

River Grove  
Board of Directors Meeting  
Thursday, September 14, 2023 5:00 PM  
450 Main St., Suite 220, Stillwater  
MINUTES

1.0 Call to Order: Meeting was called to order at 5:04pm by Chair Katie Bruns.

1.1 Roll Call: Board members: Katie Bruns, Sarah Godsave, Angie Hong, Eric Olsen, Breena Slivik, Lisa Dochniak. Also in attendance: Drew Goodson and Jessica Hansen.

Bruns read the River Grove mission: *Our mission is to utilize the natural resources, history, arts, and civic stewardship of the community as a foundation for the study of language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, physical education, art, and other curriculum subjects. The place-based learning environment will be student centered, designed by teachers, and reinforced and supported by the local community.*

Conflict of Interest: Bruns asked all board members to verbally affirm that they have no conflicts of interest with the topics of tonight's meeting. All members affirmed that they have no conflicts of interest.

2.0 Approve Agenda: Goodson requested that the building and property update be moved to the community meeting at 6pm. Dochniak motioned to approve the meeting agenda with the recommended change. Second by Slivik. All in favor. Agenda approved.

3.0 Approve Minutes: August 2023 Board Minutes Motion by Slivik to approve the minutes. Second by Dochniak. All in favor. Minutes approved.

#### 4.0 Community Discussion

##### 4.1 River Grove Community Updates

4.1.1 Authorizer Comments: Jim Zacchini from Minnesota Guild attended the meeting. Stated his support for River Grove and commended the school on a successful return to the forest for the beginning of the school year. He looks forward to our eventual move to the Zephyr building.

4.2 Community Comments: None

#### 5.0 Finance Reports & Actions

5.1 Financial Service Provider update: River Grove did not have a finance meeting in September. We are transitioning to a new financial provider, who will be on board in October. Our annual audit is currently underway and will be done by the November or December meeting. The school will be applying for an employee retention credit

#### 6.0 Admin Report

##### ~~6.1 Building Update~~

6.2 Enrollment Update - 133 students total currently. The transition has been challenging in terms of enrollment.

- Parent asked if there have been conversations about potentially re-allocating teachers to even out class-size numbers. The second grade is the largest class.
  - Hansen said there are ongoing conversations about how to best support the classes. There are currently several other staff providing support for teachers, including the 2nd grade class. Other teachers were hired specifically for their grade-level expertise, however, and we don't want to make sudden changes now that the school year is underway.
- Parent question - who is providing teacher support?

- Paraprofessionals. Licensed student counselor. Director of Staff. SpEd teachers. Art teacher.

6.3 Staffing Update: Ele Anderson has resigned and her last day will be Sept 15. Goodson and the board expressed their appreciation for Ele and her work to support River Grove since its foundation. We will be utilizing a contract nursing service this year. Pat McCarthy, a River Grove parent and PTO member just began Wednesday and will be taking on some admin and nursing support.

6.4 Academic Planning for SY24: Hansen spoke about the first week of school. It's been very positive and kids have been enjoying their time exploring the forest. The 5th graders will be going to Door County next week.

7.0 PTO Report: Steph Leonard and Meghan Ondracek were not able to attend. Nic Ondracek shared updates. Oct. 6 fall fundraising event at Rustic Roots with nature BINGO and other activities. There will be a Maker's Market in December. It's Snow Problem outdoor fundraising event in February. March will be a Winter Wonderland fundraising expo. May will be a River Grove community event. Also working on an array of give-back events from local businesses.

## 8.0 Old Business

8.1 Call for nominations to fill one open position on the River Grove board are due by Friday, September 15. River Grove's Board of Directors is a non-majority board, meaning any of the three eligible nominee categories (teacher, parent, community member) cannot hold a majority (four or more) of seats on the board. As such, eligible nominees for the current position can be one of the following:

1. a licensed teacher who is employed as a teacher at River Grove; or
2. an interested community member who resides in Minnesota, is not employed by River Grove, and does not have a child enrolled in the school.

Elections will take place online before the October meeting, if there is more than one nomination, or in-person if there is only one nomination.

## 9.0 New Business

9.1 Create a volunteer committee to help support staff: The board is sending a letter to teachers to introduce themselves and offer support, as needed. Will also convene a committee to work with volunteers.

- Goodson - we will need lots of volunteers to help with moving later in the fall.
- Hansen thanked board members for stepping up to help get the things ready for the first day of school.
- Hong noted that a call for volunteers was sent out in a recent email this week. Steph Leonard said that about 20 people have reached out to her so far to offer support in various capacities.
- Hansen - staff have been meeting daily after school and will compile a list of places in which they need additional support.
- Hong asked if the board might need to meet more frequently in the next month. Perhaps weekly?
- Goodson said there will likely need to be additional meetings. Needs to have at least 48 hrs public notice to hold a special meeting.

9.2 Inclement weather policy for field days: Goodson has lined up the Evangelical Free Church in Stillwater Twp to use as an indoor site when there is inclement weather. Tomorrow there is

rain forecasted in the morning and we might need to have a late start.

Hong asked how we might use the indoor space at the church. Will those be regular instructional days?

- Hansen said the church has classrooms downstairs. Bathrooms. Playground outdoors, woods and trails. Large parking lot. Working out bus routes to take kids to and from the space and meeting with teachers to talk about how to plan instruction on those days.
- Goodson noted that having an indoor space will give us a better ability to achieve all instructional hours needed for the school year.
- Trinity Lutheran in Stillwater is also offering a gym for River Grove.
- Goodson said kids would be bussed to the church, it might just add 10-min to their bus route. Kids could be dismissed slightly earlier on those days so that the before and after school process is as seamless as possible for parents.
- Board conversation about keeping the kids warm and comfortable indoors.

9.3 Workshop for short and long term goals- Late October: Bruns suggested that the board schedule a big-picture planning meeting in late October or November. This would be a half-day workshop, perhaps on a weekend. Will need to consider timing with the move coming up.

- Jim Zucchini noted that River Grove just received a 5-year re-authorization - one of only two ever given to a MN Charter School - and it will be ok to wait until we are in the new space to begin long-range planning.

10.0 Next Board of Directors Meeting (s):

10.1 Regular Board Meeting: Oct. 12th at 5pm at the Stillwater administrative office.

11.0 Adjournment: Meeting was adjourned at 6:04pm.

**Community Meeting:** The community meeting was convened at 6:10pm.

Bruns introduced Jim Zacchini from the Minnesota Guild and thanked him for their continued support. Noted that River Grove is one of only two charter schools in Minnesota to ever receive a 5-year contract renewal.

Bruns thanked parents for entrusting River Grove with their children. River Grove is providing kids with an amazing learning experience, but we fully recognize that there is a lot in flux and that this can be stressful for families. Asked parents to write down any questions or concerns to discuss later in the meeting. Goal to end at 7:30pm.

Hansen showed photos and videos of the kids in their first week of school. Teachers participated in three-weeks of in-service training and planning prior to the beginning of the school year and have been so excited to meet and begin the school year.

Goodson noted that Jessica Hansen took on a new role as Director of Staff and Students at River Grove this year and has been doing a great job.

**Property update:** (Goodson)

- **Field days:** River Grove is partnering with numerous environmental education experts, including Hamline University Center for Global Environmental Education, Earth Quest, and Wild Rivers Conservancy of the St. Croix and Namekagon to plan and conduct instruction this year.
  - Our model and mission is to be place-based and engage in outdoor and project-based learning. We are lucky to have access to such special locations for our students to learn in.
  - Students will also be taking additional field day trips to other locations and 5th graders are going to Door County next week.
  - Jim Zacchini expressed Minnesota Guild support for River Grove and fully-backs the school, even with the unexpected challenges the school has experienced this fall.
  - Inclement weather plan:
    - Evangelical Free Church could be available for us to use as a site, if needed, as there is wet/cold weather
    - Want to minimize disruptions in learning and keep things as seamless as possible for parents.
    - There are classrooms. Bathrooms. Playground outdoors. Acres of woods and trails. Large parking lot. Students would be provided with bussing to and from the site.
- **Stillwater Property update:**
  - Construction is ongoing, with fall completion.
- **Wilder Forest:**
  - On Monday, Sept 11, Wilder Foundation announced that the Minnesota Catholic Youth Partnership (MCYP) has withdrawn its purchase offer. Wilder sent out notice to everyone who has previously expressed interest in the property
  - River Grove is interested but has much less purchasing power than other potential entities. The school could bond for \$6-7 million through an ABC (Affiliated Building Corporation). Previously we talked about buying just our 80-acre campus. Replacing the septic system will be a big hurdle.

Questions and comments from board and parents:

- Topics for discussion included conversations with May township, recreational equipment, tent usage, parent communication methods, board meeting frequency, PTO engagement and curriculum.

Board Chair Katie Bruns suggested that the board plan to meet next week. Bruns and Godsave will participate via zoom. Intention is to approve an indoor-use plan at the church site and use the site for inclement weather. The board will likely meet the following week as well to discuss construction updates and transition planning.

Meeting adjourned at 7:59pm.