

Diane Franz to represent Kennebunkport on RSU 21 School Board

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KENNEBUNKPORT, Maine — Diane Franz became the RSU 21 School Board's newest member when Select Board members appointed her to fill a seat vacated by fellow Kennebunkport resident Jameson Davis this summer.

During its meeting on Sept. 28, the Select Board picked Franz by a majority vote. The board appointed her from an initial list of five candidates who had shown interest in the position.

Of those five, two bowed out of the running at points during recent weeks: Nina Pearlmutter and Tom Foley. That left Franz, Rachel Kennedy-Smith, and Donald Gasink for consideration.



“We were very lucky this year to have five qualified applicants for this one position,” Chair Mike Weston said.

Franz was appointed with supporting votes from Select Board members Marybeth Gilbert, who nominated her, and Sheila Matthews-Bull and Allen Daggett.

Weston and Selectman Jon Dykstra, who supported Kennedy-Smith, abstained, not wanting to oppose Franz because they felt all candidates had been strong and qualified.

As Dykstra said, "This was a tough decision."

Gilbert nominated Franz after Dykstra's nomination of Kennedy-Smith only attracted his and Weston's votes from the five-member board.

Gilbert spoke of Franz's connection to the School Board and her attendance at its meetings.

"She would be, to use an old term, 'shovel-ready' to represent us in the next six months," Gilbert said.

Matthews-Bull said she liked how Franz emphasized vocational education when she spoke before the board during candidate interviews on Sept. 14.

"That's very important to me," Matthews-Bull said.

Franz, who retired after a career with the United Way, said during an interview that she was "absolutely thrilled" by her appointment. She said she has been attending School Board meetings for months and has seen the hard work the board does.

"I'm very excited to take part and to take on some of that work," she said. "I'm honored and privileged."

In nominating Kennedy-Smith, both Dykstra and Weston said they liked that she has two children attending the RSU 21 school system, which is comprised of Kennebunk, Kennebunkport, and Arundel.

"I think it's important that parents support their children," Weston said.

Franz will serve through June 30, 2024. She will need to run for the seat during the annual town meeting that month if she wants to continue serving.

Davis resigned from the School Board in July, announcing her decision in a full-page ad in a local weekly newspaper. As her reason for resigning, Davis cited differences with what she considered to be the focus and direction of the school district.

In her announcement, Davis accused the school district of being more concerned with matters of diversity, equity and inclusion, or DEI, than with traditional education.

Voters elected Davis to her first term on the board in June 2022. Her resignation from the School Board was the fourth one in less than a year.

In March, Ryan McQueen stepped down after some of his posts on social media prompted complaints from the public and a denouncement from the district and School Board.

In late 2022, two other School Board members resigned before completing their terms.

Amanda Oelschlegel stepped down in November after she evaluated her ability to balance her roles as a parent, spouse, employee and public servant and determined the district would benefit from having a board member who could be more effective than she felt she was able to be at the time.

Weeks before Oelschlegel, board member Todd Shea also resigned. Shea, a former town manager in Arundel and the current manager of the Kennebunk Light and Power District, cited the time constraints of his personal and professional commitments as reasons for his resignation.