

ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING

Minutes (approved 6/6/13)

Library
R.J. Grey Junior High School

April 25, 2013
7:30 p.m.

Members Present: Brigid Bieber, Mary Brolin, Dennis Bruce, Michael Coppolino, Paul Murphy, Kim McOsker, Maria Neyland, Deanne O’Sullivan, Kristina Rychlik
Members Absent: none
Others: Steve Mills, Beth Petr

The Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee was called to order at 7:30 p.m. by Maria Neyland, Vice-Chairperson.

2.0 **PreK – Grade 12 REGIONALIZATION AGREEMENT**

- 2.1 Draft Regional Agreement with Appendix A dated 4/8/13, changes tracked
- 2.2 Draft Regional Agreement with Appendix A dated 4/8/13, “clean” copy
- 2.3 Revised Financial Model dated 4/7/13 (#7.1.3 from 4/10/13 SC meeting)

The Committee focused on the revised Draft Regional Agreement dated 4/8/13, which was the same version they discussed at the 4/10/13 School Committee meeting.

2.4 Addition of Intermunicipal Agreement

Maria Neyland explained that the Intermunicipal Agreement came up this week as something that needed to be added. The Committee had no questions and agreed that the sentence drafted by Attorney Lennox should be inserted into Section 4.B of the Proposed Agreement.

2.5 Need to revise Acton Town Charter due to change in number of School Committee members per new Draft Regional Agreement

2.5.1 Possible Draft from Town of Acton Attorney Stephen Anderson dated 4/23/13
The Acton Town Charter needs to be revised because it specifies six School Committee members and the proposed Agreement increases that number to nine members. Acton Town Counsel prepared Charter Amendment language in the packet. Peter Ashton suggested that this item be considered after the Regionalization vote at the meeting on June 3. This also must go to a ballot vote at the next annual town election in March. Attorney Lennox assured Peter that this would not hold up the timing of any aspect of full regionalization. If the Charter amendment does not pass at Town Meeting on June 3, but Regionalization does pass, it could be considered at another Town Meeting. If it does not pass a second time, regionalization could not move forward as proposed. Paul Murphy asked if the number of School Committee members should stay at six to avoid this situation, but there was consensus that the number of School Committee members was an important decision and had involved much serious discussion by the Regional School District Study Committee (RSDSC). Kim McOsker felt that adding more members would be valuable given all the subcommittee and other work required of members of the Committee. Maria asked Dennis Bruce (APSC Chair) to talk to Acton Town Hall.

Chairperson Janet Adachi stated that the Acton Board of Selectmen had been informed of this issue.

2.6 Assessment of Potential Reductions to Blanchard Budget with Full Regionalization
Mary Brolin walked the Committee through her assessment of potential reductions to the Blanchard budget, focusing on “efficiency reductions”. Special education costs are difficult because they are so variable. Her analysis does not pull out any special education costs. She described it as a broad cut. Retirements are based on an informed estimate. Deanne O’Sullivan asked about the reduction of five classrooms on Mary’s chart. She expressed concern that if an effort is made to try to equal out the schools and reduce class size over time, some families may be forced to move to a school during the 5 year time period. The point was made that there is no intention of closing a school.

In response to a question from Mike Coppolino, Peter referred to slide 14 from the 4/10/13 SC meeting presentation:

FINANCIAL BENEFITS	
Additional transportation aid	= +\$535K
Reduced increase in ch. 70 aid	= -\$156K
Personnel cost savings	= +\$466K
Bonus regional aid (declines over time)	= +\$139K
Contract savings	= + \$21K
NET TOTAL BENEFITS	= +\$1 Million
Average over 5 years	= +\$943K
ADDITIONAL POTENTIAL BENEFITS	= +\$300K to \$1M

Dr. Mills explained that some items could definitely be cut given full regionalization, like one of the two superintendents, however other positions are more complicated. The certified librarian that Boxborough has but Acton does not, is an example. Some may not consider this a saving in Boxborough when the position is shifted to the District. It is a budgetary issue to be decided, if a certified librarian will be available at all for the six elementary schools in a PreK-12 Regional School District. Dennis Bruce asked about Extended Day funding in Boxborough. Mary Brolin said that it has been used to reduce facilities and overhead. She was not sure how Acton used it.

Charlie Kadlec spoke from the audience. He asked what the difference would be if the number of full time equivalent employees (FTEs) in Acton and Boxborough schools were combined and compared to what that number would be with full regionalization. Peter said regionalization would lower the number of FTEs by 4 or 5, translating to approximately \$466,000 in savings. (Slide 14 above).

Mike Coppolino stressed the need for some type of ongoing review committee. He questioned whether page 5 section 6C and page 8 section 11, contained strong enough language to ensure that the savings will be examined and compared to what was projected. He felt that the Committee owes it to the public and future School Committees to confirm this as time goes by. Appendix A section E also has similar language. Maria pointed out that the Committee can do a review like this whenever they like. It could be part of the annual summer workshop meeting. Brigid Bieber agrees with Mike’s request and said it could be done using a policy.

Kristina Rychlik emphasized the non financial benefits of full regionalization as well. The Committee agreed that this is very important.

On page 10 section 12 D5 Mary noted that there is a one year delay to get the transportation benefits. It was agreed to add wording to the last sentence similar to "... shall pay an assessment to the ABRSC of an amount equal to the cost of said transportation" Attorney Lennox will be asked to add this.

Dennis spoke for a number of people saying that Appendix A is hard to understand. Maria described it as the mechanism by which the \$1 million in savings is going to be split between the two towns. Contracts are not necessarily easy to understand. Peter Ashton was recognized as an important resource regarding Appendix A.

3.0 **June 3, 2013 SPECIAL TOWN MEETINGS in ACTON and BOXBOROUGH**

3.1 Drafting of Motion(s) for the Town Meeting Warrants

Peter Ashton and Mac Reid will write the warrant article and Attorney Lennox will write a draft motion. The Committee would like these for next week's SC meeting. Brigid noted that the motions might not be the same for both towns and that Attorney Lennox should be asked about that. Mike asked if there would be a more formal opinion from DESE before the June 3 Town Meetings. Dr. Mills is trying to get a meeting with DESE before Town Meeting with an informal commitment. Boxborough needs warrant text by May 6th and Acton by May 17th.

3.2 Timetable of Events

The Committee agreed there was not a lot of time to communicate the issues.

4.0 **PUBLIC FORUMS**

4.1 "Expanded Regionalization" slides

The Committee reviewed proposed slides to be used for the public forums. Janet Pierce spoke from the audience as an Acton parent suggesting that the 80 – 20 savings split be included in presentations. It was agreed that a consistent answer is necessary when asked how the savings will be allocated. This will be determined by the Boards of Selectmen and future School Committees as budget decisions are made each year.

Allen Nitchelm spoke from the audience suggesting that savings is not the right word to use. He asked for a promise that the "savings" will go back to the taxpayers. Maria Neyland stated that that decision is not in School Committee's jurisdiction. Allen requested that it be proposed to the ALG. He disagrees with taxing to the maximum and then saying savings have been provided.

The assessments will be reduced by the savings number and the results will be determined by the Boards of Selectmen, Finance Committees and School Committees.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:48 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Beth Petr

List of Documents used: see agenda