

ACTON PUBLIC and ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE
MEETING Minutes (approved 3/7/13)

Library
R.J. Grey Junior High School

February 7, 2013
7:00 p.m. JT SC Executive Session
7:30 p.m. ABRSD Annual Budget Hearing
Followed by Joint School Committee meeting
Followed by AB Regional SC meeting
Followed by APS SC meeting

Members Present: Brigid Bieber, Mary Brolin (7:10 p.m.), Dennis Bruce, Michael Coppolino, Xuan Kong, Paul Murphy, Kim McOsker, Deanne O’Sullivan
Members Absent: Maria Neyland
Others: Don Aicardi, Marie Altieri, Deborah Bookis, Liza Huber, Steve Mills, Beth Petr

The Acton-Boxborough Regional and Acton Public School Committees were called to order at 7:02 p.m. by Xuan Kong and Kim McOsker, respective Chairs.

JT SC EXECUTIVE SESSION

At 7:02 p.m., it was moved, seconded and unanimously

VOTED by role call: that the **Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee** go into Executive Session (Joint School Committee) to discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining.

(YES – Bieber, Bruce, Coppolino, Kong, McOsker, Murphy, O’Sullivan)

Xuan Kong declared that an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining position of the Board and the Committee would return to open session.

At 7:02 p.m., it was moved, seconded and unanimously

VOTED by role call: that the **Acton Public School Committee** go into Executive Session (Joint School Committee) to discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining.

(YES - Bruce, Coppolino, Kong, McOsker, Murphy, O’Sullivan)

Kim McOsker declared that an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining position of the Board and the Committee would return to open session.

At 7: 27 p.m. the Committees were polled and voted to go out of Joint Executive Session.

At 7:28 p.m. the APS SC was suspended and the ABRSC continued.

2.0 ABRSC CHAIRMAN’S INTRODUCTION

Xuan Kong announced that he would not be running for reelection.

3.0 ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT FY14 OPEN BUDGET HEARING (7:30)

(See 1/26/13 Budget Binder or <http://ab.mec.edu/about/meetings.shtml>)

Dr. Mills began the presentation requesting an FY14 preliminary budget of \$40,482,000. This is a 3.5% increase from FY13. In response to the question of hiring English teachers during a time of declining enrollment, Dr. Mills stated that for years an explicit goal at our High School has been to allow our English teachers to teach four sections instead of five. Adding the two proposed teachers for FY14 will

achieve that goal. He and Dr. Callen both link the lower student growth percentile scores in English to our English teachers' workload. Dr. Mills proposed that if supported, he would reduce the size of the English staff by one teacher every time there is a reduction of 90 students at ABRHS as future budgets rollout.

Amy Hedison spoke from the audience questioning how the School Committee could call the proposal an "Investment" budget. She stated that her children have never been in a class within the School Committee class size guidelines.

Brigid Bieber stated that it is unreasonable for Dr. Mills to commit to reducing the English staff if the two teachers are added and enrollment decreases in future years. He thanked her saying that it is fair for fiscal conservatives to expect some savings in staff if there is a significant enrollment decrease. Mike Coppolino appreciated that two alternative motions were included in the presentation, but he will not pursue them. He noted the significant drop in energy numbers and the flexibility it provides to do other things.

Xuan Kong reminded the Committee that future School Committees and Administrations may have different goals or measures of success and that will affect future decisions. He supports the budget but has significant concerns about the large amount of E&D (excess and deficiency) funds used to lower the assessments for member towns of Acton and Boxborough. He emphasized the importance and flexibility of E&D funds to the regional school district in its budget process. He noted that there is no equivalent on the municipal side.

Brigid Bieber moved and Mike Coppolino seconded that the FY14 ABRSD Budget and Assessments as recommended in 3.1 of the packet be approved.

Dennis Bruce made an amendment and Mike Coppolino seconded, that \$200,000 less be used from E&D reserves and the assessments to member towns be increased proportionally by this amount. See handout.

The Committee discussed the desire to use as little of E&D reserves as possible. Don emphasized sustainability of the budgets.

The ABRSC **VOTED** unanimously to accept the amendment.

Xuan emphasized that the amended motion provides the same funding to the schools as the original one but the amended version has slightly higher assessment amounts to member towns due to a lower use of E&D funds. In the past few years, the regional district used E&D to fund 2% of the budget and assessed the balance to member towns and the original motion called for 2.5% offset of budget by E&D fund. Because assessments are based on relative enrollment proportion of two towns, percentage of assessment increase for Acton will be higher than 3.5% increase of overall budget.

He stressed that voting for this budget means Committee members must advocate strongly for it in their respective towns and at the Town Meetings.

The ABRSC unanimously **VOTED**:

recommends that the total appropriation for the Acton-Boxborough Regional School District for the fiscal year of July 1, 2013 through June 30, 2014 be set at \$40,482,330 and that member towns be assessed in accordance with the Education Reform Law and the terms of the Agreement and amendments thereto as follows: Acton \$26,459,873, Boxborough \$5,822,527, remainder to be accounted for by the Anticipated Chapter 70 Aid in the amount of \$6,725,844, Anticipated Charter School Aid in the amount of \$78,966, Transportation Aid, Chapter 71, Section 16C in the amount of \$624,462, a transfer from E&D Reserves in the amount of \$770,000, and a transfer from the Junior High School Project Premium on Loan in the amount of \$658.

7.1 Regional School District Study Committee (RSDSC) Update

Peter Ashton began by saying that the 2/1/13 memo in the packet is now slightly out of date. At the time it was written the RSDSC felt that due to the four reasons outlined, the RSDSC would recommend that they discontinue the effort to revise the Regional Agreement to expand the region. Specifically, there was concern that there was not a strong reason for Acton, particularly school parents, to support the proposal and advocate for others to join them. The new proposed assessment method was not a major reason, but it was a piece. On 1/23/13, the RSDSC voted not to move forward. After their decision, they started hearing from people who wanted to vote at the respective Town Meetings on April 29th.

Peter and Mac proposed the following to the ABRSC:

1. Recommend that the RSDSC continue for one more month to see what new ideas may be found
2. Recommend that it is not realistic to vote on April 29 and ask that the Town Clerks try to reschedule the vote for a June meeting or October meeting as second choice.

There was consensus on the School Committee that the effort should continue. A comment was made that the ABRSC, PTOs and Finance Committees need to be clearly on board. Mike asked if assessment models had been discussed and if that information would be shared. An outside consultant was hired to look at different approaches and Peter said his report could be publicized. Mac said that there are 7 different issues being looked at. The Committee asked that the educational benefits be strengthened and communicated better, particularly in Acton. Paul stressed that there is still \$1 million of savings a year, even if someone thought there was no educational benefit. Regarding the issue of control of the budget, Xuan suggested that both towns will actually have better control because there will only be one set of budgets to review and decide on. The budget process has become much more transparent and that helps to understand where our financial resources are going. The Committee agreed that the RSDSC should continue their work and return at the March 7th School Committee meeting.

APS SC reconvened and the JOINT SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING began at 9:11 p.m.

4.0 **APPROVAL of MINUTES and STATEMENT of WARRANT**

AB Warrant #13-017 dated 2/7/13 in the amount of \$1,828,915.54 was signed by the chair and circulated to the Committee for signatures. APS Warrant #201316 dated 2/5/13 in the amount of \$195,435.50 was signed by the chair and circulated to the Committee for signatures.

The minutes of the 1/8/13 Joint/AB School Committee meeting were approved as amended by the ABRSC then the APSC. The minutes of the 1/17/13 AB School Committee meeting were approved as amended by the ABRSC. The minutes of the 1/26/13 Joint/AB/APS SC Budget meetings were approved as written by the ABRSC and APSC.

5.0 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION** - none

6.0 **JOINT SCHOOL COMMITTEE BUSINESS**

6.1 Security Measures in Place in our Schools

6.1.1 Draft letter re Weapons ban

ABRSC VOTE:

Mike Coppolino moved, Paul Murphy seconded and it was unanimously,
VOTED: to accept the proposed letter as revised.

APSC VOTE:

Paul Murphy moved, Xuan Kong seconded and it was unanimously,
VOTED: to accept the proposed letter as revised.

The two Chairs will sign the letter and decide to whom it will be addressed, including local and federal elected officials. It will be posted on the school website. Final copies could go to other districts and MASC and they could be invited to do the same. MASC sent a mailing out recently with a similar draft statement.

6.1.2 Superintendent's Safety Task Force

Dr. Mills expects to bring recommendations from this group to the March School Committee meeting. The question of whether to lock the front doors of our school buildings is being discussed. 4-2-1: 4 fire drills, 2 lock downs, and one evacuation drill per year has now been put in place. Meetings of the Task Force are Tuesdays 3:00 – 4:30 in High School room 115N.

6.2 Acton Leadership Group (ALG) Report

Xuan reviewed the ALG meeting on 1/31/13. Use of reserves continues to be an area of concern.

6.3 Boxborough Leadership Forum (BLF) Report

Brigid reported that on Jan 29 discussion focused on the Special Town Meeting. There is a challenge finding members of their Finance Committee. They are restarting their budgeting process after the failed Special Town Meeting vote.

6.4 Health Insurance Trust (HIT) Report

Kim McOsker reported that they have not met since the last meeting. They will set rates at next meeting.

6.5 OPEB Task Force Update

Dennis reported that they met last night and discussed the state report and potential effects. They are discussing and researching 6 or 7 funding mechanisms for FY15. Feb 20 is next meeting. Goal is to come up with a reasonable funding mechanism. He would like to report more fully at the March SC meeting.

6.6 Acton FinCom Report

Steve Mills and Don Aicardi presented at the last meeting. Sustainability was emphasized.

6.7 Acton BOS Report

Paul Murphy missed the last BOS meeting but he has been following legislative issues about reimbursement and gave an update. He needs more time to research the new legislation.

6.8 Policy Subcommittee Update

6.8.1 Mission and Vision/Values (File: AD-E) – FIRST READING

Brigid Bieber reported that this update was administrative to incorporate the Long Range Strategic Plan into our policy. There were no comments.

6.8.2 Prohibition of Harassment (combining Files: ACAB, JBA, GBA) – FIRST READING

Liza Huber reported that this new policy consolidates 3 existing policies. It also includes gender identity, added by the state and ancestry which has been required by the Federal government. The file number will be added to the proposed policy.

6.9 FY13 SMART Goals Update

Dr. Mills reviewed the progress made on the SMART goals. A very extensive audit done by FUTURES Education showed that our special education services are very efficient and effective. A report will be done at the May SC meeting. Student Rep Jacob Johnson asked about teacher evaluations. Dr. Mills replied that this is a voluminous task and requires teachers to have valuable conversations about their teaching.

The APS SC was suspended at 9:45 p.m. and the ABRSC continued.

ABRSC BUSINESS

7.1 Regional School District Study Committee (RSDSC) Update – Peter Ashton, Mac Reid
(was taken out of order and considered after the ABRSD Budget Hearing)

7.2 FY13 Second Quarter Budget Report

Don Aicardi stated that there is nothing exceptional to report. The second quarter is important to tighten the process and give direction for the FY14 budget. He will be looking closely at the athletics and revolving accounts but doesn't see anything of concern at this time. He recently received last year's audit for ABRSD and will be distributing it soon. The Department of Revenue is looking at our E & D certification and Don hopes to have that number confirmed soon. Xuan reminded Don about a few outstanding requests for information, including one from Sped PAC.

7.3 Recommendation to Accept Additional Gift from ABSAF

It was moved by Paul Murphy, seconded by Mary Brolin and unanimously,

VOTED: to accept an additional gift of \$17,000 from ABSAF for this year.

ABSAF had donated \$54,945 on 11/1/12 for this school year.

7.4 Recommendation to Accept Gifts from Donors for Community Service Program

Paul Murphy moved, Brigid Bieber seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED: to accept with gratitude the various gifts from donors to the ABRHS Community Service Program Silent Auction

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

NEXT MEETINGS

- February 14, 7:00 pm, APSC Meeting at RJGJHS Library (Open Budget Hearing)
- March 7, 7:30 pm, ABRSC Meeting at RJGJHS Library (Education Report – A. Shen)
- March 21, 7:00 pm, APSC Meeting at RJGJHS Library (Education Report – E. Kaufman)
- March 28, 7:00 pm, Joint SC Meeting at RJGJHS Library
- April 1, 7:00 pm, Acton Town Meeting begins in ABRHS Auditorium

The ABRSC adjourned at 9:55 p.m. and the APS SC reconvened.

ACTON PUBLIC SCHOOL COMMITTEE BUSINESS

10.1 APS FY14 Budget Update

Kim McOsker explained that the Committee was meeting so they could have a discussion prior to the ALG meeting next week. Don Aicardi presented, stating that the entire budget adds up to a 1.5% increase. Currently, as proposed, the FY14 APS budget is \$26,960,725.

Deanne O'Sullivan asked why the term "Investment Budget" is being used when most of what is added is paid for by retirements. Dr. Mills said it is very modest, and an increase in Professional Development is the only item above that. He is going to reconvene the Long Range Strategic Planning committee to discuss this going forward.

Xuan urged the Committee to articulate what the investment is in the budgets. For example, one of the 1st grade teachers is no longer needed (because the number of sections is decreasing) so eliminating that position does not affect service delivery. In the future, he advocated that budgeting be a two step process of articulating both of those numbers.

It was the sense of the Committee that they are comfortable with this budget and asked Kim to share it with ALG members.

The Acton Public School Committee was adjourned at 10:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Beth Petr

List of documents used: see agenda