

Blossom Park School Council Meeting Minutes

Wednesday Sep 22, 2021 at 5pm

1. In attendance

- Susan Fattal: Chair
- Naoko Nakamura: Secretary/Treasurer
- Nabi Habibi: Parent Member
- Caroline Thériault: Principal
- Carmelina Falcucci: Vice-Principal
- Anita Sloan: Chief Custodian
- Seynab, Zeina, and Masa: Students

And three more parents.

2. Welcome, Introduction to Council and Approval of Agenda and Minutes

- Chair welcomed all to the new school year.
- All our meetings will be virtual this year.
- Susan introduced herself and explained briefly how the council works.
- Our School Council is a platform that connects the families to school. Parents can join, even if they are not members, to ask questions and participate in discussions.
- Agenda and Minutes were approved by everyone and seconded by Carolyn and Naoko.
- This year we do not have a teachers' rep yet, as Kirsty will not be able to attend our meetings.
- Seynab, Masa and Zeina will be our students' voice in the Council.

3. Chair's Update

- In June, we had two family pizza nights with Halal Pizza as a fundraising event to support the upcoming school activities. The owner agreed to give the families/staff a 10% discount and our Council 5% of the purchases.

Only six families/staff participated. Our total was around CAD 15; the owner added extra CAD 10 to support our Council, and the total came to CAD 25, which was deposited in our account.

Susan learnt that the place was sold to another owner, so she will try to see if we can get a higher percentage, in case we wanted to do it again.

- Susan contacted Ms. Sow to ask about her request to purchase several raised garden beds. Ms. Sow's students are interested in gardening. She needs 4-5 raised flower beds, location to be determined in consultation with the admin and custodian. She will also need soil, a bucket to catch water when it rains, and a donation of extra gardening tools, seeds, plants, etc. She also mentioned the possibility of having a gardening club to help students who might not be interested in sports. (Topic to be discussed later in the meeting)
- We hope other parents will join us in the Council, as Naoko may be leaving us soon. Date is not determined yet.

Susan sent parents an email last week reintroducing our Council and asking for the participation of more parents.

4. Treasurer's Update

- Naoko informed the Council that our opening balance for this year is CAD 4027.55. We set aside CAD 200 in June for the outdoor class project, so what we can actually spend from is CAD 3827.55.
- We still have the CAD 500 grant from last year, and we may have another CAD 500 this year as well.

5. Description of Council Roles and Election of Members

- Chair noted that we have three main executive officer positions in our Council: Chair, Treasurer and Recording Secretary. She briefly explained the roles of each one.
- Susan was reelected as Chair and Naoko as treasurer/secretary. Naoko will attend for as long as she is in Ottawa, after which Nabi will take on the roles. It is important to do the bank paper work before Naoko leaves.

6. Principal and Vice Principal's Update

- Start up has been really smooth for staff and students.
- Bussing for students is still changing. We anticipate more changes soon to the routes for students.
- COVID protocols are still well in place as they were last year, including entry and exit, kiss and ride and the existing building protocol; all understand and follow the right precautionary measures.
- Staff and students are doing a great job at doing their part.
- New this year we are offering Rapid COVID Tests (provided by OPH) to families of students who are symptomatic.
- No large gatherings (i.e. assemblies), volunteers or extra curricular activities at this time, awaiting direction from the District. Gym is still closed as well.
- Staffing update: new EA's and LTO's, 1 vacancy at this time in French (primary/junior)
- Support Team Workers started assessing students' levels for reading and math. Some educational programs are being prepared for students, such as social emotional learning programs (e.g. zones of regulation).
- Social workers have started coming in person this year.
- Technology returns: most of our tech has been returned to be cleaned and redistributed to students; we are still awaiting more returns.
- Our MLO is present at school every Wednesday and Friday. She has been very helpful.

8- Students' Voice

- Three students joined our Council: Seynab, Zeina, and Masa from grade 8 MFI. They will be giving us students' updates and bring to the table issues, suggestions or ideas from the students' perspective.
- They introduced themselves and informed us that they appreciated the good work of the school, and especially thanked all their teachers for keeping with them through this time. However, they were worried about the nature of upcoming events such as their graduation event and the field trips.

- Susan Asked about the activities that the students are engaged in, and whether there is any support for possible virtual extra-curricular activities such as art or literary clubs.

Caroline answered that currently there are no such clubs, but Mme. Chivot and Mme. Shohdy might be organizing an online art exhibit this year. Last year Ms. Murch created a social group club online.

9- Matters for Discussion:

A. Priorities and Direction for This School Year:

Susan reviewed with the Council a document about our priorities and direction for our work this year:

- Focus on communication, well-being and awareness
 - Support students' building of important emotional and life skills
 - Tackling key issues such as bullying and racism.
 - Engaging more parents
 - Fundraising
 - Outdoor Class Project
 - End-of-Year Fun Fair/ other alternatives?
 - Social media platform?
- Anita asked if the language barrier could be the reason behind lack of parents' engagement.

Susan answered that it is definitely one of other possible reasons. We are doing our best to include all parents in our communication as much as possible. Our meetings are in English, but we can do some translation whenever needed to help any Arabic-speaking parents attending. All our emails are sent out in both English and Arabic, and parents are constantly reminded that they can communicate with our Council either in English or Arabic.

- Anita also asked about possibility of food fundraising options, such as homemade foods for a bake sale or a hot dog day.

Naoko supported the idea of continuing to have other family pizza nights, and asked about the possibility of selling food items at school and if anything has changed this year.

Caroline clarified that due to safety issues, restrictions regarding food items in general at school are still in place.

- One of the students suggested working on a Halloween fundraiser party outdoors and asking for a fee from the participating students. It could be done in several cohorts for safety reasons. Students did a Halloween party in the Gym two years ago and it was a success.

We all agreed that safety needs to be guaranteed before planning any possible gatherings at school.

- A student suggested giving more leadership roles to older students in activities such as “Reading Buddies”, where older students read to younger kids who require reading assistance.
- Anita suggested engaging community partners, such as Big Brothers Big Sisters, which uses mentoring programs to make a positive difference in the lives of the youth.
- Naoko asked about the possibility of allowing kids to play wind instruments at school as it is the case in Canterbury High school.

Caroline pointed out that directions are different for elementary schools, as no musical instruments are currently allowed for outdoor programs.

B. Possibility of Supporting School Gardening Project:

This item is regarding Ms. Sow’s request to have some raised flower beds, soil and gardening tools.

- Susan did some research and checked the prices of raised garden beds. Good quality ones are overpriced; the lower cost items do not seem to be sturdy. She gave an example of Ottawa Garden Beds: a (2x8 ft) bed with double wall (11 inches) is CAD 340, without taxes or soil.
- Best material to use for garden beds is untreated cedar wood.
- She contacted Growing Up Organic, who built 3 garden beds with the students last fall free of cost, and learnt that they can offer their support to build flower beds in spring, but there will be no reduced rate. However, they will be offering our school free gardening workshops this year.
- Susan’s husband has offered to volunteer and build them for the school once we agree on the project. Susan shared with the Council a sheet showing a rough estimate of the cost for the materials needed for building the beds (lumber, weed barrier and hardware); taxes and soil included. For example, to build a (8’x3’x11”) garden bed filled with soil, the estimated cost would be around CAD 132. (We need to add around CAD 100 for soil delivery – cost of

delivery suggested by GUO). If we go down in size, the cost will be less. The suggested size is based on the garden beds GUO offered to our school.

- Caroline suggested working on the project in the spring.
- We could seek lumber donations from fencing companies such as Fence-all, for example. Richie could be a place to seek seeds or soil. They would be willing to donate as well if they knew we are a RAISE school.
- Our custodian, Anita, offered her help whenever needed as she has experience in such things.
- Meanwhile, there are lots of vacant sections in the garden beds in front of the school which Ms. Sow's students can use.
- Carmelina brought up the idea of having garden towers for indoor planting during the winter. She will send Susan two links that could be helpful. Susan will research that and find out if there is a possibility to do it.
- One of the students supported the idea of encouraging gardening projects as they help students with coping and managing anxiety.

C. Planning First Step Towards assessing Cost of Outdoor Class Project:

- In June, our Council started an outdoor class savings fund with CAD 200 in our account, and CAD 8000 in the school's account. Money will be set aside until plan is put in place and money goal is met.
- Our first step in that direction is going to be what Caroline suggested in our previous meeting, which is doing an inventory of what we already have in place before deciding what we need to purchase. We can then estimate the cost before doing any fundraising for that project or asking for possible donations or grants. A committee or team from the school could be formed to work on that.
- Susan talked about the importance of reminding parents to wear masks during pick-up time in the Kiss and Ride area. This is for the safety of everyone in that area, especially the unvaccinated kids.

The meeting was adjourned around 6:20 p.m.

Next meeting is scheduled for: Oct 20th 2021 (to be confirmed later by email)