

ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE (ABRSC)
Joint Meeting with the Acton Board of Selectmen (BOS) & Acton Finance Committee (FinCom)
Approved MINUTES

Auditorium
Administration Building
15 Charter Road, Acton

November 12, 2019
6:30 p.m.

ABRSC Members Present: Diane Baum (7:00 p.m.), Michael Bo, Ginny Kremer, Tessa McKinley, Paul Murphy, John Petersen, Angie Tso
ABRSC Members Absent: Adam Klein, Amy Krishnamurthy, Maya Minkin, Nora Shine
Others: Quorums of the Board of Selectmen (Jon Benson, Peter Berry, Joan Gardner, David Martin) and Finance Committee (Roland Bourdon, Jason Cole, Michael Majors, Christi Andersen, Christine Russell, Sahana Purohit, Alan Vlajinac), Peter Light, Marie Altieri, Beth Petr, Mary Brolin, Architect Larry Spang, Project Manager Chuck Adams, John Mangiaratti, Mark Hald, Paul Campbell, P.E., Fire Chief Robert Hart

- 1. The Committees/Board were called to order at 6:30 p.m. by the Chairs.**
BOS Chair Joan Gardner reminded everyone that the Special Town Meeting will be on December 10th and the Special Election will be December 17th for all registered voters. The Acton warrant goes to the printer on November 21st per Mark Hald.
- 2. Discussion and Review of the December 10, 2019 Acton Special Town Meeting Warrant Articles**

Article 1. Douglas-Gates-Preschool Building Project

ABRSD Superintendent Peter Light presented the School Building Project slides that have been used at many of the recent public forums. Extensive information is also posted on the school's website under the School Building Project icon.

Members discussed the logistics of the construction process particularly given that much of it will take place when school is open. Four classrooms at Gates will be replaced with modulars during that time. Architects will build a special sound proof wall that also controls dust and other issues to prevent disruption. The upcoming Gates PTO meeting will highlight more of this information. The bridge over the wetlands will be covered, as requested by the environmental commission, because it must be accessible during the winter. Mr. Light stressed the need for parents to use the drop off site for their children in the morning and at dismissal times.

Peter Berry stressed that an explanation should be given for the \$38M MSBA Reimbursement figure in slide 21 compared to the \$49M figure in the warrant article.

Enrollment increases and projections were discussed. Marie Altieri explained that NESDEC provides the projections. Birth rates and housing turnover are the drivers. Enrollment is definitely cyclical. We will know if it will increase in a few years but the Building Committee

and Administration, using reasonable assumptions, are confident that the size of the proposed school will accommodate the students for many years to come, in an educationally appropriate manner. No matter what, the current facilities are inadequate. It was suggested that the other elementary schools in the district having more students than they are supposed to have be added to the slides. In response to a question about whether more staff would be needed if more services are being provided for the preschool children, Mr. Light responded that at this time they plan to accommodate the preschool with current staff.

The District continues to apply to MSBA for work needed at the Conant School although typically MSBA won't accept another school into their plans while a district already has one in progress. The Administration continues to do what is needed to keep things safe at Conant, such as paving. Long term, Conant will be the next big project within 5 years. There will continue to be a need for Administrative space in the Admin Building. Once the preschool leaves for the new building, other staff, such as EdTech will probably join the Admin Building.

Project Manager Chuck Adam explained the contingencies in the budget. The MSBA requires the District to set a maximum project budget. For example, there is a percentage in the budget for fees, and other things the district might want to add. None of this can be spent without approval of the Building Committee. The Superintendent and Town Manager are discussing the building inspection fees which will be decided before Town Meeting. A question was asked about whether the Town has the technical resources to review the environmental aspects of the school project or will a premium be needed to cover reviewing and permitting these items. The Town Manager stated that that is being reviewed.

Article 2. North Acton Fire Station (68 Harris Street, Acton)

Acton Town Manager John Mangiaratti and Fire Chief Robert Hart presented the slides. Growth has created a significant need for coverage in this part of Acton. In 2018, Town Meeting voters approved funding for design costs for this new Fire/EMS station. The schematic design cost estimate for the total project cost is \$10,343,376. Because this would be a debt exclusion, the ballot vote is also required.

Members discussed the sidewalk network allowance and connection section and some choices that may be made regarding that. Although the special laundry equipment could be used for other stations (that do not currently have it), but that is not the plan at this time. The Town Manager stated that they will not need to buy new apparatus or staff for this new building, but they are talking about ways to add staff regardless of this new station in the future. Many people ask about buildings' sustainability. The proposal is to use electricity but building it "solar ready". They hope to have a solar project designed this winter.

Acknowledging that it is too far in the process now to suggest changing the proposal, one member asked if there had been any plans for building just an ambulance outpost. He also asked about some of the specific costs of the more intricate technology. He has heard concern from community members about the cost of this proposal. He urged the presenters to include more specific reasons for some of the specific costs.

Jon Benson stated that the Selectmen took a public position that they will maintain 3 fire stations and the question used to be which station would be closed to open this new one in North Acton. Slow response times in this part of town need to be addressed. The Chief spoke in support of the full station with fire trucks as opposed to a reduced facility.

Article 3. Town of Acton Sewer District – West Acton Continuation

David Martin, Selectman and WASAAC Chair and Paul Campbell P.E., Town Engineer presented the slides.

Members asked about who would pay betterments (the district property owners) and how much they would be compared to their current costs. Much depends on how much water they use, particularly for the local businesses in West Acton Village who are severely impacted by the current lack of sewers. The Development Committee is in support of this. There are businesses that would like to expand and cannot because of this issue.

When asked why this should be considered now with several other expensive proposals on the warrant, David explained that this would not start until 2023, and can be spread over 20 years. It also does not affect everyone in town. Jason Cole stated that there is no change in assessed value for homes with septic vs sewer in Acton. Some people say that increasing sewers will increase housing (particularly high density development) but others feel this isn't true. The decision about whether the new school would hook up to this new system would be made after Town Meeting. Peter stated that it would cost approximately \$15,000 per year based on the average between the Parker Damon Building and the Junior High School to be on the sewer. JD Head has worked with the Town Engineer on this.

3. Discussion of the December 17, 2019 Acton Special Town Election

Jon Benson gave an update on Minuteman Tech (MMT) regarding ballot question #3. Annual Town Meeting in 2016 authorized borrowing by the town of the MMT bond issue. There was a delay in the issuance of the share numbers of MMT due to the changing composition of the towns in the district. In FY19, (this past June) that number was \$300,000. In FY20 it was \$348,000. FY21 will be \$424,000 and FY22 will be larger. The ballot question seeks to exempt Acton's allocated share of the MMT debt from the provisions of Proposition 2 ½. Six of the 9 districts have already excluded the debt. Voters are being asked so the Selectmen know what to do regarding the budget. If the decision waited until the annual election on March 31, the Town and ABRSD would have to do two budgets to show how the cost would be handled depending on the ballot decision.

The Fincom recommended holding off because MMT was not sure of the final amount. Members are not comfortable with not having the final number to make this decision. Jon shared some numbers and will get confirmation on them. Although it is not on the Town Meeting warrant, Jon is giving a brief description at the Meeting and will speak with the Moderator.

Jeff Bergart spoke from the audience about the increasing cost of taxes in Acton and particularly if these questions pass. He urged the Fincom to ask questions about affordability and try to urge the BOS to shift some of this burden from our citizens, particularly our seniors. It was noted that Brian McMullin has worked very hard with seniors publicizing the senior tax relief programs that are available. These programs are not being taken full advantage of right now, probably as a matter of pride for many. Jeff wants it to be a concern of the Town.

The Boards each adjourned at 8:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Beth Petr

List of Documents Used: Posted Agenda, ABRSC Building Project Slides, Board of Selectmen Sewer Project Slides, Board of Selectmen North Acton Fire Station Slides