

ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE (ABRSC)
Approved Minutes

Library
R.J. Grey Junior High School

September 5, 2019
7:00 p.m.

Members Present: Diane Baum (7:05 pm), Michael Bo, Amy Krishnamurthy, Tessa McKinley, Maya Minkin (7:09 pm), Paul Murphy, John Petersen, Nora Shine (7:08 pm), Angie Tso
Members Absent: Adam Klein, Ginny Kremer
Others: Marie Altieri, Dawn Bentley, Deborah Bookis, Peter Light, Beth Petr, Dave Verdolino

1. The ABRSC was called to order at 7:02 p.m. by Tessa McKinley, ABRSC Chairperson.
2. **OPEN MEETING - Welcome! Routine Business**
 - 2.1. **Chairperson's Opening Remarks**
 - 2.2. **Public Participation - none**
 - 2.3. **High School Student Representatives Update:** *Caroline Browning, Michael Cheng, Rishi Girish, Justin Shan, Charles Wang*

Juniors Rishi and Charles shared their perspectives regarding the start of school. Students are very interested in the new schedule change and they seem to like it. Lunches are more crowded. They spoke about the Anti-Defamation League's new World of Differenced club at the High School. They are looking for peer tutors although the older students have less time for that type of activity as it comes from their class time.
 - 2.4. **Superintendent's Update – Peter Light**
 - 2.4.1. Welcome Back Staff presentation, 8/26/19

Mr. Light shared some beautiful pictures from his opening day presentation focusing on the four experiences that we want our students to have - feeling loved, valued, challenged and supported. He explained how these related to our four strategic objectives and reflected on some of the questions from his first year at AB. Mr. Light concluded that “asking questions should be the norm” for our students and our staff. Encouraging this curiosity led him to invite staff to share their pictures of curiosity at #ABCurious. Some of them are found at the end of his slides.

Everyone is excited about our participation in the World of Difference program at the High School. After a year of working with the Anti-Defamation League, today was the kick off. About 20-30 peer leaders are needed (Juniors and Seniors). Staff at the High School were thanked for their dedication to making this possible.

The Superintendent noted a “very smooth” start to the school year, particularly regarding transportation. Families appreciate the new “Here Comes the Bus” app.
 - 2.4.2. Summer Professional Learning, *Deborah Bookis*

Assistant Superintendent Deborah Bookis reported that 26 R&D projects involving approximately 170 educators took place this summer. She explained that the process starts in the spring when teachers can submit proposals. A committee of administrators and educators thoroughly reviews each one. The memo highlights some of the

projects along with other summer professional learning opportunities. A particularly exciting one involved Mass General Hospital and the research on brain screening and learning. One of the doctors is coming to AB to speak with our Kindergarten staff about this important cognitive research. Deborah noted that the staff was very pleased that so many School Committee members went through the SEED training.

2.4.3. Update from Assistant Superintendent for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion, *D.Bentley*
Dawn Bentley described the shift in her role from Assistant Superintendent for Student Services to Assistant Superintendent for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. Her new blog is one way to provide leadership and support to create more equitable and inclusive schools. Committee members were very positive about this new activity.

3. GUESTS & PRESENTATIONS

3.1. School Building Project – *Architect Larry Spang, Arrowstreet and Building Committee Chairperson Mary Brolin*

- 3.1.1. Presentation Slides
- 3.1.2. Value Engineering List 8/28/19
- 3.1.3. Project Cost Worksheet
- 3.1.4. Building Project Cost Comparison to Town Meeting Presentation
- 3.1.5. Important Dates/Milestones
- 3.1.6. Building Committee Minutes of Meetings on August 14 and August 28, 2019

Architect Larry Spang presented the comprehensive slides. The next big step is the MSBA Board meeting on October 30th when they vote approval of the Project Scope and Budget. At that point, the numbers will be firm, including the state reimbursement rate.

As of August 30, 2019, the estimated total project cost is \$117.8M. The estimated MSBA reimbursement rate is 34.05%. A member expressed concern that this reimbursement rate is low compared to the range of 35% - 45% that was publicized at the start of the process last year. He asked if everything included in the proposed building is actually necessary noting that a 1% change equates to \$1M. Larry explained the process used to get to the numbers emphasizing that that final version consolidates three schools, is a single-phase as opposed to multi-phase project, and the value engineering process that was applied to make the final cuts to yield cost savings. As a result of the Value Engineering process, 43 individual items were removed. There was consensus from community groups of both towns on what to keep that exceeds what MSBA will reimburse for. The original project budget estimate was \$124,531,424.

Other comments included:

- Because the educational spaces are set, it is believed that the final building will look pretty much as shown in these plans. A number of flexible open spaces for teaching or support are included.
- Net zero energy is still a target. Net zero water and waste are also being worked on. Although there is a premium to be paid for some of these items, it is considered a priority to the community, particularly given that this building will be in use for a long time.

- Embracing the beautiful natural environment is a focus including using the wetlands and other space as outdoor classrooms. Walking trails are being planned.
- The Owner’s Project Manager does one set of cost estimates and the architect does separate cost estimates, as required, and then they are compared.

The Committee discussed the numbers as they now stood. Mary Brolin emphasized that the Building Committee worked very hard to lower the cost numbers as much as possible. The cost of construction never decreases and the district is required by law to pay prevailing wages so that adds a lot to the total. It is different from building your own home. Mr. Light looked at some of the current projects that are coming in lower than ours. Springfield for example is taking all of the students out of the building, tearing it down, then building right in the same spot so that is saving them a lot of money but we cannot do it that way. Mary reminded the School Committee that in the end, they will be asked to vote on the project and every member’s support is needed. They risk losing the \$38M reimbursement from the MSBA if the project does not pass because the district will fall out of the reimbursement pipeline. She reminded members that the Douglas School building needs to be addressed immediately and the Gates School soon after.

The District received savings of 3.75 additional bonus points from our Green Initiatives and Capital Planning and Maintenance. Although new schools will not have the same maintenance requirements as the old ones did, Mr. Light cautioned the Committee about falling into the old pattern of not spending enough on maintenance.

A member urged the Building Committee to continue doing things right and not get caught up in saving pennies. Another member said that in the mid 1960s, citizens of Acton built two schools – Douglas and Gates, and they are old now. If the district does this correctly, they will be supporting education in Acton and Boxborough until 2080. This was the past six decades and we’re planning the next six.

3.2. Staffing Report – Marie Altieri

The Deputy Superintendent gave the annual staffing report. Forty seven new educators and two administrators have been hired for the new school year. Twenty percent of our teaching staff has turned over in the past two years, mainly due to retirements. We have almost 1,100 total employees.

Marie confirmed that budgeting at the M3 level for new positions is appropriate. A vacancy factor has also been added. With a 45% increase in the number of educators of color employed by our district, progress is being made with this district goal, although our numbers are still small. In response to a question, Marie reported that we continue to hire more special educators than regular educators due to retirements and replacements.

4. NEW BUSINESS

4.1. School Committee Business

4.1.1. Approval of Change of Members of the Other Post Employment Benefits (OPEB) Trust Fund Board of Advisors - **VOTE** – *Peter Light*

Paul Murphy moved, John Petersen seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED: to approve the following members of the OPEB Trust Fund Board of Advisors for FY20: David Verdolino, Steve Noone (Acton Finance Comm), Gary Kushner (Boxborough Finance Comm) and Tessa McKinley (ABRSC Chair).

The Secretary will notify the Treasurer of this update.

4.1.2. Student Activities Accounts Report – *Dave Verdolino*

4.1.2.1. Recommendation to Approve the Official Student Activities for Blanchard, RJGJHS and ABRHS for the 2019-2020 year – **VOTE**

4.1.2.2. Recommendation to Set the Imprest Balance of Student Activity Checking Accounts for FY20 – **VOTE**

Dave Verdolino gave a brief overview of these annual agenda items.

Amy Krishnamurthy moved, Paul Murphy seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED: to approve the lists of proposed student activity funds for Blanchard Elementary School, R.J. Grey Junior High School and Acton-Boxborough Regional High School, each as recommended by the respective building principals, as the officially recognized student activities for the 2019-2020 school year;

AND FURTHERMORE to set the imprest balances of the Student Activity Checking Accounts for the 2019-2020 school year, consistent with the prior year, as follows:

Regional High School	\$35,000
R.J. Grey Junior High School	\$25,000
Blanchard Elementary School	\$ 5,000

4.1.3. Approval of D. Bentley’s title change in various ABRSC policies – **VOTE** – *Tessa McKinley*

Amy Krishnamurthy moved, Angie Tso seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED: to approve the proposed change to Dr. Bentley’s title in the 4 policies as proposed.

5. **ONGOING BUSINESS**

5.1. **Subcommittee Business**

5.1.1. FY20 Subcommittee Assignments Update – *Tessa McKinley*

Since the last meeting, Nora Shine volunteered to be the Boxborough Finance Committee rep. Paul Murhpy will stay Acton Selectmen rep and Diane Baum will be the Acton Finance Committee. John Petersen will be back up for Diane. The warrant subcommittee will consist of: Diane Baum, Amy Krishnamurthy, Tessa McKinley, Paul Murphy and Angie Tso. Angie will also be the Minuteman Tech liaison.

5.1.2. Negotiations – *Tessa McKinley*

An executive session is scheduled for the Committee on Monday night.

5.1.3. Debt Strategy – *John Petersen*

5.1.3.1. Approved minutes of meeting on June 19, 2019

John Petersen reported on the meeting held on August 12th to review various borrowing models. The debt subcommittee is charged with providing two recommendations to the School Committee:

1. The structure of debt issuance – when should we issue bond(s), what should the term of the bond(s) be, and should the bond payments be level principal or level payment
2. The projected interest rate at the time of bond issuance

The School Committee will be able to use these recommendations in conjunction with the amount of the borrowing estimated by the building subcommittee to project costs for Acton and Boxborough property owners and the impact on property tax rates.

The sentiment of the subcommittee was that the borrowing should be ASAP relative to the start of the project given the low interest rate environment. The discussion also favored a 25 or 30 year term. The question of level principal vs level payment is more open. John asked School Committee members who have opinions on level principal vs level premium to share them or contact Dave Verdolino prior to the next subcommittee meeting on Sept 19th. John is in favor of level principal as this structure is more favorable for borrowing 10+ years from now although it would increase the initial payments.

The actual structure of the borrowing and timing of issuance will be decided by ABRSD Treasurer Margaret Dennehy who will rely on both the guidance of the School Committee and administration as well as the underlying discussion in writing the bond prospectus and accepting bids for the bond(s).

Several Committee members favored level principal.

5.1.4. Budget – *Diane Baum*

The first meeting will be on Sept 17.

5.2. **New School Committee Member Guidebook Update** – *Diane Baum*

Diane received a request to describe the motion process more clearly. She will add this to the revised guidebook and then it can be posted.

5.3. **School Committee Liaison Reports**

5.3.1. Acton Leadership Group (ALG) –

Diane Baum reported that ALG met on Aug 29. There was an update on reserves and Free Cash. The Superintendent gave an update on the Building Project. Discussion focused on finalizing the detail on the warrant articles for the 12/10/19 Special Town Meeting, which will be followed by the ballot election 12/17/19. Articles on the warrant include the school building and a fire station. A third article is being considered for the debt portion of the Minute Man Tech share for Acton. A TriBoard meeting with the Acton Boards is tentatively planned for Tuesday Nov 12 with dinner at 5:30 followed by updates. Diane asked members to let her know if they could attend. Boxborough members are included. The November 12 date is important because language needs to be finalized for the warrant. The Superintendent is presenting at Acton Fincom on Tuesday night. A similar presentation will be done for the Selectmen and in Boxborough.

5.3.2. Boxborough Leadership Forum (BLF) – Meeting will be Sept 10.

5.4. **Statement of Warrants**

Tessa McKinley read the warrant information and members signed the documents.

5.5. **Approval of Minutes**

5.5.1. Approval of Minutes of ABRSC meeting of August 6, 2019

Paul Murphy moved, Amy Krishnamurthy seconded and it was unanimously, **VOTED**: to approval of the minutes as written.

John Petersen asked if the minutes could be voted at the beginning of the meetings because they may refer to something that is being discussed during the meeting.

6. **FYI**

- 6.1. FY20 Schools Open, Back to School/Open House Dates, FY20 School Calendar
- 6.2. FY20 Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee Meeting Dates
- 6.3. 2019-2020 Parent Communication Map:
https://www.abschools.org/families/district_communication_map
- 6.4. Family Financial Assistance Letter:
https://www.abschools.org/district/student_services
- 6.5. ABRSD 2018 – 2019 Annual Report:
https://www.abschools.org/district/superintendent_s_office/newsletters
- 6.6. “How Trauma Impacts Children and Families” Workshop, sponsored by the Commission on the Status of Grandparents Raising Grandchildren, September 17, 2019 at 9:30 a.m. Acton Senior Center, colleen.pritoni@state.ma.us
- 6.7. This Month in the Division of Open Government, August 2019
- 6.8. Open Meeting Law Training sponsored by the Town of Acton, Oct 2, 2019 at 4:30 p.m. and 6:30 p.m. in the Acton Town Hall
- 6.9. Acton & Boxborough Special Town Meetings on December 10, 2019

The ABRSC was adjourned at 9:37 pm. Moved by John Petersen, seconded by Paul Murphy.

Respectfully submitted,

Beth Petr

List of Documents Used: see agenda with list of documents

Next Meetings:

ABRSC Executive Session re Negotiations, September 9, 7:00 pm in Superintendent’s Conference Room 13 in the Administration Building

ABRSC, September 19, 7:00 p.m. in the Junior High Library (packet posted Sept 13)

ABRSC, October 3, 7:00 p.m. in the Junior High Library (packet posted Sept 27)