

ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE (ABRSC)  
Approved Minutes

Library  
R.J. Grey Junior High School  
16 Charter Road, Acton, MA

December 13, 2018  
7:00 p.m.

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Members Present: Diane Baum, Michael Bo, Mary Brolin, Adam Klein, Amy Krishnamurthy, Tessa McKinley, Maya Minkin (7:27 p.m.), Paul Murphy, Angie Tso, Eileen Zhang  
Members Absent: Ginny Kremer  
Others: Marie Altieri, Peter Light, Beth Petr, Dave Verdolino

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1. The ABRSC was called to order at 7:02 p.m. by Chairperson Diane Baum.

2. **Chairman's Introduction** – *Diane Baum*

Diane Baum asked for the Committee's feedback regarding the last meeting held in the Administration Building auditorium. Comments about the auditorium included:

- comfortable, set up created better flow for the conversation
- narrow tables made members feel closer to each other, which was good
- no table legs to straddle and chairs were comfortable
- tables should be oriented so no one has their back to the speaker or screen
- could the screen be in a different location?
- acoustics were better than in the library, it can be hard to hear when it's raining there
- a member was cold, although some said it is always cold in the library
- not all members could see each other with the angle of the tables/chairs
- administrators (who sat off to the side of the Committee) thought it felt closer to the audience in a good way, although it was awkward for answering questions
- podium location in either venue is not ideal
- parking is more difficult than the Jr High
- concern was expressed by a member about the custodial cost of moving the current furniture out and bringing in the new furniture for the meeting

Comments about the Junior High library included:

- the library is a nice environment
- lighting in the library is better than the auditorium

Members were urged to separate the advantages of the new furniture from the location. A permanent screen could be installed in the auditorium but the temperature and lighting will not change. Members liked the idea of trying the new furniture in the library, although moving it from the Administration Building to the Jr High would be a lot of effort by the custodians for one meeting. A member suggested checking with the librarian. Diane will arrange another meeting in the auditorium so that members can form a second opinion.

3. **Public Participation**

*Per policy BEDH, members of the public may speak for up to 2 minutes on items not included on this agenda. Comments regarding items on the agenda should be made during that part of the meeting. Typically, the Committee/Administration will not respond to comments during public participation.*

Steve Ballard requested that the Committee consider zero based budgeting as part of their deliberations. He encouraged them to look at all of the lines of the budget and not just rely on the Superintendent, Deputy Superintendent and Finance Director to present their recommendations.

Danny Factor read a statement from the Green Acton Board of Directors regarding School Site Selection. They applauded the Building Committee's focus on sustainability as a chief goal. They urged members to take concerns about one site in regard to safety and environmental risks as the result of possible flooding seriously. It was noted that Acton recently passed a Sustainability policy.

4. **Student Representatives' Update**

Michael Cheng reported that not much has changed since the meeting last week. The music program had their winter concert and recent wellness activities funded by the AB United Way grant were enjoyed by everyone.

5. **Statement of Warrants & Approval of Minutes– Diane Baum**

5.1. Meeting Minutes of 12/6/18

Mary Brolin moved, Amy Krishnamurthy seconded and the minutes were approved as written.

6. **Superintendent's Update – Peter Light (oral)**

No news since the last meeting.

7. **Presentation/Discussion: School Building Project– Emily Grandstaff-Rice, Mary Brolin**

7.1. Building Site Options update

7.1.1. Community Input Survey Results – December 2018

7.1.2. November Community Forum Notes

Mary Brolin thanked everyone for the enormous amount of feedback that was received since the last meeting and the survey was done. In general there was strong support for the Gates site and including Douglas. At the meeting the night before, the Building Committee decided to go with Extension Option 1 moving the PSR Submittal Date from 1/2/19 to 2/20/19 and the MSBA Board Meeting PSR Approval Date from 2/13/19 to 4/10/19. The SD Submittal Date (7/10/19), MSBA Board Meeting Scope & Budget Date (8/28/19) and Anticipated Town Vote Date (12/2/19) would not change. There is expected to be no cost impact with this extension.

Emily Grandstaff-Rice explained that the MSBA's recent questions and comments regarding the Feasibility Study Preliminary Design Program (PDP) are a protection to be sure that the District has answered every question and considered any options that might come up. The MSBA is requesting documentation for some of the options that the Building Committee knows are not feasible. Some of the comments regarding the Education Plan will need to be revised and revoked by the School Committee.

The two sites are still viable choices, although additional wetlands have been identified and are being evaluated. Emily explained that the idea of a twin school is unusual for the MSBA and they want to ensure that they (MSBA) are funding is what they agreed to – a single school for 650 students. In the recent call, it was explained that Acton is unique in that they have school choice and it is important that they keep their two school community identities.

Mary hopes that the Building Committee will vote their site recommendation at the meeting on January 9<sup>th</sup>. She noted that members are leaning toward siting the building at Gates right now. Peter Light reported that Marie, JD, Peter and Chuck met and created a plan to get the needed information to the Building Committee by Friday January 4<sup>th</sup>, prior to their next meeting on the 9<sup>th</sup>, so members can make an informed decision. Mary would like it posted publicly on the website, similar to how School Committee materials are posted.

Emily clarified that a site will be chosen on January 9<sup>th</sup>, but not a design yet. The new wetland information at Conant does not affect the design option but could affect the building design at that site. Tessa McKinley noted that some of the comments from the MSBA on the Education Plan were similar to comments that she and Diane Baum made earlier. Bringing together two schools with different philosophies led to requests for more specific answers to questions about what some spaces would be used for. The Superintendent explained that there are 2 types of comments from the MSBA.

- Questions regarding “What is a twin school and how would the two schools function together?” are because the MSBA is used to a consolidated school model. Many of these questions will be answered directly in the document. They are a request for additional information, not changes to the Education Plan.
- Actual changes that are requested by the MSBA to the Education Plan will be shared with the School Committee.

Peter Light reported that Chuck Adam said the edited Education Plan does not need to be revoted by the School Committee, although it certainly could be. Marie Altieri suggested that the response to the PDP comments, is not revising the Education Plan so no vote would be needed for that part. When the PSR comes, an updated Education Plan will be voted.

The “Town Vote” on December 2, 2019 would be to fund the building of the new school. This would take place at concurrent town meetings in Acton and Boxborough, followed by a ballot vote the same day in both towns, because it is a debt exclusion. These dates are not set in stone but are the time frame.

Danny Factor spoke from Green Acton. They have been focused on and concerned about flooding issues which pertain to the Gates property and the 100 Year Flood Line which runs almost against the back of the proposed new building. Around the country, the frequency of storms and significant weather is increasing. He advocated that due diligence is essential around the 100 year time period. He appreciated that the Committee is meeting with the Conservation Committee.

Shawn Jennings spoke as a Douglas neighbor and parent. He is a data driven scientist and has submitted a lot of information to the Building Committee. He feels it is imperative that decisions be made based on scientific data, not anecdotes. Mary Brolin will be sure that the Green Acton and Mr. Jennings’ material is shared with the School Committee.

8. **Recommendation to Approve the FY20 ABRSD School Calendar** – Second Read –  
**VOTE** - Marie Altieri

- 8.1. DRAFT FY20 Calendar starting after Labor Day
- 8.2. DRAFT FY20 Calendar starting before Labor Day

The Calendar Subcommittee will continue to meet and present information in the spring about the religious holidays, including the emailed request to add Russian Orthodox Christmas and Orthodox Easter to the list. This will be part of the FY21 calendar discussion.

**Amy Krishnamurthy moved to approve the second calendar starting before Labor Day. Paul Murphy seconded the motion.**

Discussion:

The Committee briefly explained the homework policy regarding religious holidays. Next year Christmas falls on a Wednesday. A member noted that some people would probably not like having school on Monday, December 23 and Tuesday the 24<sup>th</sup> but if we did, students would get out 2 days earlier than the proposed calendar. It was added that the days before major holidays tend to have a high number of absences. The secondary schools' Early Dismissal times will be added to the second page. Changes to the second page of the calendar do not need to be revoted.

The ABRSC unanimously **VOTED** to approve the calendar starting before Labor Day.

9. **Presentation: MCAS 2018 – Deborah Bookis**

Deborah Bookis presented on the 2 purposes and types of assessment: Diagnostic/Instructional (formative, interim, summative) and System Monitoring/Accountability (NAEP and MCAS). As stressed in the past, she emphasized that standardized tests will only be used in concert with other diverse measures to capture how well our students are doing at a given time. New Curriculum Frameworks were put in place for History and Social Science (2018), Digital Literacy and Computer Science (2016). The Arts (1999) and Comprehensive Health (1999) frameworks are currently under review by DESE.

The digital literacy and computer science framework involves how to research correctly and appropriately use the modern library. Deborah said they have begun to look at where those standards are taught well – in the classroom or in the library. There will be opportunities to weigh in regarding the health curriculum. A member said that she is excited, but exhausted listening to all that teachers are doing and she hopes that something is coming off their plates as they take on all of these new initiatives. It is hoped that coaching will be helpful. Deborah and Dawn Bentley are working on this.

The Committee discussed how the MCAS testing has changed since 2013. Michael Bo asked about the results for 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Deborah explained that some students may have missed questions because of the Science Technology Engineering transition period. This year's students will have had better alignment of the material, and in the future, the coaching and teacher support will help them as well.

Questions were also asked about an increase in the amount of reading required in test questions on the math MCAS, specifically, which has replaced visual cues over time, and how struggling readers are handling the more language based items. Dawn Bentley agreed that it is something they are working on. Members were cautioned not to compare 2015 results to those from 2018 because they are very different tests. It was noted that while we

have an ELL cohort that is growing, it is encouraging that their scores are not changing but actually improving, which is success.

Angie Tso expressed concern about the trends in grades 3-5. She asked if the District did any comparisons with other districts. Deborah responded that while MCAS is a statewide test, our district did not do the PARCC tests. Other districts have taken similar tests for a few years when AB did not so they might do a little better due to familiarity. She did look at several districts' results but the transition years have to be considered. A parent of a 5<sup>th</sup> grader said that she is excited to hear what is being done to help the students. She noted that typing was also difficult for her daughter and that aspect of the testing really slowed her down.

#### 10. **FY20 Superintendent's Preliminary Budget – Peter Light**

##### 10.1. Capital Plan Funding Strategy

*(See extensive material posted for 12/6/18 School Committee meeting)*

Capital planning continues to be a priority, per Goal #3: *Our students will have access to safe and effective learning environments*. Mr. Light explained the funding process for his recommendation to plan for a \$20M total allocation for capital projects over the next 12 years. This includes a \$7.5M bond, funded within the district's operating budget and requiring a 2/3<sup>rd</sup> vote at both Town Meetings to fund priority projects over the next several years, and an FY20 increase to the district's capital allocation by \$250K for a total of \$1.25M in the FY20 budget. The plan is to additionally increase another \$250K in the FY21 budget for a total annual allocation of \$1.5M plus 2.5% inflation going forward.

Mr. Light explained how Skanska and our Director of School Operations have been evaluating the 8,000 line items in the original \$120M Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) from the 2015 Dore and Whittier Master Plan. Of the \$120M, \$61M are from Douglas, Gates, Conant, and the Admin Building. The capital needs of two of those schools will be taken care of through the building project. The remaining \$59M has been reduced to \$23M by identifying redundancies, work completed, work that can be completed by in-house staff and other cost saving measures. When they complete their work, the \$23M will come down lower, with a goal of completing the \$23M through the bond and operating budget over the next 12 years.

In addition to developing a funding strategy for both short and longer term capital needs, the Capital Subcommittee has have been involved in finalizing the list of capital projects and prioritizing them, grouping them into actionable bundles, and identifying alternative sources for funding, e.g., through the MSBA's Accelerated Repair Program.

When asked how much the district should have in its capital line, Mr. Light said the recommendation is 1% of the assessed value of the buildings. Bringing a new school on adds a tremendous asset value to the district so that affects how much is carried forward, in this case \$2 million. The bond would not be issued for 3 years, and rates could be higher, lower or the same. Whatever happens to the interest rate between now and then will also affect construction costs.

The Committee discussed the timing of the bond. Dave Verdolino explained that over the next 3 summers is when the capital work would be done. The district wouldn't borrow money now for those first 3 summers. Short term borrowing at a much cheaper interest rate to fund these projects makes sense. When that is done, you take out the bond at that point. Peter explained that the school can create a school stabilization fund so perhaps in the spring the Committee can discuss that.

A member described the proposal as “a robust and comprehensive plan” and another as “responsible budgeting”. Diane Baum asked for more information about how the numbers were arrived at (such as the \$2 million for capital) on Budget Saturday.

John Petersen spoke from the audience, asking when the specific priorities of this budget would be brought to the School Committee. The response was on Budget Saturday (1/26/19) and also at possible joint presentations for the boards. John also asked a long term question – Acton is taxing at the levy limit, would this proposed plan eventually drive Acton into an operating override? Dave Verdolino said that the numbers will change over the next 10 years and they are subject to many things. This is a responsible plan for a pretty long period of time. Marie Altieri agreed. Mr. Light stated that as the administration looked at balancing priorities and risk, it was agreed that the capital projects that the community needs to be addressed cannot be done within the regular budget.

**11. Recommendation to Approve Donations from the ABRSD PTSO, Danny’s Place Youth Services and the Town of Acton for the William James Interface Referral Service –**

**VOTE** – *Peter Light*

Mary Brolin moved, Paul Murphy seconded and it was unanimously,

**VOTED:** to approve the donations for the William James Interface with gratitude.

**12. Recommendation to Approve Gift from Mark Lawrence Photographers, Inc. to the R.J. Grey Junior High School to support student activities –**

**VOTE** – *Peter Light*

Angie Tso moved, Paul Murphy seconded and it was unanimously,

**VOTED:** to approve the gift from the Mark Lawrence Photographers, Inc. with gratitude.

**13. Subcommittee and Member Reports**

- 13.1. Policy – meeting on Dec 11 - *Amy Krishnamurthy*  
Two policies will be brought to the January 10<sup>th</sup> School Committee meeting.
- 13.2. Capital Improvement – meeting on Dec 12 - *Adam Klein*
- 13.3. Budget – next meeting Jan 3 - *Amy Krishnamurthy*
- 13.4. Acton Leadership Group (ALG) – meeting on Dec 13 – *Paul Murphy*
  - 13.4.1. Draft minutes of meeting on Nov 29, 2018
- 13.5. Others

**14. FYI**

- 14.1. Little Free Libraries at our Carol Huebner Early Childhood Program sites –  
Diane Baum highlighted this new activity.
- 14.2. Professional Learning Day, November 2018 –  
Peter Light highlighted this important work and thanked the Committee for their support.

Mary Brolin moved, Paul Murphy seconded and the ABRSC adjourned at 9:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Beth Petr

List of Documents Used: see agenda