

ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE (ABRSC) MEETING
Approved Minutes

Auditorium
Administration Building
15 Charter Road, Acton

February 6, 2020
7:00 p.m. Open Meeting
7:05 p.m. Annual Budget Hearing
7:20 p.m. (approx.) Open Business Meeting
8:30 p.m. (approx.) Executive Session

Members Present: Diane Baum, Michael Bo (7:27 p.m.), Ginny Kremer (7:14 p.m.), Amy Krishnamurthy, Tessa McKinley, Maya Minkin, Paul Murphy, John Petersen, Nora Shine, Angie Tso
Members Absent: Adam Klein
Others: Marie Altieri, Dawn Bentley, Deborah Bookis, Peter Light, Beth Petr, Dave Verdolino

1. The ABRSC was called to order at 7:07 p.m. by Chairperson Tessa McKinley
2. **Chairman's Welcome**
 - 2.1. Annual Spring Town Elections
 - Acton deadline to obtain papers is February 7 for the Election on March 31
 - Boxborough deadline to submit papers is also March 31 for Election on May 19

3. **FY21 BUDGET HEARING** (*see separate agenda*)

The Hearing was called to order by Tessa McKinley at 7:08 p.m.
She explained that per Robert's Rules, the Committee would vote after the Hearing was adjourned.

Please see budget material posted for 1/25/2020 School Committee meeting at https://www.abschools.org/school_committee/meetings_agendas_packets_minutes

ABRSC FY21 Budget Overview— *Peter Light*

- FY21 Final Budget Presentation

Mr. Light explained that the Committee could vote on the revised budget either tonight or at their meeting on February 13. Per the Regional Agreement, 2/3 of the weighted vote of the full School Committee is needed for approval of the budget.

Since the start of the budget process, there have been a total of 20 meetings of the Budget and Debt Strategy Subcommittees plus the School Committee. Members of all were thanked. Budget Priorities were established to adhere to Budget Guidelines. This included the reallocation of existing resources to continue the District's Strategic Growth, a commitment to a multi-year, fiscally responsible transition to tuition-free add-day kindergarten, and implementation of the Capital Improvement Plan that was adopted during the FY20 Budget Process.

- Bonding Update
- Recommended Assessments and Table 6

The impact of the new school debt was intentionally left vague at the Budget Saturday meeting (1/25/2020) but the District is now ready to proceed with estimated numbers. Based on a meeting with the District's Financial Advisors, it is the recommendation of District Treasurer Margaret Dennehy, Dave Verdolino and

the Debt Strategy Subcommittee that FY21 Budget Option 2 be voted. When the final bonding numbers are in, a reduction to the budget could be voted if needed at the March 5 meeting. Per slide 17, the operating budget has not changed since Budget Saturday. To be as transparent as possible with the community about the tax impact, the two columns in slide 17 were added. The revised Acton total of \$66,163,514 includes \$3,570,000 for the school debt. The ALG model has been carrying \$4M (or so) so this is a beneficial reduction to the model.

The recommended Option 2 has the least tax to the Acton community. Guidance being received by the District advises to borrow as much as possible now, while rates are very low. In 5 years or so, the biggest piece of existing exempted debt will drop off.

Budget Feedback and Public Participation

Members discussed how the bond premium should be handled. Acknowledging the significant financial challenges facing our communities, members generally felt they needed to go with the lower impact to the tax rates in Option 2. On slide 13, Option 1 it was not clear why Acton's tax impact goes down while Boxborough's goes up.

Dave described how the \$75M could be deposited with the Massachusetts Municipal Depository Trust (MMDT), the largest holder of government assets in the state. They pay a fixed interest rate that is the same for everyone, based on short term securities, a 1 ½ - 2% rate now. The Acton Health Insurance Trust money is also being held by them. This provides the District with a competitive return, although Margaret can review other options, based on the cash flow of the project. The investment of these funds is the Treasurer's (Margaret's) decision. An entity is not allowed to earn more money on deposited borrowed funds than the entity has paid (arbitrage). Angie Tso felt that the interest earned from the \$75M should only be used for building projects in the future. One option may be put it in Capital Stabilization Fund. Members discussed how the interest earned from the \$75M cash could be used, although that decision has not been made yet. Some members were surprised that there are not legal constraints on how the premium money is used.

There were no comments from the public.

John Petersen moved, Amy Krishnamurthy seconded and at 7:47 p.m. it was unanimously, **VOTED:** to adjourn the Budget Hearing.

BUSINESS MEETING

4. Recommendation to Approve the FY21 Final ABRSD Budget and Assessments – VOTE – Peter Light

John Petersen moved, Amy Krishnamurthy seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED: That the total appropriation for the Acton-Boxborough Regional School District for the fiscal year of July 1, 2020 through June 30, 2021 be set at \$97,599,777, and that member towns be assessed in accordance with the Education Reform Law and terms of the Regional Agreement and amendments thereto as follows:

Acton \$66,163,514 (consisting of a Capital Assessment of \$5,771,463 and an Operating Assessment of \$60,392,051); and
Boxborough \$12,230,727 (consisting of a Capital Assessment of \$961,655 and an Operating Assessment of \$11,269,072);
with the remainder to be accounted for by the following sources of funds:

Anticipated Chapter 70 Aid in the amount of \$15,345,811,
Anticipated Chapter 71, Section 16C Transportation Aid of \$2,097,225,
Anticipated Charter School Aid in the amount of \$50,000,
Anticipated Federal Medicaid Reimbursement of \$250,000,
Anticipated Investment Earnings of \$300,000,
Anticipated Miscellaneous Revenues of \$17,500, and
A transfer from E&D Reserves in the amount of \$1,145,000.

5. Chairman's Welcome to Business Meeting

5.1. Public Participation

Mike Ballescu, President of the Acton Boxborough Education Association, Acton resident, and Merriam School parent spoke from the audience, stating that he was addressing "the whole community". He expressed concern about how some people reacted to the incident that took place in school on January 9th and accusations that were made about a staff member "without fact or the ability to defend herself." He strongly encouraged the public not to tolerate the bullying he felt was taking place over social media.

5.2. High School Student Representatives Update

Michael Cheng gave an updated including that a student walk out was planned for Friday, February 7.

5.3. Superintendent's Update

Mr. Light congratulated the Academic Decathlon Team, Quiz Bowl Team and our new ESports League of Legends Team for their recent successes. He recognized Deborah Bookis and her curriculum team for rethinking some of our early literacy work as they develop a PK-6 Literacy (Reading) Vision and implementation plan for this year. It is particularly exciting that AB is on the cutting edge of the latest research associated with early markers of dyslexia.

5.4. Follow Up to Community Conversation about Race

Mr. Light wanted to share what he spoke about at last week's community forum regarding the investigation following the incident at the Merriam School on January 9th. The District has contracted with Jeff Sankey, an independent fact finder to conduct a thorough review. This work will be a priority of our district, no matter what the investigation concludes. It has been very difficult for everyone involved, but Mr. Light appreciated seeing how passionate and caring our staff is about putting kids first.

Committee members were invited to share their thoughts. Comments included:

- There was general consensus that the quick action to offer the public forum and the honesty and concern that was expressed, especially by the Superintendent was very much appreciated.
- The need to respect people and students' privacy made answering some questions difficult and often members of the public do not realize this.
- An incident like this is something that affects everyone in the community, not just the schools, and everyone needs to work on it together.
- The SEED training last year was very valuable in this setting.
- It was hoped that Dawn Bentley will return to her blog about ways to address these issues.
- Kids and adults should talk about these issues together and at home.
- One thing that is common in all races is kindness. As leaders in the district, members were encouraged to lead by example to show that inclusiveness can start simply by looking at each other with a smile.

6. Presentation: School Improvement Plan Updates (8:15)

6.1. McCarthy-Towne School – *Principal David Krane and Assistant Principal Matt McDowell*

https://mct.abschools.org/the_mct_school/school_improvement_plan

McCarthy-Towne's equity goal includes creating a co-teaching model with one of two Sixth Grade teams in order to significantly reduce pull out services for most Sixth Grade students receiving supported learning services in their school's Learning Center. The exact wording of this goal may be revised but the focus is to include children in the general education classroom as much as possible, in an effort to

increase opportunities for one on one interaction between students and teachers, and build one community that combines all of the children.

Mr. Light commented that making a commitment to a real co-teaching model would mean adding special educators. It can be efficient when kids are pulled out for a topic because they can be grouped together, but they do miss out of some of the classroom experience. Pushing “in” requires you to have enough special educators who stay in the general education classroom. We will never have enough money to have every team in every school be a co-taught team, but we do have opportunities within our current staff to do some of this at McCarthy-Towne. Some co-teaching is also being done at Merriam.

The School Council meeting minutes posted on the McCarthy-Towne website about this topic really impressed one member. David complimented his School Council because they are passionate about co-teaching and are very invested in all the kids. He offered to return to the Committee in the fall for an update on this effort.

7. **Approval of ABRSC Minutes (8:40)**

The meeting minutes of 1/25/20 and 1/9/20 were unanimously approved as amended. The motion was made by John Petersen and seconded by Diane Baum.

8. **Recommendation to Authorize the Superintendent to Submit to the MSBA the Statement of Interest (SOI) for the Blanchard Memorial School – VOTE – Peter Light**

The Committee reviewed the SOI. Mr. Light and JD Head explained that this was for the Accelerated Repair Program for the Blanchard roof.

Paul Murphy moved, Ginny Kremer seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED:

Resolved: Having convened in an open meeting on February 6, 2020, prior to the SOI submission closing date, the Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee of Acton and Boxborough in accordance with its charter, by-laws, and ordinances, has voted to authorize the Superintendent to submit to the Massachusetts School Building Authority the Statement of Interest Form dated February 6, 2020 for the Blanchard Memorial Elementary School located at 493 Massachusetts Avenue Boxborough, MA which describes and explains the following deficiencies and the priority category(s) for which an application may be submitted to the Massachusetts School Building Authority in the future 5 which is the replacement, renovation, or modernization of school facility systems such as roofs, windows, boilers, heating and ventilation systems, to increase energy conservation and decrease energy related costs in the school facility; and hereby further specifically acknowledges that by submitting this Statement of Interest Form, the Massachusetts School Building Authority in no way guarantees the acceptance or the approval of an application, the awarding of a grant or any other funding commitment from the Massachusetts School Building Authority, or commits the City/Town/Regional School District to filing an application for funding with the Massachusetts School Building Authority.

The application will be submitted tomorrow.

9. **Recommendation to Approve \$5,611.13 Gift from AB Friends of Music for the ABRHS Performing Arts 2020 NYC Band Trip – VOTE – Peter Light**

Maya Minkin moved, Angie Tso seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED: to approve the \$5,611.13 gift from the AB Friends of Music

10. **Recommendation to Approve \$2,100 Gift from the Conant PTO to the Conant School for Reading Materials – VOTE – Peter Light**

Amy Krishnamurthy moved, Paul Murphy seconded and it was unanimously, **VOTED**: to approve the \$2,100 gift from the Conant PTO.

11. **Subcommittee and Member Reports**

11.1. **School Building Committee Update**

Mr. Light reported that JD Head is receiving proposals for the solar project, and engaging in programming meetings including exterior design and development discussions. They will be moving into internal programming such as finishes and reaching out to stakeholders about it.

11.2. **Policy -- Amy Krishnamurthy**

11.2.1. Educational Opportunities for Children in Foster Care, File: JFABF – Second Read – **VOTE**

Paul Murphy moved, Amy Krishnamurthy seconded and it was,

VOTED: to approve the Educational Opportunities for Children in Foster Care policy, File: JFABF (YES: Baum, Bo, Kremer, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Minkin, Murphy, Shine, Tso NO: Petersen)

11.2.2. Residency and Student Enrollment, File: JF – Second Read - **VOTE**

Paul Murphy moved, Ginny Kremer seconded and it was,

VOTED: to approve the Residency and Student Enrollment policy, File: JF (YES: Baum, Bo, Kremer, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Minkin, Murphy, Shine, Tso NO: Petersen)

11.2.3. Combining: Acknowledging Religious Holidays, File: ACD and School Ceremonies and Religious Holiday Observances, File: IMD – Second Read – **VOTE**

Paul Murphy moved, Ginny Kremer seconded and it was unanimously,

VOTED: to combine the Acknowledging Religious Holidays policy, File: ACD and School Ceremonies and Religious Holiday Observances policy, File: IMD

John Petersen voted against the first two policies due to what he considered their poor level of readability. While readability is important, due to required legal language and other factors, some of the policies are not as simply worded as one might like. John agreed but wants to ensure that the intended audiences can understand the policies.

11.3. **Budget** –meetings on Jan 14, 24, 28 – *Diane Baum*

The staffing report was highlighted. Adding 8 FTEs with a net cost of zero is very significant. The subcommittee discussed how \$525,000 of cuts were made in this budget, and it was built into the collaborative culture of this budget cycle.

11.4. **Acton Leadership Group Update (ALG)** , *meeting on 1/21/20*

Minuteman Technical High School budget had a 6% increase in operating expenses, but we had additional students counted in the state enrollment. The combination of the two, Minuteman's new debt and one member district's withdraw (Belmont) there was a redistricting that lead to a 20% in in tuition. They are trying to expand their enrollment. Our enrollment will go from 36 to 62 students next year, and that will increase our assessment from 15 – 20% over the next 5 years. We need to be cognizant of how this will affect our budget in the future. Amy also reported that the deficit on the financial model was closed but a great deal of concern was expressed that the District choose this year to lower the ADK tuition. Mr. Light explained that it was part of supporting our Core values and part of our plan. It was agreed that the District needs to be very clear about why they did this for next year.

Health Insurance Trust Update –

John Petersen reported that a topic at the meeting this morning providing guidance to the entities sooner. They will try to develop guidance at the June meeting, and if not then, in September.

11.5. **Boxborough Leadership Forum Update (BLF)**

A member asked for information about the individual schools earlier in the year but Mr. Light said this could be difficult. It was pointed out that the School Improvement Plans done by the School Councils are not about the budget.

12. Statement of Warrants

The Chairperson read the warrant information and members signed the documents.

13. FYI

EXECUTIVE SESSION

At 9:30 p.m., John Petersen moved, Amy Krishnamurthy seconded and it was unanimously,
VOTED by roll call: to convene an executive session:

Pursuant to MGL Ch 30A, sec.21(a) Purpose 3: to discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining with the Acton-Boxborough Education Association (ABEA) because an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining position of the Committee.

(YES: Baum, Bo, Kremer, Krishnamurthy, McKinley, Minkin, Murphy, Petersen, Shine, Tso)

The Chairperson stated that the Committee would return to open meeting for the sole purpose of adjourning.

The ABRSC returned to Open Meeting and was adjourned at 10:33 p.m. (moved by John Petersen, seconded by Paul Murphy)

Respectfully submitted,
Beth Petr

List of Documents Used: See agenda with documents used