

ACTON PUBLIC and ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL
SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING WORKSHOP Minutes (approved 6/28/12)

Sargent Library
Boxborough

July 26, 2011
6:00 p.m.

6:30 p.m. Business Meeting begins

Members Present: Brigid Bieber, Dennis Bruce, Michael Coppolino, Xuan Kong, Kim McOsker, Maria Neyland, John Petersen, Bruce Sabot
Members Absent: Paul Murphy
Others: Don Aicardi, Steve Mills, Beth Petr

ABRSC Chair, John Petersen and APSC Chair, Mike Coppolino, called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

Chairmen's Introduction

The goal of the meeting was to identifying primary topics for the year, not to go into great detail about any item.

2. Regionalization

Bruce Sabot described the proposed Regional Study/Planning Committee and what they would do. The DESE would eventually have to approve any change to Regionalization. The School Committee would have to show DESE the benefit of what a revised Regionalization Agreement would bring to both communities. Once a proposed agreement has been achieved, both towns have to agree to it. This study/planning process would take about a year. Preliminary information would be available by next Town Meetings in 2012. There is some concern that 2/3 of Boxborough's budget would be an assessment if this goes through. The ABRSC unanimously supported moving forward with this study. A vote will be taken at the August 1st ABRSC meeting to form the Study Committee. Bruce will ask Mac Reid and Rep. Jennifer Benson about the recommended composition of the committee, as well as the timeline. Mike Coppolino asked if the Committee that drafts the new Agreement has to be the same as the Study Committee. It was pointed out that the 1998 Regional Agreement was reviewed by the Committee of: Lees Stuntz, Cheryl Levine, John Fallon, Dore Hunter, Sandy Pitcher, Anne Ridley and Isa Zimmerman. It is believed that there were two committees: study and amendment drafting. See powerpoint slides from Bruce.

3. Regional Budgeting Issues

Don Aicardi just finished one budget cycle as Finance Director. Don proposed quarterly budget reports focused on trends instead of brief monthly updates. He also plans to start the internal budget discussion earlier, perhaps in October to be well prepared in December to start the next budget discussion. He was surprised at the passion for the level of detail required to answer some School Committee members' questions this past year. Don wants to report to SC on a quarterly basis and make adjustments during the year, not all at the end as was done this year. He wants to devote more time to analyzing the budgets, given current resources. Steve Mills pointed out that one of the comments on Steve's evaluation was for the Committee to focus more on educational issues and not so much on the budget.

John asked if the Committee agreed with quarterly reports for the current year, unless there was anything unusual or significant. Bruce preferred the ongoing discussion of next year's budget planning process, to be sure the Committee has ultimate control over their budget. The

Committee agreed on quarterly reports for FY12, and to making spending adjustments during the year as appropriate and not all at the end.

Mike Coppolino asked if there should be a subcommittee to consider budgeting to actual numbers and coming up with some simple reports. Westford uses the lines they report to the state for their reports.

John asked the Committee what level of service they would strive for - the level currently being provided or what they would like to be providing. Brigid Bieber pointed out the "massive list of unmet needs" and said she would support a budget that addressed some of the needs, not all of them, but above level service. Steve Mills asked Alixe Callen to submit a budget with the NEASC 7 standards in mind. Increased staffing was identified as a need.

Xuan Kong stated that level service cannot be gold standard, what students are learning is key. He wants educators to justify needs with concrete scientific evidence showing that expenses will lead to better education. He wants to see more long term planning and goal setting.

Mike is not satisfied with the CASE accounting methods. He feels significant money could be saved in this area. He pointed out that Westford decided not to use CASE transportation 7 or 8 years ago and saved hundreds of thousands of dollars. Steve Mills said he is happy to take up this issue but he is only one voting member at CASE. Mike said there are 2 parts to this issue, the accounting piece to charge actual students to take advantage of circuit breaker, and CASE transportation. He believes the District can provide its own transportation more efficiently. Maria Neyland asked for this information for the Committee's consideration. Steve agreed to provide it.

Maria expressed serious concern that many Boxborough citizens feel that Acton Leadership Group (ALG) is setting their assessment and they have no input. Unless Boxborough is given a seat at the ALG table, it is imperative that the Regional School Committee and its representation have a voice. She stated that the ALG reps must bring the Committee's input clearly to ALG. Bruce Sabot felt like the process has worked well for the past few years, but last year it did not.

Brigid stated that assumptions are made when budgeting is done and at some point those decisions should be locked. At ALG, some assumptions were changed last March without proper ABRSC representation, in an effort to make Acton balance their budget. John Petersen replied that the ABRSC should have met to discuss this as it happened. John said the Committee should have been clear about the assessment, and that the ABRSC should agree on their numbers in October to help prevent this and lead the discussion at ALG. Maria concluded that SC members are well educated about their communities and ALG is not familiar with the Boxborough community. The numbers must be fairly represented. The Committee agreed on the importance of this discussion and to continue it at their Aug 2 SC meeting.

4. Office of the Superintendent

Steve Mills asked that the Superintendent's contract be reviewed every year. An open discussion and vote will be on the Aug 2 meeting agenda. The Committee will also discuss whether to change the evaluation form.

The Committee considered whether to change legal counsel due to cost. Atty Peter Ebb of Ropes and Grey has been excellent but at \$770 per hour, he is very expensive. Steve feels the Districts could get excellent legal counsel from less expensive attorneys. He suggested that an RFP for legal services be considered. Steve was asked to pull together the last two years of expenses for Ropes and Grey, and note how much was Peter's time and how much was less costly associates' time. Don will collect this information and provide it to the Committee.

Beth Petr left the room at 8:25 p.m. and returned at 8:37 p.m. while the Committee talked about Central Office staffing levels. During that time, the Committee agreed that Steve Mills should feel comfortable hiring more support staff if he felt it was necessary.

5. Policy Issues

Xuan reported on the Long Range Planning Subcommittee. By November, the new Plan incorporating planning priorities will be presented to SC for feedback. The Committee was also asked to comment on the timeline. Last month, 30 staff members at the Leadership Institute weighed in on the values and goals, creating a very thoughtful document. The hope is that this Plan will inform the budgets going forward and make them more intelligent and most responsive to our communities. Mike was surprised that academics came in second. He thought academics should be first.

John wanted to see the Negotiating Subcommittee (NSC) stay in place so Negotiations can start as soon as they're ready. It is also good to get to know the union representatives in a positive way, not just when negotiations are happening. John Petersen, Brigid Bieber and Terry Lindgren were on the Subcommittee last year. John asked if they would like to meet with AEA, OSA, AFSCME reps quarterly. In Boxborough, the SC chair does this, not the NSC. Brigid agreed that getting together even once or twice a year would be valuable for all. This does not need to be as part of the NSC. Mike would be happy to meet like this, but cannot be on the NSC. John will try to go to one or two of the union meetings, and offer the chance for them to attend our meetings, if they like. Xuan will help if needed. The Chairs will make these connections with the unions. John said an example is the Schedule B proposal and how that will be handled. John would like the NSC to handle this item and if the SC agrees, he asked for a couple of volunteers for NSC. Kim McOsker will do it. Maria Neyland will do it with Brigid and Kim if someone else can help out if she cannot continue.

Regarding School Committee meetings, it was agreed to:

- Identify people in the audience so they don't have to wait all night to speak
- Work together to model good teamwork during meetings
- Disagree without being disagreeable
- Have no surprises
- Provide times on agenda with vice chair as timekeeper, no late meetings
- Keep addenda short

The Committee agreed that the September meeting will be paperless. Amy will provide a few iPads for those who don't have a laptop to view the material posted on the school website.

6. Other Issues

A new Teacher Evaluation process is coming. The goal for Steve is to develop benchmarks and tools in every content area in every grade K -12. Starting a year from now, part of the evaluations will be how students are assessed in ability.

The Lower Fields Project is on the agenda for Aug 2. SC will look at the general concept and consider that money will be coming out of the SC budget, perhaps \$200,000. Maria will not agree to go forward, unless she sees numbers about cost showing that it makes financial sense. Kim was uncomfortable with the first presentation although she loves the idea of developing the fields. Brigid told the Fields Committee that the SC needs more information, primarily from the Administration. Mike would like to agree to the concept, but needs rough assurance that after the sports organizations get their money back, the schools are next in line, as well as how expenses will be covered. The Committee needs more numbers about this proposed project. John will try to get that information by the next meeting.

The policy subcommittee is reviewing the Use of Email by School Committee Members policy. The law requires that copies of all emails be archived and made public upon request. School Committee emails are public records. A new policy will be proposed to the Committee soon.

Due to time, the Committee asked that the International Field Trip policy and school committee's oversight role, as well as a discussion of the Demographics Study be added to the agenda for the Aug 2 meeting.

7. APS Issues

The discussion of K-6 Funding of Assistants – how should we fund (PTO, local budget, Comm Ed, other?) will take place at the next APS SC meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:42 p.m. by both ABRSC and APSC.

Respectfully submitted,
Beth Petr

List of Documents Used: see agenda

ACTON PUBLIC and ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL
SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING WORKSHOP

Sargent Library
Boxborough

July 26, 2011
6:00 p.m.
6:30 p.m. Business Meeting begins

AGENDA

- 1. Call to Order**
- 2. Chairmen's Introduction**
- 3. Regionalization**
 - Vote for Study Committee – discussion, timing
 - Goal for Study Completion – process overview
 - Goal for Town Meetings Apr/May 2012
- 4. Regional Budgeting Issues**
 - Financial Reporting to SC; adequate or alter format?
 - Service Level including Class size for FY13? FY14?
 - E&D target level? How should E&D be used?
 - Management of year end spending
 - ALG process, representation, communication and effect on the regional budget
 - Calendar for Regional Budget
 - CASE Accounting / Transportation Savings
- 5. Office of the Superintendent**
 - Superintendent Contract (update)
 - Format for Superintendent Review – should it be revised?
 - Central Office Staffing Levels – are they adequate?
 - Legal Counsel – are we using counsel cost effectively?
- 6. Policy Issues**
 - Long-Range Planning (Xuan)
 - Negotiation – should we have a negotiating subcommittee?
 - SC as a whole – are we functioning well?
 - Structuring SC meetings to end by 10pm and Ground Rules
 - SC Going Paperless
 - SC Members Email Practice and Policy
 - "Demographic Study" – further analysis of existing study? New study? Action plan?
- 7. Other Issues**
 - ABYS Fields Project
 - International Field Trip policy – school committee oversight role? Scholarships?
 - Identification of New Issues of importance to the schools, school committee
- 8. APS Issues**
 - K-6 Funding of Assistants – how should we fund (PTO, local budget, Comm Ed, other?)
- 9. Adjourn**