

**JOINT ACTON PUBLIC (APSC) and ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL (ABRSC)
and ACTON-BOXBOROUGH TRANSITIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE (ABTSC)
MEETINGS Minutes (approved 3/6/14)**

Library
R.J. Grey Junior High School

February 6, 2014
7:00 p.m. ABTSC Open Budget Hearing
Followed by Joint ABTSC/ABRSC/APSC meeting (7:30 p.m.)
Followed by Joint Executive Session

Members Present: Brigid Bieber, Mary Brolin, Dennis Bruce, Michael Coppolino, Kim McOsker, Paul Murphy, Maria Neyland, Deanne O'Sullivan, Kristina Rychlik

Members Absent: none

Others: Don Aicardi, Marie Altieri (7:30 p.m.), Deborah Bookis, Liza Huber, Steve Mills, Beth Petr, Several members of the Acton and Boxborough Boards of Selectmen and Finance Committees

The Acton-Boxborough Transitional School Committee was called to order at 7:03 p.m. by Chairperson, Maria Neyland. Maria thanked Bob Stemple (BBOS), Katie Green (ABOS), Mary Ann Ashton (Acton FinCom). She convened the Budget Hearing at 7:04 p.m.

ABTSC FY15 BUDGET HEARING

Please see material posted for 2/1/14 meeting at <http://ab.mec.edu/about/meetings.shtml>

1. Chairmen's Introduction

Dr. Mills and his staff look forward to answering questions from Budget Saturday 2/1/14.

2. ABTSC FY15 Budget – Dr. Mills

The proposed FY15 school budget increase is 3.64% from final FY14. The Acton assessment increase is 6% mainly due to E&D moving from \$700k to \$300k, a 1% increase in the CASE assessment and a .5% increase in the OPEB Fund contribution. The Boxborough assessment is a decrease of 4.77%. Dr. Mills now recommends a more gradual approach of E&D using \$500k instead of \$300k for next year. This changes the Acton assessment from 6% to 5.67%. Given the history of the schools replenishing E&D, Dr. Mills feels that risk is minimized.

The Administration has stated since regionalization was proposed that the budget would be \$1 million less than it would be at this time if regionalization did not occur. This does not mean \$1 million less, but less than it would be without regionalization. Staff savings of \$416k and new Regional Transportation Revenue of \$550k have been included in the proposed FY15 budget. It was noted that slide 9 has an error in that the Workers Comp and Prop/Casualty decreases should not be included. Instead of \$50,853,332 Acton's share of the FY15 Total School Expenses should be \$51,048,332.

Dr. Mills reviewed slide 14, Realignment of Staff. His staff made a compelling case for these decisions on Budget Saturday, despite the concern he is hearing. There is a net staff reduction of 4 FTEs from this year to next. The need for the additional pupil services coordinator was reviewed and the possibility of adding the two special educators listed just below the cutoff line was discussed.

Noting that the Certified Free Cash slide 22 shows that there is 3 times more Free Cash than when he arrived, Dr. Mills asked for \$76,938,225 for the FY15 School Budget.

The Committee reviewed the numbers and requests. Mike Coppolino asked if FUTURES recommended any additional staff when they did their audit/review. They did not specifically recommend a coordinator, but they noted that the Districts are staffed extremely tight. Dr. Mills stated that FUTURES' charge was not to recommend programs or positions, but to confirm whether a system is efficient or not.

Several Committee members struggled with the 6% assessment increase and questioned whether the full time Assistant Principals could be phased in over three years. It was suggested that Merriam be the first because they are the largest elementary school. Mike Coppolino questioned the justification for the Energy Manager, given the need to mitigate the increase. Others asked about the Boxborough efficiencies and how those savings had been handled.

Dennis Bruce emphasized that several times over the past years, issues have come up and Dr. Mills has found ways to work around them. He gave the examples of the PTO funding of assistants, and the additional English teachers needed at the High School. Dennis urged Dr. Mills to consider the Assistant Principals in this light. Other members disagreed stating that the Assistant Principals' work is not phased in, and emphasized the compelling case made on Budget Saturday about the increased mandates and requirements.

Brigid Bieber respectfully appreciated her Acton colleagues' concern over the "alarming" number and said it is difficult to bring up because Boxborough's number is decreasing, but she urged the Committee to look at the issue as a Regional School Committee. She pointed out that it will be a different discussion going forward discussing one budget, each member looking at their own town, but the School Committee's job is to advocate for the educational needs and students. Stating that she supports the budget as presented, Brigid asked if there was a target number that the naysayers were trying to hit.

Paul Murphy said that there is a safety component in the Assistant Principal role that is key. To him, the value of having them all next year outweighs a rollout. Kim McOsker stated that from a financial standpoint, each school has the same issues and phasing them in would not be fair to all schools. That said, 6% is a huge number and it is all staff and recurring. She appreciated assessment driver slide 5.

The change in the CASE assessment was discussed, including the upcoming decision to go from a 2 year prior tuition calculation to a current one. Brigid noted that another driver is that more AB students are going to CASE now and with CASE's overall enrollment decreasing, that is costing our District more.

Peter Ashton spoke from the audience about the need to be very careful about making comparisons. Table 6 does not include some of the things that were in the Study Group model so not everything can be compared. He noted that there is about a \$1.7 million difference between the two documents. Peter has consistently said that comparing FY14 to FY15 is extremely difficult to do appropriately.

With the long term interest of the schools and community at heart, Peter expressed serious concern that, in his opinion, the budget and resulting Acton assessment fails to meet the commitment that the School Committee and Administration made to Acton voters in convincing them to support regionalization. He and Mary Ann are concerned about 3 areas from 1 to \$1.5 million:

1. Revenue plays an increasing role now that an assessment is being paid. State revenue is up \$1 million in Acton, due to additional transportation aid from regionalization, but Chapter 70 revenue is about \$600,000 less than what the Regional School District Study Committee expected. This is largely due to the decline in enrollment. This aid will lag as enrollment declines year to year. This is a message that increases in spending should be limited because the revenue will not be there going forward. Increasing E & D use is not sustainable.
2. With about \$650,000 in true cost savings from regionalization and \$416,000 in staffing cuts and some Blanchard staff realignment, Peter believes the proposed Budget spends every dollar of the savings, and the operating budget spends all of the regional transportation aid. He doesn't believe any effort has been made to return any savings to tax payers or the municipal issues, or even discuss how it is being spent.
3. Peter noted that the increase in the Budget is more than double the average increase of the past years, despite decreasing enrollment (slide 24). Without regionalization, he said this increase would be 11% and called it, "extraordinary". He said that a 6% increase in education is not what the public was told would happen.

Peter stated that he cannot support the budget as presented.

Mary Ann Ashton, Acton Finance Committee member but speaking only for herself, agreed with Peter and advocated for phasing in some of the needs. She agreed with Dennis that the Committee's credibility is at stake with the proposed Budget that "captures all of the savings from regionalization and then allocates it in the short term". She said when she began on School Committee years ago things had happened and it took a very, very long time to regain the community's trust. This eventually turned around because Committee members consistently did what they said they would do. Mary Ann urged the Committee to consider the message that they gave Acton voters regarding supporting regionalization.

Because the Committee did not vote a preliminary budget on 2/1/14, the Chair urged them to consider making a motion.

Paul expressed concern that he thought regionalization would mean the Committee could meet the unmet needs from last year, plus some savings. Now, instead of talking about approving a ½% or 1% increase, it is up to a 6% assessment increase. Allen Nitschelm pointed out that one of the cautions of regionalization was that the elementary students would be in a regional formula, and that has resulted in a huge shift to Acton tax payers.

Acton Selectman Katie Green stated that she was one of the biggest supporters of regionalization, but she wanted a discussion about how savings would be allocated. In her opinion, a 6% increase in the school budget, is not fair to the Town. The Superintendent pointed out that it is a 6% increase in the assessment to Acton, and a 3.6% increase in the regional budget.

Maria Neyland asked all who have concerns to give specifics to the Administration. Brigid asked for a number that Acton citizens want to consider in order to make a motion. Kim McOsker said that it was a similar situation last year and it was felt that the community could not support an assessment increase above 5%. She stated that the Committee needs to show more savings to the Acton community.

3. Dr. Mills stated that to be under 5%, everything listed on the Realignment of Staff slide could be eliminated. Marie Altieri said that it would take cuts of approximately \$700,000 to get under 5%.

Mike clarified that lowering the 6% assessment increase to under 5% could come from any area, not just the list of positions on slide 14. Paul asked what percentage of the budget are items that the Administration has no control over, such as the CASE assessment. Mary Brolin asked if a decrease in the OPEB contribution is possible. It was agreed that this is a School Committee decision. Dennis emphasized the long term implications of the District's OPEB balance. It affects our debt restructuring and long term costs and was part of a process with our town and region regarding how to address this obligation. He felt that the \$200,000 gets the Committee a lot of leverage because they stuck with their word to tackle the OPEB liability.

Maria stated that if the CASE or Middlesex assessments come down, the Committee should discuss how to handle that. Results of this possibility were not considered or promised to the community. Kristina Rychlik said that although it is unfortunate timing that there were high expectations with regionalization, she feels it is time to catch up with some of the significant educational needs.

4. **Recommendation to Approve FY15 Acton-Boxborough Regional School District (ABRSD) Budget and Assessments**

ABTSC VOTE:

Kristina Rychlik moved, and Mary Brolin seconded, the following

MOTION: that the total appropriation for the Acton-Boxborough Regional School District for the fiscal year of July 1, 2014 through June 30, 2015 be set at \$76,938,225 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 \$50,460,332 Boxborough \$10,758,791, remainder to be accounted for by the Anticipated Chapter 70 Aid in the amount of \$13,714,944, Anticipated Charter School Aid in the amount of \$67,707, Anticipated Regional Bonus Aid in the amount of \$139,000, Transportation Aid, Chapter 71, Section 16C in the amount of \$1,296,794, a transfer from E&D Reserves in the amount of \$500,000, and a transfer from the Junior High School Project Premium on Loan in the amount of \$658.

Members were asked to consider the importance of budget sustainability, and that the credibility of School Committee members depends on them creating a stable platform. The changes in budgets every year was noted, however, Mike said that FTEs are rarely reduced once added.

VOTE: **YES:** Bieber, Brolin, Murphy, Neyland, O'Sullivan, Rychlik
NO: Bruce, Coppolino, McOsker

Although it was initially thought that the motion had passed, 9 to 6, in fact a 2/3 vote was required so the motion failed.

The Budget Hearing was adjourned at 8:55 p.m.

JOINT BUSINESS MEETING

5. The ABRSC and APSC were called to order at 8:57 p.m. by Maria Neyland and Dennis Bruce, the respective chairs.
6. **Statement of Warrant**
APS warrant #201416 dated 2/4/14 in the amount of \$127,197.93 and warrant #201415 dated 1/21/14 in the amount of \$753,546.76 was signed by the chairperson and circulated to the Committee for signatures.
ABRSD warrant #14-014 dated 1/9/14 in the amount of \$1,466,345.00, warrant #14-015 dated 1/23/14 in the amount of \$4,041,266.82 and warrant #14-016 dated 2/6/14 in the amount of \$1,460,692.88 were signed by the chairperson and circulated to the Committee for signatures.
7. **Approval of Minutes** – Minutes will be done at the next meeting.
8. **Public Participation** - none
9. **ABTSC PreK – 12 Regionalization Update**
This update was included in Dr. Mills' SMART goals update.
10. **Recommendation to Approve Change to Administrators Benefits Manual**
The proposal is to add "Superintendent" to the list of positions on page 14 of the manual posted at <http://ab.mec.edu/hr/hrpdf/2013-2014-administrators-benefits-manual.pdf>
The Administration is recommending that contracts point to the Benefits Manual now instead of trying to outline details in the actual contract.
Brigid Bieber moved, Mary Brolin seconded, and it was unanimously,
VOTED: to add the word "Superintendent" to page 14 of the manual as proposed.
11. **FY14 SMART Goals Update**
Dr. Mills reviewed the updates to the SMART goals.
12. **School Committee Member Reports**
 1. Acton Leadership Group (ALG), next meeting is 2/13/14
 2. Boxborough Leadership Forum (BLF)
Brigid reported BLF's concerns about the Minuteman Tech School Budget. A generator is being installed at Blanchard, as it is their community emergency center.
 3. Health Insurance Trust (HIT)
Kim reported that HIT met last Thursday, will vote an increase of 10%. As of July 1, approximately 50 new employees from Boxborough will be added
 4. Acton Finance Committee
Dennis reported that Steve Mills and Don Aicardi presented the Budget at the last meeting. School Committee will present to Acton Fincom on Feb 25.
13. **Acton and Boxborough Local Elections Reminder**
Two Acton residents have turned in papers and several more have taken them out. At this time, only Maria Neyland has taken out papers in Boxborough.
14. **FOR YOUR INFORMATION**
 1. CASE Collaborative AB Assessment Proposed Change memo and Annual Report 2012-2013 found at <http://casecollaborative.org/annual-reports>
Dr. Mills highlighted this information.

It was decided that the ABTSC would meet on Wednesday, 2/12/14 because ALG is scheduled for 2/13/14.

15. **JOINT EXECUTIVE SESSIONS**

At 9:15 p.m., the ABTSC was suspended. Maria Neyland announced that the ABTSC would reconvene after the ABRSC/APSC Executive Session and adjournment at approximately 9:30 p.m. Reconvening the ABTSC would be for the sole purpose of an Executive Session for strategy in preparation for negotiations with nonunion personnel, followed by adjournment.

ABRSC and APSC JOINT EXECUTIVE SESSION

At 9:15 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, Brolin, Bruce, Coppolino, McOsker, Murphy, Neyland, O’Sullivan, Rychlik)
Maria Neyland 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 for the sole purpose of adjourning.

At 9:15 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, McOsker, Murphy, O’Sullivan, Rychlik)
Dennis Bruce 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 for the sole purpose of adjourning.

The ABRSC and APS Committees were polled to go out of Executive Session at 9:30 p.m. and were adjourned at that time.

ABTSC EXECUTIVE SESSION

At 9:31 p.m. the ABTSC was reconvened.

At 9:31 p.m., it was moved, seconded and unanimously **VOTED** by role call: that the **Acton-Boxborough Transitional School Committee** go into Executive Session to discuss strategy in preparation for negotiations with nonunion personnel.

(YES – Bieber, Brolin, Bruce, Coppolino, McOsker, Murphy, Neyland, O’Sullivan, Rychlik)
Maria Neyland 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 for the sole purpose of adjourning.

The ABTSC was polled to go out of Executive Session at 9:48 p.m. and adjourned at that time.

Respectfully submitted,
Beth Petr

List of Documents used: see agenda