

**ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT  
School Building Committee (SBC) Approved Minutes**

RJ Grey Junior High School Library  
16 Charter Road, Acton, MA 01720

November 8, 2017  
7:00 p.m.

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*Members Present:* Mary Brolin, Amy Krishnamurthy, Dennis Bruce, Marie Altieri, Peter Berry, Jason Cole, Bob Evans, Brian Griffin, Adam Klein, Lynne Newman, Katie Raymond, Mac Reid, Chris Whitbeck.

*Members Absent:* Bill McAlduff, Rob Bukowski, JD Head, Ted Kail, Steve Mielke, Maria Neyland, Damian Sugrue.

*Other:* Dave Verdolino, Karen Coll.

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1. **Call to Order** – Mary Brolin called the meeting to order at 7:02pm.
2. **Minutes** – Mac Reid moved, Chris Whitbeck seconded, Jason Cole and Dennis Bruce abstained, and the minutes of the 10/11/17 Building Committee were unanimously approved.

### 3. **Outreach Update**

The public forums began on October 17<sup>th</sup>, and have been going well. Attendance at some of the events has been limited; a forum at the Boxborough library drew only four attendees and one of those was from Stow, and a session at the Acton Senior Center had approximately a dozen attendees, about half seniors and the other half parents. The Boards of Selectmen and Finance Committees in both towns support the OPM/feasibility study. Marie Altieri has also spoken to the Douglas and Conant faculties, and has presentations to the larger district faculty and to Gates and the preschool families coming up. We will get feedback from JD Head about his presentation at ITC on November 7<sup>th</sup>. Among the upcoming forums will be one at the Boxborough Senior/Community Center on November 29<sup>th</sup>. The video tour of Douglas, while still not final, has been shown at many of the forums and has been very effective.

The Douglas tour/presentation events have gone well. Most attendees seemed supportive of the project. One concern mentioned by forum attendees was about traffic in West Acton with the combining of two schools on the Gates property and all of the parking on the current Douglas site. Chris Whitbeck said that there are at most about 20 families who walk or drive to Douglas, typically no more than five on any given day. The bridge between the current Gates and Douglas properties will be a footbridge, not for cars to use.

Boxborough residents in general are less supportive of the project than Acton residents. Their concerns fall into two primary areas:

- Some see the Blanchard school as relatively new and in good shape, and aren't aware of the maintenance and repairs that will be needed in upcoming years.
- Some did not support regionalization to begin with, and are unhappy with the busing situation as well as the fact that class sizes increased after regionalization.

Members discussed the need to be sure voters understand that, in light of updated enrollment projections, Blanchard could run out of space to house all Boxborough students without significant overcrowding. We should develop slides showing enrollment projections at Blanchard over the next 10 years to illustrate the anticipated space needs.

Some voters also don't realize how the educational needs and space utilization at Blanchard have changed over time. Marie suggested that Mac Reid could tour Blanchard with principal Dana Labb to see how space usage has changed.

Amy Krishnamurthy noted that voters may not realize the cost of not doing the project. We need to be sure they understand that costly maintenance and repairs will be needed on buildings throughout the district; that these repairs will only extend the life of the buildings for a few years instead of the 50-year life of a new building; and that the costs of these repairs would be entirely borne by the district instead of being partially reimbursable by the MSBA as an approved new building would be.

Marie will make a presentation to both the Blanchard PTF and at a Blanchard faculty meeting. Mary will tape a presentation at Acton TV. Mary is also thinking about developing a 1-page document that clarifies the purpose of the \$1.3MM request, perhaps to be disseminated through social media.

Adam Klein reviewed the status of the social media outreach. Facebook has been most active of the social media outlets, and is generating mostly positive comments. The list of FAQ is growing, with approximately five pages to add to the current document. Adam has incorporated links to the MSBA website from the FAQ for information about funding and project phases. He and Katie Raymond will need help editing the new sections of the FAQ, with review by Marie and Mary, before posting to the website.

The *Beacon* will probably do another article before the vote, as well as an editorial. A blurb could be written for the PTO newsletters, with a brief description of the project and encouragement to attend Town Meeting; the blurb should also note that babysitting will be available.

Jason has received questions from Charlie Kadlec, a politically active Acton voter, about whether the properties we are looking at would perc or meet other standards. He is likely to raise those questions at town meeting. Mr. Kadlec was told that assessing those issues was part of the purpose of a feasibility study. Members discussed whether we should inform the public about options for wastewater disposal in advance, such as a package treatment facility or even a sewer system expansion. While the preliminary estimates take into account the cost of a package treatment facility, the feasibility study should provide answers to these questions.

The Acton FinCom has asked how extensive the design schematic resulting from the feasibility/OPM process would be. Would this process result in a finalized design? The expectation is that the design schematic will be complete enough to allow people to visualize the building and to prepare a cost estimate, but Marie will clarify this with the MSBA when she meets with them on November 14<sup>th</sup>.

#### **4. MSBA Update**

Marie, Bill and JD will be meeting with the MSBA on Tuesday, November 14<sup>th</sup> and will be discussing enrollment. We have received updated enrollment reports from NESDEC and Peter Ashton. The MSBA enrollment projections are much lower than either the NESDEC or Ashton projections, a difference of about 50 students in each entering class. Marie thinks MSBA has used housing data only through 2012, before the current increase in housing turnover. Marie, Bill and JD will update the committee after their meeting with the MSBA.

Dave Verdolino summarized a report from the MSBA that rated Douglas, Conant and Gates highly on factors such as building condition and capacity, among others. All three schools are listed as average for overcrowding. Some issues were not addressed in this survey, such as accessibility, etc. These results were highly incongruous, especially given their approval of the Douglas project, and we should find out

how the ratings were derived. We should be prepared to address this if community members ask about it. Marie and Karen will forward the report to the committee.

Peter Berry mentioned a housing study conducted by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council; Marie commented that growth is generally driven more by turnover in existing homes than by new housing construction.

## **5. Prepare for Special Town Meetings 12/4/17**

The 'Get out the Vote' (GOTV) group in Acton has three members so far, and a larger list is under development, hopefully with the help of PTO co-chairs. Mary will contact Tessa McKinley and Katie Neville at Blanchard to energize a GOTV group in Boxborough. Advocacy organizations supporting the building project would have to register with Town Halls. Katie Raymond will ask the town clerk about the process and rules for having yard signs. Yard signs should have a message that will work for both the current vote and the next vote to fund the full building project in about 18 months.

Members discussed the limits of who is allowed to advocate for the project. PTOs can advocate unless their bylaws specifically prohibit it, since they are independent organizations, but School Councils include staff and are more restricted. Anyone can advocate for going to Town Meeting in general. GOTV groups looking for contact information are probably safest using town voter lists; school directories are generally not released for solicitation purposes, although there may be some exceptions allowing their limited use.

The Acton PTOs are sponsoring a movie night at Acton's Town Meeting from 7:00 – 9:00pm, with teachers volunteering to babysit. Concerns were expressed that, if the discussion of the building project went beyond 9:00, families would have to leave before the vote. Some families are finding creative childcare arrangements to maximize the number of voters available to attend Town Meeting.

A School Committee member has said that the Chinese community is likely to come out in force against one of the controversial articles in Acton, but she thinks they are supportive of the building project. Marie noted that we held a building project forum at the Chinese language school last spring and no one came.

Members agreed that Building Committee members should make the presentations rather than the School Committee. Dennis Bruce will make the presentation at the Acton Town Meeting, and Mary will present it in Boxborough. Bill will support Mary in Boxborough, which has fewer Building Committee members and where residents are more likely to express concerns. Building Committee members who are not residents of either town can attend either meeting.

Dennis and Mary will draft presentations and will ask others for review. Presenters will have limited time on the town meeting agendas, and will include the video tour of Douglas school. The presentations will be very similar but each will address town-specific issues. Presentation materials are due to Boxborough Town Hall by November 22<sup>nd</sup>; we will have to find out when Acton's deadline is.

The town meeting process is that a motion is made, followed by recommendations by the Board of Selectmen and Finance Committee. The presentation is made next, and then the floor will be open for discussion. Anyone can make a motion, but we need to be sure that both the written and spoken language of the motions are correct and track with MSBA standards.

If a resident wishes to make a rebuttal presentation, they will probably have to declare that in advance. We should be prepared to respond to rebuttals as well as to answer any questions that are raised. The sewage issue is one topic that we should be prepared to address, or at least to identify the potential options. We may also want to ask Dore & Whittier to be available to answer questions and provide expert opinions. We

would need permission from the town moderators to bring in D&W, and possibly from town meeting voting members as well.

Acton town moderator Peter Ashton is looking into mechanisms to ensure that one town's vote is not made public until both have voted to avoid influencing voters. Even if one town votes no and the project does not go forward at this time, we would still want the other town's positive vote on the record; if it were postponed to a future time, MSBA would take current support for the project into account.

**Adjourn** – Amy moved, Mac seconded, and the meeting was adjourned at 8:41pm.

Respectfully submitted,  
Karen Coll

Documents Used:

- Agenda
- Minutes from 10/11/17 Meeting
- FAQ

Next Building Committee Meetings:

- December 13
- January 9
- February 14
- March 14
- April 11