions that are unethical, unsafe or breach trust.

Board votes: Savannah McCay to enter probationary period in 2019-2020 school year, legal counsel will continue to be consultant on human resource issues.

Next Meeting: beginning of July.

Meeting end: 11 am