

WESTWOOD SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Westwood, Massachusetts

MEETING MINUTES

February 10, 2022

Attendance and Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 7:03pm in the Josepha Jowdy Little Theater at Westwood High School by Chair Maya Khuri Plotkin. Also present were: Vice Chair Charles Donahue, Clerk Anthony Mullin, Carol Lewis, Amanda Phillips; and student member Ruby Fyffe. Superintendent Emily Parks and Director of Business and Finance Lemma Jn-baptiste were present on behalf of the district. John Cianciarulo recorded the minutes.

Westwood Media Center was recognized for live-streaming the meeting and also recording for later viewing on its platforms. NBC10 Boston news photographer Steve Shannon and reporter Oscar Margaine were recognized, as they were present to record portions of the meeting.

Superintendent's Report

Recognition of Middle School Student Charles Goodman

Charlie Goodman was recognized. He is a grade 8 student at Thurston whose novel was chosen as the winner of the Chatham Bars Inn Screenwriter and Novelist Competition.

Recognition of High School Varsity Field Hockey Team

Members of the high school varsity field hockey team were recognized, along with coach Heather Joyce, for their Division Two State Final win.

Superintendent Parks introduced two new administrators: Tom Carey, the new Director of Facilities, and Lateefah Franck, who has been newly appointed as the district's Director of Equity, Integration, and Community Partnerships. Ms. Franck will also continue to oversee the METCO Program.

Summer Planning

The district is planning for another robust Extended School Year program this summer. In addition, intervention programming for general education students are being planned.

In December, Superintendent Parks met with the Town Recreation Department to discuss how best to support their summer programs, as the district provides the space. The Department would like to run a larger program this summer. Based upon these conversations, and the desire to continue to partner with the Recreation Department, the district will not be running its summer enrichment program this year.

Student Opportunity Act Plan Amendment

In 2020, the district submitted its Student Opportunity Act Plan to the State. Districts are required to submit plans after legislation was passed that increased funding for public schools. The plan is focused on needs surrounding learning gaps. Districts are now required to amend their plans by April 1. The amendment will be presented to the School Committee next month for review prior to submission.

Public Comments

Members of the public were invited to participate in the meeting either in-person or via Zoom.

In October, the district sent a communication to families requesting feedback on the face mask policy which resulted in 52 responses. A subsequent call for feedback was sent to families last week, resulting in 342 responses. Members of the Committee reviewed each of the comments ahead of the meeting.

Ken Mackin of Fox Hill Drive expressed concerns related to students' MCAS results; and recommended that the Committee not expand the METCO Program to elementary students and use those funds for Westwood students.

Sandra Castaldini of Birch Street spoke in support of making face masks optional.

Antigone Grasso of Oak Street read a list of districts that, as of this afternoon, have or will be mask optional effective February 28. She expressed concern that the Board has lost sight of students' holistic health and asked that the Committee have masks be optional for students.

Maryam Yeganegi of Storrow Circle recommended that the mask mandate remain in place through the winter.

Patrick Nee of Briar Lane asked that academic rigor and shared purpose return to the district.

Donna Morrison of Oak Street asked that the Committee wait to approve the mask exemption.

Rachel Millbury of Spellman Road requested that the mask mandate end.

William Brooks of High Street asked that the Committee postpone the mask waiver.

Heather Morrison of Magnolia Drive asked that the Committee follow the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's guidance to be mask optional in schools.

Kimmie Ng of Clapboardtree Street does not believe that the time is right to lift the mask mandate.

The meeting reached the thirty minute time limit for public comment.

MOTION made by Anthony Mullin to extended public comment for ten minutes, limiting each commenter to two minutes. Motion seconded by Carol Lewis.

Result: 5-0-0 -- Approved

Dallas Rose of Spellman Road asked that the mask mandate end.

Sandra Yoon of Brookfield Road asked that various scenarios for masking be outlined in the revised policy.

Carlo Rosen of Partridge Drive believes that the infection rates are too high to remove the mask policy; and recommended waiting until two weeks after winter vacation.

Mandy Taft-Pearman of Gay Street expressed concern surrounding the protection of medically compromised students. She also spoke in support of the district's diversity, equity, and inclusion focus.

Danielle Kaplan of Skyline Drive believes that removing the mask mandate at this time is premature.

School Committee Chair Update/Liaison Reports

Chair's Update

The Committee continues to hold periodic office hours where the public can meet with members of the School Committee and the administration in an informal roundtable. The next session will be held on March 23 from 9am to 10:30am in the District Administration Professional Development Room.

School Building Project(s) Update

Hanlon-Deerfield Project

The sixty-percent cost estimates have been received and will be submitted to the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA). The project remains on-budget. The next step in the process is to complete a ninety-percent cost estimate. It is anticipated that the groundbreaking will take place in the summer.

Sheehan Project

A Statement of Interest was submitted to the MSBA, but Westwood was not invited to participate. The district will make another attempt for the next cycle in June.

Mr. Mullin requested that the Committee discuss other options for the Sheehan project at a future meeting.

School Start Times Subcommittee

The Subcommittee is working to create surveys for parents, staff, and students. Plans are being finalized for a parent forum about the science of school start times.

Policy Review Subcommittee

There was no update.

Other Liaison Reports

Carol Lewis reported that she volunteered to serve on the Hale Task Force, but was inadvertently left off of the guest list. She stated that the recommendation to support a warrant article to seek funding to preserve the property does not represent the Committee's position as the School Committee was not involved in the discussion. Mrs. Lewis also conveyed this to the Town Administrator.

Amanda Phillips reported that the Special Education Advisory Council is partnering with the Recreation Department to sponsor inclusive programs.

Discussion Items

FY'23 Budget Hearing

Superintendent Parks noted that the budget was presented at last month's meeting and the budget narrative, and all other documents, have been published on the district website. The school department's budget was presented to the Town's Finance and Warrant Commission on Tuesday.

Public Comments on FY'23 Proposed Budget

Members of the public were invited to comment either in-person or via Zoom.

George Laham of Aran Road asked if the budget would need to be re-presented if the Finance and Warrant Commission requests an increase in funding.

Donna Morrison of Oak Street was dismayed that the budget is over 2.5% and that there are cuts to the Art Department budget.

Superintendent Parks responded that the district's budget is a 3.5% increase, and municipal is 3.7%. Both budgets are balanced, and do not require an override. She also noted that there are no cuts to the Art budget.

Superintendent Parks then clarified how METCO funding works. The grant that funds the Program is from the State legislature as part of the Commonwealth's budget, which has increased Westwood's allocation by \$250k to fund the expansion. There is no increase in the operating budget for this purpose.

Third Reading of Revised Policy EBCFA – Face Masks

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) announced this week that the face mask mandate, which was set to expire on February 28, will not be extended. The Commissioner of Education met with Superintendents, explaining that the decision was made in consult with public health officials. Masking on school buses is an order of the Federal government, and remains in place.

Chair Plotkin explained that, since the mandate is going to be revoked by DESE, there will be no concept of an exemption. Thus, the revised policy does not make sense as written.

The Committee discussed the face mask policy, noting that data surrounding vaccination and infection rates have improved. Concern was expressed that the district must be thoughtful in ensuring that everyone feels comfortable wearing a face mask if they choose to continue to do so.

Anthony Mullin reported that he has communicated with the Town Health Director who advised that the face mask mandate for municipal buildings will expire on February 28.

Action Items

Policy EBCFA – Face Masks

MOTION made by Anthony Mullin to rescind the face mask policy for all Westwood Public schools effective on February 28. Motion seconded by Amanda Phillips.

Result: 5-0-0 –Approved

Approval of FY'23 Budget

FY'23 Operating Budget

MOTION made by Anthony Mullin to approve the FY'23 operating budget of \$51,762,397. Motion seconded by Amanda Phillips.

Result: 5-0-0 –Approved

FY'23 Capital Budget

MOTION made by Anthony Mullin to approve the FY'23 capital budget of \$1,017,000. Motion seconded by Carol Lewis.

Result: 5-0-0 –Approved

Vote to Accept Gift for Ann O'Flaherty Nursing Scholarship

MOTION made by Charles Donahue to setup the Ann O'Flaherty Nursing Scholarship. Motion seconded by Amanda Phillips.

Result: 5-0-0 –Approved

Vote to Accept Gift from Needham Bank

MOTION made by Carol Lewis to accept a gift of \$1,200 from Needham Bank. Motion seconded by Amanda Phillips.

Result: 5-0-0 –Approved

Approval of Committee Meeting Minutes

January 13, 2022

MOTION made by Amanda Phillips to approve the meeting minutes of January 13, 2022. Motion seconded by Charles Donahue.

Result: 5-0-0 –Approved

January 27, 2022

MOTION made by Carol Lewis to approve the meeting minutes of January 27, 2022. Motion seconded by Charles Donahue.

Result: 5-0-0 –Approved

Acceptance of School Start Times Subcommittee Meeting Minutes

MOTION made by Charles Donahue to accept the School Start Times Subcommittee meeting minutes of December 1, 2021. Motion seconded by Carol Lewis.

Result: 5-0-0 –Approved

New Business

Carol Lewis shared that she has decided not to seek re-election as a member of the School Committee.

Anthony Mullin shared that he received communication as a parent surrounding bullying and would like increased communication on the prevention strategies that the district uses.

Charles Donahue asked for an update on the district's equity audit. Responses to the Requests for Proposals are due on February 21 and will then be evaluated.

Anthony Mullin asked for an update on the Director of Safety and Security position. About twenty applications have been received which the team will review soon.

Adjournment

MOTION made by Carol Lewis to adjourn the meeting. Motion seconded by Amanda Phillips.

Result: 5-0-0 –Approved

The meeting adjourned at 8:45pm.

Documents/Exhibits Used at Meeting

- Approved School Start Times Subcommittee meeting minutes of December 1, 2022
- Draft Revised Policy EBCFA – Face Masks
- Draft meeting minutes of January 13, 2022 for the Committee's review and approval.
- Draft meeting minutes of January 27, 2022 for the Committee's review and approval
- Memo from J. Cianciarulo regarding Gift from Needham Bank, dated February 4, 2022
- Memo from A. Davenport to E. Parks regarding Ann O'Flaherty Nursing Scholarship, dated February 4, 2022
- Proposed FY'23 budget