

ACTON PUBLIC AND ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE
MEETING Minutes (approved 2/7/13)

Library
R.J. Grey Junior High School

Tuesday, January 8, 2013
7:30 p.m. Joint School Committee
followed by AB Regional School Committee Meeting

Members Present: Brigid Bieber, Mary Brolin, Dennis Bruce, Michael Coppolino, Xuan Kong, Paul Murphy, Kim McOsker (8:50 p.m.), Maria Neyland, Deanne O’Sullivan
Members Absent: None
Others: Don Aicardi, Marie Altieri, Deborah Bookis, Liza Huber, Steve Mills, Beth Petr

The Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee was called to order by Chairperson Xuan Kong and the Acton Public School Committee was called to order by Vice-Chairperson Dennis Bruce at 7:35 p.m.

APPROVAL of MINUTES and STATEMENT of WARRANT

The minutes of the 12/6/12 Joint/AB School Committee meeting were approved by the ABRSC and APSC as written.

AB Warrant #13-013 dated 12/13/12 in the amount of \$1,658,031.90, #13-014 dated 12/27/12 in the amount of \$2,676,719.88 and #13-015 dated 1/10/13 in the amount of \$1,420,235.04 was signed by the Chairperson and circulated to the Committee for signatures.

APS Warrant # 201313 dated 12/24/12 in the amount of \$665,256.63 was signed by the Chair and circulated to the Committee for signatures.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - none

EDUCATION REPORT – Dr. Alixe Callen, Principal, AB Regional High School

Dr. Mills thanked Dr. Callen for the direction she is providing to the High School and how her decisions are supporting the Long Range Strategic Plan (LRSP). This is particularly true as people retire and she assesses her leadership team. In her presentation, Dr. Callen focused on one piece of the LRSP – increasing student-adult interaction in the school. The new Advisory Program has been popular with many students and staff members. Regarding student load she stated that we need to look beyond class size and at how many students each teacher has per day. She advocated for the need to build time into the day for students to conference with staff. The new counselor has reduced loads from 249 to 219 students per counselor but this is still very high compared to other communities. She thanked the Committee for providing increased hours for the drug/alcohol counselor. Other examples of popular things happening now are the Saturday Night activities and extended library hours. Restructuring the special education learning center has also increased personalized attention for students.

Dr. Callen’s plan to restructure her leadership by creating two deans would allow some beginning administrators to take some of the more experienced administrators’ tasks and make better use of their expertise. A committee member cautioned about how to present the addition of two English teachers to the public if enrollment is decreasing. The point was made that it takes significant time to give thoughtful feedback to students on written work and the High School has been understaffed in that area for a long time. A student rep spoke in strong support of the value of the Advisory Program.

JOINT SCHOOL COMMITTEE BUSINESS

6.1 Security Measures in Place in our Schools

Dr. Mills described the statement he read at the APS meeting on 12/20/12, now posted on the homepage. He is creating a new Security Task Force with a variety of staff and parents. Focused meetings will be held weekly and he hopes to report to the School Committee in March. One issue that will be discussed is that of locking school front doors. Xuan asked who wants to join the Task Force.

6.1.1 Draft letter requested by the APS School Committee

In reaction to last month's tragedy in CT, a draft letter calling for a ban on assault weapons was written by Michael Coppolino at the direction of the APS SC at their last meeting. While ABRSC members appreciated the idea, and there was broad agreement that they should put out a statement, they were not prepared to do so immediately. Dennis Bruce will work with Brigid Bieber on a revised draft for the next meeting. Members can send comments to them. Given that timing is important, it was agreed that if a revision is ready for 1/26/13, the Joint SC would discuss it then. Paul Murphy mentioned that Cory Atkins had a meeting on Jan 4 regarding school safety as a priority. David Linsky is chairing a meeting to address a bill about this issue and he could be a good resource.

6.2 Regional School District Study Committee (RSDSC) Update

- 6.2.1 Regional Assessment Method memo from X. Kong, 1/4/13
- 6.2.2 Educational Benefits memo from Superintendents, 1/4/13
- 6.2.3 Regional Assessment Formula proposal from J. Petersen, 12/30/12
- 6.2.4 Acton FinCom letter to APSC, 12/18/12
- 6.2.5 Outreach Opportunities

Peter Ashton reported that many things have happened recently. Presentations have been done at all of the PTSOs and many public groups. Mac Reid is keeping a record of all comments/questions received.

Concerns being heard include:

1. People in both towns need more information about the educational benefits, not just the financial benefits. The Superintendents' memo on this has been added to website.
2. There are many questions about loss of control. This means different things to different people.
3. School parents ask if PTO funding and school schedules will change. There is concern over a loss of "personal identity" of the 6 elementary schools.
4. Questions come up about specific financial impacts and benefits.

In December, the financial benefits calculation was reviewed with a focus on administration. It is now believed that the total financial benefits in the first year would be \$1 million, considerably more than initially thought. This is largely due to cost savings. The analysis has been updated so it starts regionalization when it actually would start, in FY15, not FY14. Legal counsel is now being used and is drafting a new agreement. These expenses will be paid for by a grant if it is received. Hopefully this draft will be completed by mid next week. Other legal issues have come up. The most significant involves the two methods of how assessments are formulated. We continue to use the alternative method. See memo dated 1/4/13 in packet from legal counsel summarizing the two methods.

The committee discussed John Petersen's memo dated 12/30/12 proposing a hybrid method for calculating assessments. This involves combining enrollment information and the relative property value of the two towns to get to an assessment. This idea was discussed at last week's RSDSC meeting. A subgroup will investigate this further, consistent with how other issues have been dealt with by the RSDSC. The RSDSC agreed with looking into this suggestion, although here is concern about staying on schedule for the April Town Meeting. DESE was asked for a preliminary opinion if this method would be legal to use. DESE is considering it but it will take time. Final word will not come until after April 29th.

A long range education plan has to be done and submitted to DESE. Next meeting is Jan 23. The RSDSC hopes a new regional agreement will be ready for the next Joint School Committee meeting to discuss.

Mary Brolin and Mike Coppolino wanted to discuss the assessment memo because it would affect current budgets. Mary suggested that the Committees look at the budgets both ways so they know how the approaches specifically work out.

Maria Neyland expressed frustration that, “at the 11th hour” another method is being considered by the subcommittee. She is concerned about creating confusion for the public with this new proposal. Peter Ashton stated that the purpose of doing outreach has been to inform the public and take their input. The RSDSC feels that the public is now asking them to consider this proposal. He agreed that one of the proposals would change some of the numbers. Mary Brolin (a member of the RSDSC) added that there was a lot of concern about this new assessment approach and how long it may take to study it, but in the end the RSDSC decided to take a 2 week look and see if it merits further consideration. At that point, the RSDSC will decide whether to move forward with it or not.

Peter stated that once a new regional agreement proposal is created, he believes that the work of the RSDSC is over and it is the School Committee’s job to do the outreach and “sell it” for the Town Meetings. Brigid Bieber understands the reason to look at the new assessment method and take public feedback seriously but she is afraid that the Committee will get bogged down on one issue. She reminded that Committee that the Regional Agreement does get reviewed periodically. She doesn’t want the process to be derailed. Mike Coppolino disagreed saying that delaying a few months would be alright if it leads to a better agreement.

Peter envisions that by February, the RSDSC would present the Draft Regional Agreement that would be proposed. At that point, it is the Regional School Committee’s decision to accept, reject, or modify the proposal. If anything is modified, it must be reviewed again by legal counsel. Mary said that the DESE agreed to at least give the Committee initial feedback on the proposal prior to the Town Meetings.

Xuan announced the upcoming public forums and said that the Acton and Boxborough cable TV channels will be airing a tape of Peter Ashton explaining the issues.

6.3 Acton Leadership Group (ALG) Report

ALG will meet on 1/10/13.

6.4 Boxborough Leadership Forum (BLF) Report

Maria Neyland reported that BLF discussed the 5 articles for their Special Town Meeting on 1/7/13. All three municipal contracts for police/fire/dispatch failed. The BOS is going back to renegotiate.

6.5 Health Insurance Trust (HIT) Report

Kim McOsker reported that the December meeting was brief. They are still looking at an 8 – 10% rate increase and will vote in February. The next meeting is 1/24/13.

6.6 OPEB Task Force Update

Dennis Bruce reported that the State commission issued a draft report. Legislation is expected soon. Recommendations include looking at eligibility issues from age point of view, as well as changing the number of years from 10 to 20 years of service. Some exceptions could be made for retirees. There are other recommendations about funding but everyone is waiting for the final report to see the true effect on towns’ liability. The Task Force has not met but is talking to Segal since their numbers are the ones used. Paul Murphy stated that at Rep. Cory Atkins’ meeting there was concern that a funding requirement is not included in the draft.

6.7 Acton FinCom Report

Dennis Bruce reported that Fincom has not met recently. Kim McOsker is drafting a response to the FinCom letter in the packet for consideration at the 1/17/13 APS SC meeting. She will share it with the Boxborough members.

6.8 Acton BOS Report

Paul Murphy reported that the Town of Acton's Budget Saturday was last weekend. He would like to write to our elected officials to urge them to follow through with the proposed circuit breaker legislation. Maria Neyland would like to discuss this with the Boxborough School Committee and perhaps do a letter from all three school committees.

6.9 Policy Subcommittee Update

Brigid Bieber reported that updates are being made to the Sexual Harassment policy (File: ACAB) and it is being combined with two other policies. A First Reading is expected for the next Joint SC meeting. The policy subcommittee is also discussing cameras on school buses, videotaping on school property, as well as Facebook/Social Networking use. The Mission and Vision policy is being revised to incorporate the approved Long Range Strategic Plan.

APS SC adjourned at 9:10 p.m. ABRSC continued.

ABRSC BUSINESS

7.1 FY 14 Budget Update

Don Aicardi presented the FY14 ABRSD proposed preliminary budget. At \$40,775,000 this is a 4.24% increase from the Final FY13 Budget. Boxborough's decreasing enrollment is a trend that will continue for the next several years. Based on current level service numbers, current state aid estimates and updated enrollment numbers, Acton's FY14 assessment is estimated to increase 6.2% while Boxborough's assessment is estimated to decrease by .1%.

The preliminary ABRSD Investment Budget includes the addition of 2 ABRHS English teachers (less resulting \$30k reduction in 990 salary account), Bridges Program at ABRHS and \$120,000 in professional development. Dr. Mills commented that for 42 years the district has tried to get the High School English teachers to 4 sections and adding two teachers would do that. He received a very good report from the FUTURES Education audit that no efficiencies were found in special education at the Region, but they did identify a revenue source in Medicaid. Dr. Mills stressed that much more detail would be presented at Budget Saturday on 1/26/13.

Xuan asked what the absolute increase in ERI would be. Don will provide that at the next meeting. If MUNIS is hosted by the town of Acton, Xuan asked how this would impact the schools if full regionalization occurs. Don and Amy Bisiewicz said there are still costs either way. Several meetings have been held with the Town of Acton and the tech teams have discussed options with a consultant. Amy offered to bring the costs of various operating scenarios to Budget Saturday. Dennis asked if this wasn't part of the RSDSC work, to include those costs. Xuan said it was not because there would be costs either way if we regionalize or not.

Mary Brolin focused on the assessment methods. For Budget Saturday, she asked for each town's assessment amount under the statutory method. She stated that Acton might think it is best to vote down an assessment and then use the statutory method. This might mean we want to use the statutory method, and not the alternative method right from the beginning. Don will try to do these calculations for Budget Saturday.

Xuan suggested that for future presentations, one time expenses be separate from recurring expenses. There are really two concerns for both towns – Do we have the money to pay for it, and most importantly, is the budget sustainable (what is recurring)? Separating these expenses might help people understand and come to agreement.

Don asked the School Committees to email him their questions leading up to Budget Saturday. He also invited people to come in and meet with him.

7.2 Lower Fields Update

Dr. Mills said this is the quarterly update, as requested. Dennis stated that the financial snapshot is well laid out but he had some questions about construction. JD expects everything to be finished for the tax season and an “opening” event at that time. Everything should be finished in the next 8 – 10 weeks. Deanne O’Sullivan asked about field use - what is the percentage of rental? How often is it empty? Are they on track? JD said there is plenty of free time left and rentals are expected to go way above \$200,000.

7.3 Recommendation to Accept Gifts from the Friends of the Acton Libraries to the ABRHS and RJGJHS Libraries

Brigid Bieber moved, Mike Coppolino seconded and it was unanimously,
VOTED: to accept this gift with gratitude.

7.4 Recommendation to Accept Gift from IBM to the ABRHS Science Team and Computer Science Club

Paul Murphy moved, Mike Coppolino seconded and it was unanimously,
VOTED: to accept this gift with gratitude.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

8.7 Acton Election Deadlines from Acton Town Clerk – Xuan highlighted this information.

NEXT MEETINGS

- January 17, 7:00 pm. APSC Meeting at RJGJHS Library
- January 26 (Saturday), 9:00 am – 3:00 pm Joint/APS/AB SC Budget Presentations, RJGJHS Library
- February 7, 7:30 pm, AB SC Meeting at RJGJHS Library (Open Budget Hearing)
- February 14, 7:00 pm, APSC Meeting at RJGJHS Library (Open Budget Hearing)

The meeting was adjourned at 10:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Beth Petr

List of Documents Used: see agenda