

ACTON PUBLIC SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING
MINUTES (approved 1/21/10)

Library
R.J. Grey Junior High School

December 17, 2009
7:30 pm

Members Present: Jonathan Chinitz, Michael Coppelino, Xuan Kong, Terry Lindgren, Sharon Smith McManus, John Petersen
Others: Marie Altieri, Liza Huber, Stephen Mills, Beth Petr, Tess Summers

The meeting was called to order at 7:33 pm by Xuan Kong.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of November 19, 2009 were unanimously approved as written.

STATEMENT OF WARRANT

Warrant #201012 dated 12/15/09 in the amount of \$206,979.48 was signed by the chairperson and circulated to the Committee for approval.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - none

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

1. APS Enrollment Projections Annual Report

Marie Altieri made a presentation on APS enrollment based on two projection models, one from NESDEC and one from MSBA. She commented on possible data entry errors of the MSBA model, the projection numbers from NESDEC are used primarily in presentation with cross-reference to MSBA projection. The projected incoming Kindergarten size was 274 and then number was adjusted upward to 309 due to projection being lower than actual in prior years. The Principals recommend that we keep 16 Kindergartens in the budget. The K-6 projection showed that we are at the peak number of students now with 2531 students in grades Kindergarten through 6.

Grades 1 -3 will all be over School Committee class size guidelines next year.

It was asked that assumptions used in any calculations be clearly spelled out to avoid confusion.

Jonathan Chinitz commented that if there's a time to control class sizes, it's in K and 1st. 16 sections in K using 309 students makes sense to him. In 1st grade, under any other circumstances, he'd be advocating for 16 sections moving forward. Even with 16 sections, the 1st grade class size is not good. He urged the Committee to try to offer classroom support going forward because there are so many children in this grade. Next year's 6th grade worries him the most, size-wise. He said that the Committee needs to do anything it can to keep 108 sections, as recommended by the Administration. He would support 16 K sections.

John Petersen said that nothing would make him happier than to have 16 K sections, but they can't create a responsible budget for 108 sections. If we add to 16 sections in K, what would be taken away somewhere else? He would not support the 16th.

Mike Coppolino appreciates John's point, but said there are so many unknowns. He's confident that the educational leadership will make good decisions, and will go with their recommendation of 16 K sections.

Conant Principal Christine Price said that the Principals had talked at length about all of this. At this juncture, educationally they don't feel it is prudent to drop the 16th K section. For an entering K student, the classes would just be too big. The elementary principals asked for the Committee's support for 16 sections of Kindergarten. She said, it is "too big a gamble with all the unknowns. The youngest students' needs cannot be overstated." She shared a new piece of important research regarding the importance of small class sizes (Konstantopoulos, Spyros, and Vicki Chung. 2009. "What Are the Long-Term Effects of Small Classes on the Achievement Gap? Evidence from the Lasting Benefits Study." *American Journal of Education* 116 (November): 125-154.), and said that "Principals need this and understand the budget implications and would make other choices."

Terry Lindgren asked if there is an ideal class size. Dr. Price responded, "The most significant impact was seen around 16 or 17 students per class. This research calls a large class size over 22 students."

It was moved, seconded, and

VOTED: to endorse the Central Office's recommendation plan with 16 sections of Kindergarten, Grade 1, and Grade 6, found on page 5 of V.I. in the packet

(Vote: YES - Chinitz, Coppolino, Lindgren, McManus, NO – Kong, Petersen)

2. ALG Report/Acton Finance Committee Report

Acton Finance Committee: The FinCom prefers an evening budget meeting probably the last week of February. Sharon McManus will share the School Committee's feedback on Bill Mullin's 12/5/09 Point of View (POV) memo with the FinCom. The statement re FY2011 Budget Planning on page 3, "As a general principal, the "Town" side of the revenue split should increase over time, as the Town has given up revenue over the last several years to accommodate the expansion in school age population growth." generated much discussion.

ALG Report: Sharon McManus said that the Acton Town Manager will present his 3% and 0% increase budgets to BOS on 12/21/09. A meals tax is being discussed. Our Minuteman Tech assessment is down 11% . This does not change the cost of our Junior High Minuteman curriculum. \$135,000 is the Minuteman cost to the Junior High program. John Murray asked Dr. Mills to present the educational value of the Minuteman curriculum.

Xuan Kong proposed to use \$309,000 of additional reserves to reduce the debt/COPS impact on the Acton Public Schools' FY2011 budget, with the disclaimer that the transfer was not properly carried out for FY2010. The debt/COPS costs were subtracted from APS net operating budget for FY2010 but did not get included in the municipal budget.

John Petersen felt that COPS staff should be subject to the same scrutiny that every other FTE in the budget goes through. Jonathan Chinitz said he would support the proposal for FY11, and approve the \$70,000 from our budget but that for FY12 and beyond, he would not. He feels that it is a service that the municipal operation is responsible to fund.

It was the consensus of the Committee that the debt service should come out of reserves so APS could have a true level funded operating budget, and the \$70,000 COPS budget item should remain in the APS budget. Sharon McManus and Xuan Kong will take this view back to ALG.

FY' 10 BUDGET

Steve Mills referred to the Powerpoint budget presentation that he did at the 12/3/09 Joint School Committee Meeting and that is posted on the School Committee website. We are now two weeks closer to the end of the year so numbers are being reaffirmed, and will continue to change. He is moving ahead with the \$1.15 million cut that will include layoffs. He noted that if a teacher is retiring and is not replaced – that will still hurt the students and staff. Staff that is left has to pick up the slack. Unless something changes over the next six months, there are people currently working in our schools, who would like to be working, who will not be. Even in affluent times, we need to reduce duplicity and make those efficiencies.

FY' 11 BUDGET

Jonathan Chinitz reported on the Joint Task Force on Cost Savings which includes members of the Acton Finance Committee, Acton Public School Committee, and the Board of Selectmen. He recently met with Erin Bettez (Community Education), JD Head (Facilities), Steve Hall (Technology), and Tess Summers (Finance) about their departments. It was obvious that they know their operations inside and out and are fully aware of the budget situation. The next step is to get similar feedback from the respective entities on the Town side, then look for commonalities. The Task Force will be meeting with Steve Mills and Steve Ledoux next week to hear their priorities.

Mike Coppelino said that he doesn't want to lose sight of revisiting the possible option of combining the Acton Public School District with the Regional School District.

HEALTH TRUST REPORT

The Committee met this morning. The cost structure of Blue Cross was discussed.

SCHOOL COMMITTEE LIAISONS FOR EACH ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Xuan Kong asked each School Committee member to take an elementary school and be the communication link. He asked them to have a budget discussion in each school and bring back families' feedback to the School Committee. All of the members agreed.

NEW BUSINESS

1. Recommendation to Accept Gift from Yoon Jung Hur and Jinhaeng Cho

It was moved, seconded, and unanimously

VOTED: to accept, with gratitude, the generous gift of \$1000 to the Acton Public Schools Preschool.

This gift will be used to purchase an outdoor storage shed for preschool equipment.

2. Bus Ridership/Fees

JD Head will present on this at the next meeting. He was asked to include information from other communities, including those that charge for bussing.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

8. Social Security Withholding vs OBRA Report

Steve Mills said that this cost saving plan could save us \$170,000 and that it needs to be implemented. Town Manager Steve Ledoux, said that the Acton Public School District needs a vote of the Board of Selectmen to do this.

ISSUES OF THE COMMITTEE

Sharon McManus said that the Board of Selectmen wants to update the Master Plan for Acton and asked if the School Committee should make a statement about it. The Committee agreed that there would be no school construction in the near future.

At 9:45pm, the Acton Public School Committee was polled and voted unanimously to go into Executive Session according to Chapter 39 Section 23A Paragraph 3, "To discuss strategy with respect to litigation if an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the litigating position of the governmental body."

The Acton Public School Committee was polled and voted to go out of Executive Session at 10:17 pm.

NEXT MEETINGS – January 7, 2010 – 7 pm, RJGrey JH Library – Joint Budget meeting,
followed by AB meeting
January 21 - 7:30 pm, R.J. Grey Junior High Library

The meeting was adjourned at 10:18 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Beth Petr
Secretary