

**JOINT  
ACTON/ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE  
MINUTES**

Library  
R.J. Grey Junior High School

February 5, 2009  
7:00 pm

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*Members Present:* Jonathan Chinitz, Heather Harer, Brigid Bieber, Michael Coppolino, Xuan Kong, Sharon Smith McManus, Maria Neyland, John Petersen, Bruce Sabot

*Also Present:* William Ryan, Susan Horn, Marie Altieri, Liza Huber, Sharon Summers, citizens

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The joint meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. by Jonathan Chinitz and Heather Harer, respective Committee chairs.

**CHAIRPERSONS' INTRODUCTION**

**EXECUTIVE SESSION**

**Acton School Committee action:**

At 7:05 pm, it was moved, seconded and unanimously

**VOTED:** To go into executive session under Chapter 39, Section 23B, paragraph 3, to discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining if an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the government's bargaining position. Each member was polled individually and each member voted to go into executive session for the stated purpose.

**Acton-Boxborough School Committee action:**

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The Committees returned to open session at 8:00 pm.

**PUBLIC PARTICIPATION** – None

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

The joint minutes of January 8 and 31, 2009 were approved as read. The joint minutes of January 27, 2009 were approved as amended.

**ISSUES FOR THE COMMITTEE**

- **Public Requests for Information**  
Jonathan Chinitz read a summary of many detailed public requests received over the last few months.
- School Committee members commented that although it is right and proper for the public to ask for information about the schools and the budgets, the number of requests and degree of detailed information should be within reason. Committee members felt that the schools' budget process is open and transparent, and we provide as much information as possible to the public. However, unreasonably detailed requests or extremely time consuming projects for staff is not an efficient use of staff time. The School Committee asked that members of the public be aware of this, and ask for

reasonable and useful data. The School Committee chairs should be approached for these requests. It is hoped that all of this can be done in a spirit of cooperation.

- Becky Neville, staff member, asked that her W-2 form (these had been requested for all employees for a 3-yr period) not be released. She could not understand why this information was requested.
- A parent was disappointed that the administration was spending time and money on this vs. focusing on the needs of our children.
- Terry Lindgren, citizen, said some information requested is 'way over top.' Simply say no.
- Allen Nitschlem, citizen, apologized, if it put the School Committee out. It was not the intent of the Acton Voters Group (AVG). He feels some distrust, and doesn't think the budget has been properly scrutinized. AVG is looking at salary increases, high class size, student/teacher ratios.
- Dick Calandrella, citizen, said all requests were made in the spirit of cooperation. We are in extremely dire economic times, and are looking at town and school budgets. We are asking these questions, because it is not apparent. AVG is acting as responsible citizens trying to persuade people to spend wisely. We want to keep good schools and want to function efficiently and want to work together.
- Peter Ashton, citizen, said that the school committee and staff had been ambushed by these requests. He seriously doubts they are necessary. The fundamental changes that drive the budget are clear and transparent. He felt the key issue is that Mr. Nitschelm has no trust in our elected officials to do this sort of work. The irony is that AVG espouses efficiency and reducing taxes, but by all these requests, they are creating inefficiency.
- A parent was disheartened to see this disagreement. She requested as a taxpayer that these questions don't divert important resources. Our community spirit is extraordinary, and creating bad feelings runs the risk of driving a rift in the community. We're doing a fantastic job, and that is what is important.
- Clint Seward, AVG member, said he is a great supporter of schools. But the reality is difficult economic times, and a lot of people in Acton are hurting. He apologized to the Committee and said he didn't intend this. AVG will not ask any questions that are unreasonable.

## **UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

### **1. ALG/Acton Finance Committee Report**

- Jonathan Chinitz referred to the ALG February 2 minutes in the packet, which included the current ALG model (includes House I). He reviewed the details and key differences. The deficit is now \$816K, and the Superintendent will talk about ways to deal with this for FY'10. We lost some local aid this year, and made up the shortfall in town fees and eliminated surplus in FY'09 projected budget. Jonathan noted that there will be a pre-town meeting meeting on April 2.

### **2. BLF Report**

Boxborough Leadership Group will meet next week. Jonathan Chinitz asked that they provide any financial information possible.

### **3. FY'09 APS/AB Schools Budget Update**

- Bill Ryan reported good news for the current budget. He referred to revised free cash (town of Acton) numbers for the general fund and NESWC Enterprise Fund in the packet. He also noted the letter from DOR certifying E&D for the region as \$1,231,767. He mentioned the 9C reductions to additional assistance and lottery from the state for the towns of Acton and Boxborough. The budget problem for FY'09 is solved. Bill also referred to the memo from ESE – circuit breaker will be funded at 72% this year, and next year at 70%. These are numbers we are using. Regional Transportation Aid was cut this year to 80%. Next year it will be 70%. The 'Pothole' account was eliminated.

#### **4. FY'10 APS/AB Schools Budget – OPEN BUDGET HEARING**

- The good news is that Chapter 70 is being level funded. (We were assuming a 10% reduction.) Bill Ryan referred to the revised ALG spreadsheet which included a reduction in the Minuteman preliminary assessment.  
Bill reviewed the budget slides - the Level 1- IV cuts, which amount to a K-12 budget cut of \$853,737. The APS budget is up 4.6%; the ABRSD budget is up 3.2%. Bill then recommended additional cuts of approximately \$266K (Level V). They include salary adjustments (retirees/ replacements), health insurance adjustments, ERI, 1.0 FTE ABA Trainer, reduction of 5 hrs ABA trainer, .50 Facilities Sec. staff, .25 FTE Finance support, all non union staff salaries raises reduced from 3.25% to 1.5%. If Level V cuts are approved. the APS budget will be up 4%, and AB up 2.88%. Overall assessments would be up 3.4%. The adjusted school deficit would be \$268,103. The School Committee will meet on Feb. 26 to vote the preliminary budget. Health Insurance Trust (HIT) will set rates on Feb. 25. Bill referred to the Federal Stimulus Bill and the possible amounts we may get in FY10 and FY11. He hopes this will be signed before Feb. 26.
- Sharon Smith McManus supported the Level V cuts, and recommended not going any further until we see what the federal stimulus packet provides.
- Brigid Bieber commented that we are fortunate compared to other districts, and approved of the Level I-V proposal.
- John Petersen added that the ALG process will balance the aid, and we will share revenues. Looking beyond the next two years, we need to minimize the impact on our reserves. HIT expects a reduction – rate increases are likely to be around 8 % not 10%.
- Xuan Kong commented on the recommendation to cut non-union salary increases.
- Jonathan Chinitz thanked non-union staff who will have their raises cut by more than 50%. He commended them for their support in shouldering some of the burden.
- Bill said that we will make these adjustments, and will send it electronically as soon as we have it. Re: the capital plan, phase 2, he recommended going forward with the warrant article to replace the Douglas roof, as we have applied for reimbursement from the state. He reported that the West Acton Boardwalk project is on hold, and we will not move forward with the project at this year's Acton Town Meeting.

#### **5. Health Insurance Trust Report**

- John Petersen reported that the Trust will meet on February 25<sup>th</sup> and rates will be set – expects less than a 10% increase.

#### **6. Superintendent Search Process**

- Heather Harer thanked the search committee for their many hours of work - 11 meetings, reviewed 27 resumes, interviewed ten candidates. The School Committees met with three finalists, and moved forward with the candidacies of Dr. Stephen Mills and Dr. Richard Hoffman. They will visit Acton and AB in the next few days. Heather encouraged the community to come out and meet the candidates and offer feedback to the Committees. The School Committee will meet again on Tuesday, Feb. 10 at 8:30 pm for further discussion and a possible appointment.
- On behalf of the Committees, Michael Coppelino thanked Heather Harer for ably chairing the search committee and for all her hard work in leading the search process.

#### **7. McCarthy-Towne Principal Search Process**

- Bill Ryan reported that there are two finalists – Margaret Doyle, principal in Framingham, and David Krane, teacher in Winchester. Site visits will be made next week, and Bill hopes make an appointment the following week.

**FOR YOUR INFORMATION**

- Susan Horn referred to Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) results (given last spring) in the packet. There will be a presentation and panel discussion, open to the community, on February 24, 7 – 9 pm in the JH Library.

**NEXT JOINT MEETING:** February 26, 6:30 pm, JH Library – with Acton & Boxborough FinComs.

At 10:03 pm, the Joint Committee meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,  
Sarah T. Lawton,  
Secretary