

Andover School Committee
Minutes of March 5, 2020

Members in Attendance: Chair, Joel Blumstein, Vice-Chair, Tracey Spruce, Paul Murphy, Susan McCready, and Shannon Scully.

Others in Attendance: Superintendent Berman, Asst. Superintendents Paul Szymanski, Sandra Trach, Sara Stetson and Communication Director, Nicole Kieser.

I. School Committee Regular Meeting

A. Call to Order/Opening Ceremonies

Chairman Blumstein called the School Committee to order at 6:00 P.M. in the School Committee Meeting Room located in the School Administration Building. The Meeting began with a Moment of Silence and a Salute to Flag.

B. AHS Facility Study Statement of Interest

Chair of the AHS Facilities Study Committee, Mark Johnson, reported on the status of the Study Committee's recommendation as to whether to submit another Statement of Interest (SOI) to the MSBA. Andover has twice submitted a Statement of Interest (SOI) to MSBA and both times have been denied, the latest due to a difference of opinion in the instructional capacity space at AHS. MSBA also informed us that West Elementary School is our priority school until completed. Discussions have been held with our legislative representatives to look at different options that could be of assistance. Therefore, the options before the Study Committee were to go forward with submitting an SOI in April, move forward with a town-funded project, or to submit an SOI and move forward with a town-funded project. The AHS Facilities Study Committee is recommending submitting an SOI and simultaneously preparing to move forward with a town-funded project. A town-project would require submission of a Warrant Article for Town Meeting for a feasibility study and schematic design. We contemplate a Special Town Meeting in January of 2021, if this next SOI is not accepted by the MSBA, and would use the time between now and then to prepare the community to undertake a town funded project.

Dr. Berman pointed out that we are in an uphill battle to have the next SOI accepted and should be ready to move on if it is not accepted. The SOI previously submitted was very strong; we will update enrollment figures and resubmit capacity figures and resubmit.

Shannon Scully said there is no cost to resubmitting an SOI, but would require a vote of the Select Board and School Committee. The Study Committee also discussed the possibility of holding a Special Town Meeting in the fall of 2020, but felt that it was not practical for a number of reasons..

Chairman Blumstein is supportive of the recommendation to resubmit another SOI and also to submit a warrant article for a town-funded project for a Special Town Meeting in January 2021. This will be a major project and it is important to build public support for a feasibility study,

schematic design and funds for an OPM. Outstanding issue that needs to be determined is if it will be a new school or renovations/additions; there are advantages and disadvantages to each. Tracey Spruce suggested we think about a communication strategy to build public support. Susan McCready agrees that we should start communication soon to capitalize on the timing and noted that the Educational Plan takes time to produce. Paul Murphy also agrees with the recommendation.

Tracey Spruce moved that the School Committee authorize the Superintendent to submit to the Massachusetts School Building Authority the Statement of Interest dated April 8, 2020 for the Andover High School located at 80 Shawsheen Road 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, herein, described as: Priority 2: Existing conditions that constitute severe overcrowding; Priority 4: Conditions expected to result in increased enrollment; Priority 5: Issues surrounding school facility systems that require repair or replacement; Priority 7: Programs not currently available due to facility constraints; and hereby further specifically acknowledge that by submitting this Statement of Interest Form, the Massachusetts School Building Authority in no way guarantees the acceptance of 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 Town to filing an application for funding with the Massachusetts School Building Authority. The motion was seconded by Susan McCready and voted 5-0 to approve.

C. Recognitions / Communications

An important initiative, "One Community," which is focused on how we acknowledge and value various cultures of our students at the elementary level, was held at High Plain last week. Three performances were conducted by "Reggie" for the elementary students.

Sandy Trach, Paul Szymanski, Rita Casper, and Steve Chinosi have been involved in sending out communications to the public and staff on COVID-19 with a focus on the Governor's statement on travel. All scheduled school trips are being reviewed. An extensive cleaning of the school buildings has been put into place and Rita Casper will be our point person with the Public Health Departments.

Steve Chinosi reached out to faculty and principals on travel for students. EF Tours has a robust plan for working with parents on providing options for student that include at this time, changing the trip location, changing the date of the trip, and offering a voucher for almost 100% of the value. The School Committee will be advised of any change in travel dates.

Dr. Berman met with entire faculty at South School on Monday and has been meeting individually with staff to get a better sense on how to proceed with moving the school forward.

Sandy Trach reported that another successful guided reading training for grades 3-5 was held this week. She wished West Elementary School a Happy 25th Anniversary of WERAWC.

An update on the recent Informal School Committee Forum was given by Tracey and Susan. Parent questions included: AHS renovation project, policy for adopting new curriculum, concern about communications at South School, lunch-periods at South and recess time, status

update on guidelines for advertising for schools, policy on under-age drinking and athletes, use of school dishwashers, and literacy curriculum. Susan and Tracey will divide up the questions and follow-up.

Joel Blumstein reported that the Triboard Meeting scheduled for Wednesday, March 11th will focus on the school budget.

This year's Prudential Spirit Awards, granted to students who have dedicated a significant amount of time volunteering, were awarded to AHS Students Bipahsa Ray (Gold) and Pratheek Kuimanda (Bronze) in recognition of their outstanding community service. Congratulations to the students.

D. Public Input

Gerry Gustus would like the new School Committee to consider changing the 3-minute public speaking rule, commented on Special Education being the scapegoat for budget overruns, and expressed concerns of parents with special education students.

E. Response to Public Input

Dr. Berman said all special education students deserve the services they need. Andover has provided an extra-ordinary investment to ensure all our students are doing well. In the particular case for the high cost of the incoming placements, we were at the time not sure what the costs would be.

Shannon Scully said the School Committee has supported the efforts for Special Education programs, and it is unfair to suggest that there is any 'scapegoating'. She hopes Mr. Gustus has the opportunity to go back and look at previous conversations; there has been transparency about every dollar being spent. Chairman Blumstein said there has never been a suggestion by any School Committee member to cut back from Special Education funding.

F. Continuing Business

1. School Start Times (SST)

Sandy Trach provided a broad overview of where we are at on school start times and said a report will be provided at the next School Committee Meeting. The goal of the Committee is to seek opportunities for adolescents to shift circadian rhythms and to change the SST to accommodate that.

They are pursuing information on sleep research for adolescents and elementary students, looking at other Massachusetts communities that included discussions with other Merrimack Valley School Districts that we play in sports. Of the 15 high schools reviewed, Andover had the latest school start time. They also looked at transportation, school bell times and options, start times for in-town Special Education Students and private school transportation. The cost of changing school start times is one of the largest obstacles to overcome.

2. FY-21 Preliminary Warrant Articles:

Tracey Spruce moved that the Andover School Committee vote to recommend approval of the following Warrant Articles as presented.

WA P4: FY-21 Budget as amended.
WA P5: FY-21 Capital Projects Fund
WA P6: FY-21 Capital Projects from General Fund Borrowing
WA P7: FY-21 Capital Projects from Free Cash
WA P16: General Housekeeping Articles E and F
WA P17: Granting Easements
WA P21: FY-21 Revolving Accounts
WA P22: FY-21 School Department Revolving Accounts
WA P23: School Department Supplemental Funding for Circuit Breaker
WA P47: Acceptance of General Laws to consolidate maintenance functions of School and Town.

The motion was seconded by Susan McCready. Roll call: S. Scully-Y, T. Spruce-Y, S. McCready-Y, P. Murphy-Y, J. Blumstein-Y. Motion passes 5-0.

Tracey Spruce moved to accept the provisions of MGL Chapter 71, Section 37M for the purpose of consolidating the maintenance functions of the School Committee with those of the Town. The motion was seconded by Susan McCready. Roll call: P. Murphy-Y, S. Scully-Y, S. McCready-Y, T. Spruce-Y, and J. Blumstein-Y. Motion passes 5-0.

3. Financials

Paul Syzmanski presented information on the updated February financials. The February financials show a deficit of approximately \$568,000. We have applied for extraordinary relief which, if received, will go directly to offset the operating budget.

G. New Business

1. Superintendent's Mid-Year Report

Dr. Berman: There have been number of items that have demanded a lot of time and energy this year, but all in all we have had a productive year. He thanked Sandy Trach and Sara Stetson for the work they have done. He acknowledged the work by Paul Szymanski on the budget process and said they have taken another step to refine the budget in detail. Nicole Kieser is to be commended for her work on communications. In addition, Hannah Tolla has been essential in data analysis, building and helping teachers understand the data. Significant progress was made in researching school start times, and the Sprint Teams are also making progress. Progress monitoring will be phased into some of the other on-going work of the district; accessibility work is on-going.

School Committee Remarks:

West Elementary: The Education Plan has been an immense amount of work, there has been a great amount of progress made, but there are concerns about the cost.

Communications: Would appreciate a presentation on the master plan for communications and an update on the website. Refresh content on website. Unclear if we have developed a system to reach residents who do not have students in the public schools. Look into using Social Media. Educate public on some of initiatives we are working on.

Full-Day Kindergarten: Pleased that APS will be providing tuition free FDK beginning in 2020.

Analyst Role: Ensure Hannah is helping with operations, finance, student services and general education.

Start Time Goal: More direct involvement by the Superintendent

H-Block: Continue to look at how H-Block is being used.

West Elem: Appreciate the immense amount of time spent on this project.

Testing: Strike a balance on testing / assessments

Next: What do you want to stop doing and what do you want to continue doing. Hold focus groups with AHS students for their thoughts.

Advertising: Complete the policy – it is a source of revenue

OCON: Not all SC members on the same page on how it is being conducted, especially the finances and logistics. Suggest is to have an “OCON” Summit with SC to do everything we can to get everyone on the same page on what we are doing.

H. Consent Agenda

1. Grants: Two Grants to approve 2. Minutes: N/A

Susan McCready moved to approve the Consent Agenda as presented. The motion was seconded by Paul Murphy and voted 5-0 to approve.

I. Executive Session

Susan McCready moved to enter into Executive Session pursuant to Massachusetts General Laws chapter 30A section 21(a) for Purpose 3: To discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining with administrators, food service, custodial, instructional assistants, LPNs, secretaries and Unit A-teachers and that the Chair so declare that an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining position of the Andover School Committee and not to reconvene in Open Session. The Chair so declared that an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining position of the Andover School Committee. The motion was seconded by Tracey Spruce. Roll call: S. Scully-Y, P. Murphy-Y, S. McCready-Y, T. Spruce, J. Blumstein-Y. Motion passes 5-0.

J. Adjourn

The School Committee adjourned from Open Session at 9:03 P.M.

Respectfully submitted

Dee DeLorenzo
Recording Secretary
dd/jb