

WESTWOOD SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Westwood, Massachusetts

MEETING MINUTES
June 9, 2022

Attendance and Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 7:02pm by Chair Charles Donahue in the Community Meeting Room at the Westwood Public Library. Also present were: Vice Chair Anthony Mullin; Clerk Amanda Phillips; Maya Khuri Plotkin; and Dorothy Parmelee. 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, which provided a live-stream of the meeting and also recorded it for later viewing on their platforms, was recognized.

Superintendent's Report

Lunch Price Update

The federal program that provides free lunch to all students, regardless of income, is ending this school year. Rising food costs have necessitated the consideration of an increase in lunch fees. However, a decision on the increase should likely be made after the fall once the federal reimbursement rates have been determined, as that will influence pricing. Any mid-year lunch price adjustment will then need to be approved by the School Committee.

DESE Site Visit

Last month, a team representing the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education conducted Westwood's accountability review. The district now awaits the findings. Many teachers, students, administrators, and parents took time to participate in the focus groups and interviews.

Final COVID Update

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) announced that pool testing will stop at the end of the school year. They will continue to provide rapid at-home antigen tests for symptomatic students only through the Extended School Year Program. The district's on-site pool testing program concluded this week.

DESE also announced a change to its COVID-19 protocols, stating that unvaccinated students no longer have to quarantine as a close-contact so long as they are asymptomatic.

At the end of June, COVID-19 monitoring will revert back to the Town's Public Health Department.

Superintendent Parks then shared some data related to the district's COVID-19 monitoring and advisement work:

- 1,479 positive COVID-19 cases this school year (there were 272 positive cases last school year)
 - 297 staff
 - 1,182 students
- 8 vaccine clinics were held
- 8,556 pools sent to the lab for testing, with 261 returning positive
- 3,583 rapid tests were administered at school as part of the Test and Stay and pool testing follow-up, with 195 positives

Transportation Bid

Director of Business and Finance Lemma Jn-baptiste provided an update on the bid for student transportation.

The yellow school bus transportation and special education student transportation contracts expire on June 30.

An invitation to bid was issued for yellow bus transportation; Michael J. Connolly & Sons was the only bidder. The bid includes a substantial increase in costs related to fuel and the additional bus for elementary METCO students, which is paid for from the METCO grant.

There is a 7.4% budget increase impact for the district. The bid includes a fuel escalation and de-escalation clause. The contract has not yet been awarded as details are being finalized.

For special education transportation, the district reached out to the existing contractor, Van Pool. A one-year agreement is being finalized, which includes a 5% increase for in-district transportation and a 10% increase for out-of-district. The increases are attributed to labor costs increases and fuel; out-of-district is larger due to the longer rides.

Other Activities, Events, and Programs

Baby chicks are hatching at the elementary schools. Students are observing the eggs during incubation.

A new student leadership initiative called “Community Builders” is launching at the middle school with the objective of building and sustaining a positive culture and climate. The initiative includes a day-long training at Hale.

Grade 9 orientation will consist of a two-day event in August before school starts with a goal of ensuring that all students feel welcomed into the high school community. Student leaders are developing further objectives. Fifty to sixty student mentors have been identified to assist in orienting.

The district’s annual Milestone Ceremony took place, celebrating faculty and staff that achieved milestone years working for the district beginning in year ten.

The Sheehan School’s cultural festival took place.

A welcome event for Boston-resident families took place at Hanlon. There is a matching program, pairing Boston families with Westwood families to forge connections. Boston students entering grade 6 in the fall will participate in the year-end grade 5 event at Hale.

Public Comments

There were no public comments. Chair Donahue shared that the School Committee Roundtable forums will resume in the fall.

School Committee Chair Update/Liaison Reports

Chair’s Update

Chair Donahue reported that the Dale Carnegie program will be returning this year and hosted at the High School.

The Committee was asked to review liaison/subcommittee assignments and to speak with the Chair about their preferences for next school year

School Building Project Update

Maya Plotkin reported that responses for the Request for Proposals for contractors are expected on June 22. The School Building Committee is scheduled to meet on June 24 to make a selection.

Residents should be aware that construction vehicles will be entering and leaving from a new construction vehicle access point which will be placed on the site closer to the Pine Street and Gay Street intersection.

An official groundbreaking is expected in the fall, with students moving into the new school in February 2024.

Hanlon Principal Matt Kuklantz will be communicating about its impacts to families and staff next week.

School Start Times Subcommittee

Vice Chair Anthony Mullin reported that a communication to families will be sent next week about next steps. The goal is to have a recommendation for the October School committee meeting.

A forum will be held on September 15 so that the community may provide input.

Staff and Middle School Students' Survey Results
Survey results were not reviewed.

Policy Review Subcommittee

Clerk Amanda Phillips reported that the Subcommittee recently reviewed Sections C and D of the policy manual.

Section C (General School Administration)
Section C was shared with the Committee for review.

Policy CBA – Qualifications and Duties of Superintendent
The Committee currently has Policy CBA which is, in essence, a job description for the Superintendent of Schools. Some districts choose to omit this policy from their manual and maintain a job description instead.

The Committee agreed to omit Policy CBA and to maintain a job description for the Superintendent of Schools.

Section D (Fiscal Management)
Section D was shared with the Committee for review.

Other Liaison Reports

Vice Chair Mullin and Clerk Phillips participated in the Committee's May Roundtable. About 25 parents attended. Discussion included changes to start times; the delay of the grade 5 anti-racism workshop; a desire for more social opportunities for students; ongoing communication regarding acts of hate and racism; progress on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives; and substitute teachers.

DEI work will be an ongoing, standing item on future Committee meeting agendas.

A kickoff meeting for the Safe Gun Storage workshop took place. It included School Committee Clerk Phillips, member Dorothy Parmelee, Superintendent Parks, Youth and Family Services Director Danielle Sutton, Hanlon Principal Matt Kuklantz, and Police Chief Jeff Silva. They are working to schedule presenters.

Discussion Items

Report on 2021-2022 District Goals

Superintendent Parks provided a report on the district goals. There are four strategic objectives which guide the district's long-term work:

- Meaningful learning experiences
- Coherent, connected curriculum
- Healthy and supported school community
- Infrastructure for the future

Each has three or four action steps to support moving toward intended outcomes.

The district has reported on the progress of these priorities at School Committee meetings throughout the school year.

Additional important accomplishments, unexpected opportunities, and unanticipated challenges included:

- Residents voted to support the Hanlon-Deerfield building project at the Fall Town Meeting and at the special election.
- The district was provided with an increase in State funding to expand the METCO program to the elementary level for the 2022-2023 school year.
- Responding to the ongoing pandemic

Energy Incentives and Efficiency Opportunities

Director of Business and Finance Jn-baptiste and Town Energy Manager Tom Philbin presented.

The Town entered into a long-term Power Purchasing Agreement to procure electricity which expires in December 2026 and offsets utility costs. The current market rate is approximately 15¢ per kWh; while the agreement is at a cost of 9.9¢ per kWh. Maximizing renewable energy sources and conservation efforts can help to prepare for the subsequent FY'27 budget cycle when the agreement expires.

The Town has a goal to reach 90% electric energy consumption.

The Solar Massachusetts Renewal Target (SMART) Program was reviewed. It is a long-term, sustainable solar incentive program sponsored by Eversource, National Grid, and Unitil. SMART encourages the development of solar photovoltaic (PV) technology by supporting 1,600 MW of new solar-generating electricity. It is a declining block program in which the incentive levels decline by prescribed amounts over up to eight blocks per Electric Distribution Company territory. There are set-aside amounts for small projects (≤ 25 kW AC) in each block to enable projects of all sizes to participate. SMART also has Adders available that increase the amount of the incentive if features such as energy storage, community solar, or various location-based installations are proposed.

To achieve long-term renewable goals:

- Ameresco was retained and implemented phase 1 of the Town's solar initiatives in 2016/2017.
- Ameresco invested \$1.7M on rooftops:
 - High School (186 kW)
 - Martha Jones School (151 kW)
 - Downey School (181 kW)
 - Middle School (99 kW)
- Actual generation in 2021 in Westwood was 663,000 kWh.
- The new Massachusetts solar incentive program, SMART, offers an opportunity to commence phase 2 as originally intended

Phase 2 is proposed as:

- High School parking lot canopy (680,000 kW)
- Middle School rooftop (85 kW)
- Council on Aging (260 kW)
- Police/Town Hall solar garage (130 kW)

Solar Canopy

A timeline for the proposed solar canopy construction was presented:

- June 2022—School Committee discussion and interconnection request
- September 2022—School Committee and Select Board vote on Power Purchasing Agreement
- September-December 2022—Permitting and engineering; Planning Board hearings and notification to abutters
- December 2022—Eversource Interconnection Agreement executed
- February 2023—Construction-set design

- March 2023: Procurement commences
- Late June 2023—Commencement of construction
- September 2023—Substantial completion of construction
- October 2023—Interconnection

Renderings of the solar canopy were shown.

The Committee previously heard a proposal a few years ago for solar canopies, which was denied due to concerns related to aesthetics.

It was confirmed that Ameresco is responsible for maintenance and repairs of the panels; and that no parking spaces would be lost.

The new Deerfield-Hanlon School will not be ready in time for phase two of the solar initiative. It will, however, be constructed in a manner where it will be ready for panels in the future.

The new Islington Fire Station is constructed at the wrong angle for a solar panel installation.

It was suggested that the Town work to engage with the community on solar initiatives, not just the mandated Planning Board hearing.

The Committee was concerned about the impact of the canopy installation on events at the high school, including Class Night and the Town’s Westwood Day.

Mr. Philbin clarified that he is looking for a signal of interest from the Committee in order to proceed.

Ameresco Project Manager Jackson Dowdy and Executive Vice President Mike Bakas also spoke about the project and how delays can impact the incentive levels.

The Committee expressed an interest in learning more about the project. Ameresco will work with the Town on the proper approach.

Electric Vehicle Charging

- Westwood awarded a \$340k grant by Mass EVIP
- The sum of \$85k was specifically awarded for two charging stations at the high school
- Also awarded the benefits of the Eversource “Make Ready” program
 - “Make Ready” installs chargers at no cost to schools, and includes all infrastructure improvements to support two Level 3 EV charging stations
- Through consultation with the district’s facilities personnel, four parking spaces have been identified for deployment of chargers at no cost to schools

The Committee agreed to proceed with the installation of the electric vehicle chargers at the high school.

Superintendent’s Evaluation

Mrs. Plotkin conducted the Superintendent’s annual performance evaluation, providing a summary to the Committee. A formal, written version is being drafted.

Goals

1. Engage in year-long teacher diversification professional learning community sponsored by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and The New Teacher Project.
 - a. Hiring practices were revised
 - b. Grant funding obtained to improve outreach and educational opportunities
 - c. Created and filled the Director of Equity, Integration, and Community Partnerships position
 - d. Increased faculty and staff diversification

2. Create a school environment where all students feel academically challenged, supported, and experience a sense of belonging.
 - a. Focus groups/surveys and equity audit not yet implemented due to logistical challenges and re-visualizing content and intent
 - b. Equity audit RFP issued and vendor selected
 - c. In 2022-2023, would like to Superintendent to work with elementary principals to provide programming; and to continue communicating with parents both regarding the work that the district has done and work they intend to do
3. Utilize research-based time and schedule structures to support student learning and wellness.
 - a. Co-Chair of the School Start Times Subcommittee
 - b. Begun to problem-solve with Director of Finance and Operations on challenges
 - c. Encouraged to focus energy on staff engagement in the year head
4. Continue to engage the community in long-term capital planning for other school buildings, including the Hanlon-Deerfield project milestones.
 - a. Town voted to support the Hanlon-Deerfield building project in October
 - b. Continue to make the capital needs of Sheehan a priority

The Committee thanked Superintendent Parks for her work to improve the district.

Action Items

Approval of Section B (Board Governance and Operations) School Committee Policies

MOTION made by Amanda Phillips to approve Section B of the School Committee Policies. Motion seconded by Dorothy Parmelee.

Result: 5-0-0 – Approved

Approval of Transfer of Funds from Non-Salary to Salary

Rather than contracting out for electrician services, the district would like to hire someone in-house. The Town will cost-share and time-share the position 80/20. The Committee is being asked to approve a transfer of up to \$80k from the Facilities contract line for building maintenance into a Facilities salary line.

MOTION made by Maya Plotkin to transfer up to \$80,000 from the Facilities contract line for building maintenance into a Facilities salary line. Motion seconded by Amanda Phillips.

Result: 5-0-0 – Approved (Unanimous)

Approval of 2022-2023 School Committee Meeting Dates

MOTION made by Anthony Mullin to approve the 2022-2023 School Committee meeting dates. Motion seconded by Maya Plotkin.

Result: 5-0-0 – Approved (Unanimous)

Approval of FY'23 Non-bargaining Salaries/Pay Rates

The recommended FY'23 non-bargaining salaries/pay rates were shared with the Committee. They included an increase to the per-diem substitute teacher rate.

MOTION made by Amanda Phillips to approve the FY'23 Non-bargaining Salaries/Pay Rates as recommended. Motion seconded by Dorothy Parmelee.

Result: 5-0-0 – Approved (Unanimous)

Authorization for Superintendent to Negotiate and Execute the Director of Finance and Operations' Contract

Under Massachusetts General Law, the School Committee is responsible for confirming and contracting the district's Director of Finance and Operations. Superintendent Parks is seeking, and Chair Donahue agreed, that the Committee authorize her to negotiate the current Director's new contract.

MOTION made by Maya Plotkin to authorize Superintendent Parks to negotiate and executive the Director of Finance and Operations' contract. Motion seconded by Amanda Phillips.

Result: 5-0-0 – Approved (Unanimous)

Acceptance of Massachusetts Civics Learning Grant

MOTION made by Maya Plotkin to accept the Massachusetts Civics Learning grant. Motion seconded by Amanda Phillips.

Result: 5-0-0 – Approved (Unanimous)

Approval of School Committee meeting minutes

MOTION made by Amanda Phillips to approve the School Committee meeting minutes of May 12 and May 16, 2022. Motion seconded by Dorothy Parmelee.

Result: 5-0-0 – Approved (Unanimous)

Acceptance of School Start Times Subcommittee meeting minutes

MOTION made by Anthony Mullin to accept the School Start Times Subcommittee meeting minutes of April 13, 2022. Motion seconded by Maya Plotkin.

Result: 5-0-0 – Approved (Unanimous)

Acceptance of Policy Review Subcommittee meeting minutes

MOTION made by Amanda Phillips to accept the Policy Review Subcommittee meeting minutes of April 29, 2022. Motion seconded by Maya Plotkin.

Result: 5-0-0 – Approved (Unanimous)

New Business

There was no new business.

Adjournment

MOTION made by Maya Plotkin to adjourn the meeting. Motion seconded by Dorothy Parmelee.

Result: 5-0-0 – Approved (Unanimous)

The meeting adjourned at 9:03pm.

Documents/Exhibits Used at Meeting

- 2022-2023 School Committee meeting dates
- FY'23 Recommended Salary Increases for Non-bargaining Unit Employees
- Draft meeting minutes of May 12, 2022 for the Committee's review and approval

- Draft meeting minutes of May 16, 2022 for the Committee’s review and approval
- Memo from J. Cianciarulo to School Committee regarding Policy CBA – Qualifications and Duties of Superintendent, dated June 3, 2022
- Memo from L. Jn-baptiste to School Committee regarding In-house Electrician, dated June 9, 2022
- Memo from L. Jn-baptiste and T. Philbin to School Committee regarding Solar Canopies and Electric Vehicle Charging, dated June 9, 2022
- Memo from E. Parks to School Committee regarding Report on 2021-2022 District Goals, dated June 2, 2022
- Memo from M. Redmon to E. Parks regarding Massachusetts Civics Learning Coalition, dated June 1, 2022
- Proposed Solar and EV Charging Initiatives slideshow presentation by Thomas Philip, dated June 2022
- School Committee Policies – Section B (Board Governance and Operations) – Third Reading
 - BA—School Committee Operational Goals
 - BAA—Evaluation of School Committee Operational procedures
 - BB—School Committee Legal Status
 - BBA—School Committee Policies and Duties
 - BBAA—School Committee Member Authority
 - BBBA/BBBB—School Committee Member Qualifications/Oath of Office
 - BBBC—School Committee Member Resignation
 - BBBE—Unexpired Term Fulfillment
 - BCA—School Committee Member Ethics
 - BDA—School Committee Organizational Meeting
 - BDB—School Committee Officers
 - BDD—School Committee-Superintendent Relationship
 - BDE—Subcommittees of the School Committee
 - BDF—Advisory Committees to the School Committee
 - BDFA—School Councils
 - BDFA-E-1—School Improvement Plan
 - BDFA-E-2—Submission and Approval of the School Improvement Plan
 - BDFA-E-3—Conduct of School Council Business
 - BDG—School Attorney
 - BE—School Committee Meetings
 - BEC—Executive Sessions
 - BEDA—Notification of School Committee Meetings
 - BEDB—Agenda Format
 - BEDC—Quorum
 - BEDD—Rules of Order
 - BEDF—Voting Method
 - BEDG—Minutes
 - BEDH—Public Participation at School Committee Meetings
 - BEDH-E—Guidelines for Public Comment
 - BEE—Special Procedures for Conducting Hearings
 - BG—School Committee Policy Development
 - BGB—Policy Adoption
 - BGC—Policy Revision and Review
 - BGD—Committee Review of Regulations
 - BGE—Policy Dissemination
 - BGF—Suspension of Policies
 - BGH—Policy Implementation
 - BHC—School Committee-Staff Communications
 - BHE—Use of Electronic Messaging by School Committee Members
 - BIA—New School Committee Member Orientation
 - BIBA—School Committee Conferences, Conventions, and Workshops
 - BID—School Committee Member Compensation and Expenses
 - BJ—School Committee Legislative Program
 - BK—School Committee Memberships

- School Committee Policies – Section C (General School Administration) – Second Reading
 - CA—Administration Goals
 - CB—School Superintendent
 - CBD—Superintendent’s Contract
 - CBI—Evaluation of the Superintendent
 - CCB—Line and Staff Relations / Staff Relations
 - CE—Administrative Councils, Cabinets, and Committees
 - CH—Policy Implementation
 - CHA—Development of Regulations
 - CHA/CDC—Development and Dissemination of Procedures
 - CHC—Regulations Dissemination
 - CHCA—Approval of Handbooks and Directives
 - CHD—Administration in Policy Absence
 - CL—Administrative Reports
 - CM—School District Annual Report
- School Committee Policies – Section D (Fiscal Management) – Second Reading
 - DA—Fiscal Management Goals
 - DB—Annual Budget
 - DBC—Budget Deadlines and Schedules
 - DBD—Budget Planning
 - DBG—Budget Adoption Procedures
 - DBJ—Budget Transfer Authority
 - DD—Grants, Proposals, and Special Projects
 - DEC—Federal Funds Supplement not Supplant Policy
 - DGA—Authorized Signatures
 - DH—Bonded Employees and Officers
 - DI—Fiscal Accounting and Reporting
 - DIE—Audits
 - DJ—Purchasing
 - DJA—Purchasing Authority
 - DJE—Bidding Requirements / Procurement Requirements
 - DK—Payment Procedures
 - DKC—Expense Reimbursements
- School Committee Policy Review Subcommittee meeting minutes of April 29, 2022
- School Start Times Subcommittee meeting minutes of April 13, 2022