

ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE (ABRSC) MEETING  
Minutes (approved 2/4/16)

Library  
R.J. Grey Junior High School

January 14, 2016  
7:00 p.m.

*Members Present:* Diane Baum, Brigid Bieber, Mary Brolin, Michael Coppolino, Amy Krishnamurthy, Maya Minkin, Paul Murphy, Maria Neyland, Deanne O’Sullivan, Kristina Rychlik  
*Members Absent:* Kathleen Neville  
*Others:* Marie Altieri, Marilyn Bisbicos, Deborah Bookis, Clare Jeannotte, Glenn Brand, Beth Petr

1. The ABRSC was called to order at 7:02 p.m. by Chairwoman, Kristina Rychlik.
2. **Chairman’s Introduction**  
Kristina reminded the Committee about the Annual Spring Town Elections. Mary Brolin and Kristina Rychlik will run again. Michael Coppolino has not decided yet.

3. **Statement of Warrant**

The following warrants were signed by the Committee:

WARRANT #	WARRANT DATE	WARRANT AMOUNT
16-013PR	12/24/15	\$ 2,437,516.91
16-013B(PR ADJ)	12/24/15	\$ 400.00
16-013C(PR ADJ)	12/29/15	\$ 2,150.94
16-014	12/31/15	\$ 1,243,769.49
16-014PR	01/07/16	\$ 1,998,795.78
16-015	01/14/16	\$ 686,783.11
		\$ 6,369,416.23

4. **Approval of Minutes**  
Mary Brolin moved, Mike Coppolino seconded and it was unanimously, **VOTED:** to approve the minutes of 12/17/15 and 1/6/16 with a minor amendment.
5. **Public Participation - none**
6. **FY15 Independent Auditor Reports by Borgatti Harrison & Co. – VOTE** to accept - *Clare Jeannotte, Tim Harrison (Auditor)*

- 6.1. ABRSD Basic Financial Statements for Year Ending 6/30/15
- 6.2. ABRSD Management Letter for Year Ending 6/30/15
- 6.3. ABRSD OMB Circular A-133
- 6.4. ABRSD Student Activity Funds for Year Ending 6/30/15

Tim Harrison presented the FY15 Final Budget. Due to several minor errors in the bound copy of the Basic Financial Statements new copies will be delivered. Clare Jeannotte and her department were thanked for all of their efforts in gathering this material. Being the first year of regionalization made this audit more complicated. The auditors’ letter is the most important piece. Pensions were complicated in this year (FY15) due to it being the first year of full regionalization. OPEB has about \$15 million. Net pension for Middlesex County is \$22 million. Fund balances unassigned of \$1.8 million, is close to E & D and good. Page 17 is one of the most useful pages – budget vs. actual. The

Management letter cites no major concerns. Some of the comments are more about the timing of make some changes.

***Questions from the Committee:***

Kristina noted that there is a lot of good news in this report. Paul Murphy asked about page 46, and if the total net pension liability of \$21 million is different from OPEB. Tim replied that it is different. OPEB was \$16 million on page 11. OPEB liability is determined by an outside actuarial. Dr. Brand asked if changes are anticipated due to changes in accounting practices in the next couple of years. Mr. Harrison replied that they are redoing the OPEB standard so that will change.

Mike Coppolino noted that page 9 breaks out the numbers. He feels it would be helpful to compare broad categories in other districts, as a metric, although he was not sure what it would take to do this. Tim Harrison said that the DESE has that information on their website.

Mary Brolin moved, Brigid Bieber seconded and it was unanimously,

**VOTED:** to accept the Auditor's ABRSD FY15 Report as presented.

7. **Ready to Learn Presentation** – *Deborah Bookis, Joe Gibowicz*

Deborah Bookis thanked Nat Martin, art teacher at the High School, and his students for designing their brochure.

Maya Minkin thanked Deborah for the Family Learning Series and the wonderful speakers. She asked if inviting preschool teachers to the professional development could be considered (from preschools outside of the district). Currently, it is just within the district, but Deborah will consider this.

Mary Brolin also commended Deborah on her excellent work, and asked that as future presentations are planned, they include what is the right amount of electronics for play. Deborah agreed but stated that there really is no correct answer. Joe Gibowicz said that the American Academy of Pediatrics has recommendations for screen time for children, but as time goes on, we will see a shift by the Academy, he thinks, of phasing out their strict standards. Joe feels like this is an important message to get out to families. Being realistic with the screen time limitations is a challenge, and would make a great presentation, in Joe's opinion. Janell Burley Hofmann mentioned in her Family Learning Series presentation, the need for families to transfer their own values to screen times.

The Committee enjoyed talking about the importance of play in learning. Diane Baum noted that this is "critical and amazing work" and that it is important to capitalize on the natural learning of a child and challenge them right where they need to be. Mike Coppolino loved the brochure and suggested a parent to parent forum, in addition to the experts.

At previous meetings, people were interested in discussing all day kindergarten, but were asked to wait until the "Ready to Learn" group finished their work. Deborah said that they did come across some research about all day kindergarten, and the Westford School Committee had also completed a study last March and also identified the Meta Analysis that the group read. In summary, Deborah reported that the evidence on all day kindergarten appeared to lead to some improvement in students' reading and math skills, but it did not last beyond kindergarten. The Meta Analysis group's recommendation is that all day kindergarten should be available but a choice should be given.

8. **FY17 Budget Pres. #3 - "Superintendent's Recommended Budget"** – *Glenn Brand, Clare Jeannotte*

8.1. FY17 Superintendent's Preliminary Budget Request Memo

8.2. Director of Finance's FY17 Budget Overview including Preliminary Assessment

8.3. Budget Line Item Detail (*posted separately*)

8.4. ABRSC FY17 Budget Saturday Agenda – January 23, 2016 8:30 a.m.

Clare Jeannotte explained a presentation change that has been made (slide 5). The District is assessed by the state through the cherry sheet process. This used to be captured as revenue offset and will now show as expense. It has no impact to the bottom line or the assessments to each member town. Clare is waiting to see what happens with the State, so slide 6 is unchanged from the previous meeting. The increase over FY16 is 3.9%. Clare reviewed the cost changes on slide 7 noting \$179,000 in savings that have been added. The preliminary assessment is now 4.8% total, with an increase for Acton of 5% and an increase for Boxborough of 4%.

*Questions from the School Committee:*

Mike Coppolino asked why the administrative supplies increased 10%. Clare replied that it is not all administrative items, but includes dues, subscriptions, postage and other smaller expenses. He still feels that that increase is too high. Clare said there are still some deficiencies in the chart of accounts that was created for regionalization, so there may be some things that need to be revised. She does not believe this is a true 10% increase in the administrative account. Mike has concerns about how the Energy Advisor salary is paid, and he said that at some point that position might need to be reviewed, per previous School Committee members. He appreciated the complete answers that Glenn provided to his questions.

**9. Departmental FY17 Budget Presentations**

9.1. Facilities and Transportation – *JD Head*

JD Head explained that 2009 was the carbon footprint benchmark for the School District. His budget drivers are primarily utilities and capital items. He presented a 10.1% increase from the proposed FY17 budget to FY16. This is a 2.8% decrease from FY10. Deanne O’Sullivan asked why the items that were identified in the last Capital Study that was done don’t appear to show on the current capital plan. JD asked that the Committee let the Dore and Whittier process unfold and then the Committee will have all the information.

9.2. Educational Technology – *Amy Bisiewicz*

Amy Bisiewicz outlined proposed expenses of \$634,560 for FY17, a decrease of \$4,415 from FY16. A \$90,000+ increase in hardware was offset by a similar decrease in infrastructure. Amy explained that this is partially due to a decision to push deployments of some laptops and desktops out a year, last year so those costs are now added to FY17. Amy described the very successful Innovative Learning Program (ILP) that she recently implemented. Teachers are asking their principals for technology that their colleagues are using with success. Amy feels this is the ideal way to integrate technology into the classrooms. Mike Coppolino described this program as “exemplary”. Amy said that the \$50,000 is not for anything specific because it depends on what the teachers request, and that is the point. She wants to see what the ILP 2.0 program looks like. Requesting chromebooks is no longer innovative. Deanne O’Sullivan urged Amy to communicate more with parents about the benefits of this program.

When asked why the wifi does not work consistently in all of the buildings, Amy said although there should be 100% coverage, but there are occasional outages. Wireless upgrades can only support a certain number of devices, and that is being upgraded.

9.3. Teaching and Learning - *Deborah Bookis*

Deborah Bookis proposed an increase of \$16,300 in her FY17 proposed budget compared to last year. This was primarily due to a decrease in grant funding. Brigid Bieber asked what is the best way to measure what we are doing for our staff compared to other districts. Last year the staff was surveyed about this and Deborah will present those results to the School Committee at a future meeting. Mike Coppolino responded that a few years ago, the District was very low, dollar wise, compared to other districts, but now that has improved, although the curriculum specialists’ jobs have changed over the years. Mike wanted to know how to measure the effectiveness of the specialists. Deborah replied that there is more much more demand from our

teachers than the specialists can provide. Another important aspect of their work is that the specialists are the one common person who sees what is happening in all of our schools in a subject area, because of the differences we foster among our 6 elementary schools.

9.4. Community Education – *Erin Bettez*

Erin Bettez explained that Community Ed (CE) is unique in that it is not funded by the appropriated budget. All expenses are paid with fees from the participants. Gross revenues have been fairly flat for the last several years. All day kindergarten finances are moving elsewhere in the district so the CE budget reflects reduced costs in that area. In FY15, Community Education provided \$527,601.78 of financial support to the District and community. The Community Education staff was thanked for offering some great classes.

10. **Minuteman Regional Vocational School District (MMT) Presentation** – *Vince Amoroso*

Boxborough resident Vince Amoroso briefed the School Committee on what is happening at MMT. Without a new regional agreement, several of the member towns, particularly small towns, may not mobilize to support the building proposal. At the last two Town Meetings, the agreement failed (approval is needed from all member towns). The MMT School Committee has passed a new Agreement that they believe addresses concerns, including changing the assessment formula and the voting. Seven out of 16 towns are considering withdrawing, but this does not affect that many students. If members approve the agreement, then they can vote to withdraw, as opposed to not supporting the agreement. There is no leap of faith required with the new proposed Agreement. After the series of Special Town Meetings in February by member towns, they should know which towns are in and out, and the MMT School Committee will know how much funding is required for their new building project. Member towns would have to vote the funding at their annual Town Meetings.

Kristina shared MMT School Committee member from Acton, Pam Nourse’s comments. There will be an info session on Jan 27 in Acton. She supports the agreement and is very positive.

Kristina asked Vince what would happen if Boxborough withdraws, and would our Boxborough students have different opportunities than our Acton students. Vince responded that yes, Boxborough’s 8<sup>th</sup> graders would only have the option that Boxborough had agreed to and it may be different from what the Acton students have. The Commissioner would have to approve what Boxborough does. There have been questions about how this would affect the Minuteman Tech classes at our Junior High. Marie Altieri explained that all students participate in this program, run by MMT. The teachers work for MMT. There is an assessment charged to each town based on the enrollment from each town. The District is committed to continuing this program at the Junior High. If one town was not part of MMT, it would be a mechanical issue of how to charge the region. If a town pulls out, it would not affect or impair the program.

Mary Ann Ashton encouraged the School Committee members to convey the importance of this vote to citizens in our two towns. The parent community needs to be encouraged to attend the Special Town Meetings about this. MMT is one part of the educational opportunities that we offer our students and their families.

Deanne O’Sullivan said the PTO co-chairs were meeting the next week and will have lots of questions. Kristina, Diane Baum and Deanne will talk about how to help them understand the issue at hand.

11. **Existing Conditions Study – Phase II Timeline and Recommendation – Second Read – Sense of the Committee** - *Glenn Brand*

As presented at the meeting on 12/17/16, Dr. Brand proposed the reallocation of \$70,000 of savings in this year’s budget to support the second phase of this study to obtain more timely results. Kristina Rychlik agreed that particularly for budgeting purposes, having this information sooner would be

most useful. In response to a question from Mary Brolin, JD Head confirmed that if the Committee supported this proposal, and the \$70,000 was funded this year (FY16), it would not be removed from his FY17 budget and he would use it to fund other capital needs. Mary agreed with accelerating the schedule and keeping the \$70,000 in JD's budget for FY17.

It was the sense of the Committee that the proposal was acceptable.

12. **Recommendation to Approve Solar Net Metering Agreement – VOTE – JD Head**

The Committee had many questions after their initial discussion of this issue at their meeting on 12/17/15. As a result, Paul Murphy and Maya Minkin met with JD Head, Kate Crosby and several of the consultants involved for further explanation. Paul and Maya agreed that they were satisfied that they understood and were comfortable with the proposal and would urge the Committee to support it at the meeting. JD stated that any possible credits would not be seen until December or so. Clare Jeannotte recommended not including any savings in the FY17 budget yet, until the district sees how it works out. Kristina thanked Paul, Maya, Kate and JD for their extra effort to explain this opportunity.

Paul Murphy moved, Mary Brolin seconded and it was,

**VOTED**: to authorize the ABRSD to enter into net metering agreements with Omni Navitas Holdings, LLC for the purpose of virtual solar net metering for up to 80% of the ABRSD total FY15 electrical consumption (or 4,582,044 kWh).

(Yes: Baum, Bieber, Brolin, Coppolino, Krishnamurthy, Minkin, Murphy, O'Sullivan, Rychlik. Maria Neyland abstained stating that she did not fully understand the proposal.)

13. **Recommendation to Revise FY17 School Calendar for No School on Tuesday 10/11/16 and Addition of Early Dismissal Days – First Reading – Glenn Brand** (due to no school scheduled for 10/10/16 and 10/12/16) (9:05)

*Due to the lateness of the hour, this item was moved to the next meeting.*

14. **Recommendation to Accept Gift from Littleton Electric Light and Water to Blanchard School – VOTE – Glenn Brand**

Brigid Bieber moved, Maria Neyland seconded and it was unanimously,

**VOTED**: to accept this gift with gratitude.

15. **Assistant Superintendent of Student Services Search Update – Marie Altieri**

Marie Altieri updated the Committee. Finalists will be chosen in 2 or 3 weeks and a decision will be made before February vacation.

16. **Subcommittee Reports**

16.1. Budget – Maria Neyland

On Jan 5<sup>th</sup>, they discussed the evening's Budget presentation and Existing Conditions Report. They also considered how the quarterly financial reports are provided to the towns' finance committees.

16.2. Policy –

16.2.1. **Minutes**, File: BEDG – First Reading – Brigid Bieber

Comments should be sent to Brigid.

16.2.2. **Physical Restraint of Students**, File: JKAA – Second Reading-**VOTE** - Bonnie Bisbicos

16.2.2.1. Procedures

There was a question about whether new legal recommendations about this policy had just come out. In light of that, Brigid Bieber asked that the policy be reviewed and considered at the next meeting.

16.3. School Liaison Updates

*Due to the lateness of the hour, this item was moved to the next meeting.*

## 17. School Committee Member Reports

17.1. Acton Leadership Group (ALG) – *Kristina Rychlik, Paul Murphy*

17.1.1. Minutes of 12/10/15

17.1.2. Minutes of meeting on 1/7/16 – See revised minutes in next meeting materials.

There is concern that the proposed Acton tax levy is contrary to the Finance Committee's Point of View document. At the current reserve level, some people feel that the Town of Acton will run out in a few years although there will be some replenishment. The question is being asked, "For the extra \$500,000 that is there, should it be used to reduce the tax levy (to aid taxpayers) or used to lower reliance on reserves?" Members were asked to ask their Boards and bring comments back to ALG. Mike Coppolino asked what effect the \$500,00 would have. Marie Altieri responded that the combined reserves are at about 10% of budget (town and schools).

17.2. Health Insurance Trust (HIT)

17.2.1. Trend Summary of Key Financial Information and Management Memo dated 6/30/15  
Marie reported on the draft audit that was done. The packet has the 5 year history. Fund balance is healthy. Rates will not be set until February. We are using 8% in our budget.

17.3. Acton Finance Committee – *Kristina Rychlik*

Kristina attended the 1/12/16 meeting. Much of it was about Kelley's Corner and some of that will impact the schools, including sidewalks and the entrance on 111. They spoke about quarterly reports at the Finance committee meetings. Members agreed to come to the School Committee meetings when Quarterly Reports are being done and a line will be included on the agenda welcoming the Finance Committees' members' comments. Fincom did not have agreement about the \$500,000 question raised at ALG.

17.4. Boxborough Finance Committee- *Mary Brolin*

Mary Brolin reported that the Fincom members are coming to Budget Saturday and agree with the plan regarding School Committee's Quarterly Reports.

## 18. Superintendent's Report/Updates – *Glenn Brand*

*Due to the lateness of the hour, this item was moved to the next meeting.*

The ABRSC adjourned at 10:22 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Beth Petr

List of documents used: see agenda