

WESTWOOD SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Westwood, Massachusetts

SUMMER RETREAT/REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

July 18, 2019

Attendance and Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 5:43pm at the Courtyard by Marriott Boston Dedham/Westwood by Chairperson Tony Mullin. Also present were: Josepha Jowdy, Vice Chairperson; Carol Lewis, Clerk; Charles Donahue; Maya Plotkin; Emily Parks, Superintendent; and Allison Borchers, Assistant Superintendent. Allison Borchers also recorded the minutes.

Discussion

Building Project -- Community Engagement Planning

Tim Bonfatti of Compass Project Management shared lessons learned from other school building projects. Mr. Bonfatti stressed the importance of envisioning the project as a step forward for the whole district, not just a particular elementary school. Within that district-wide view, the Committee would need to think about how to look at two possible redistricting scenarios: combining Hanlon and Deerfield or combining Hanlon and Sheehan.

Carol Lewis raised the concern that once people get a sense of the benefits of a new building, one elementary school community will feel left out.

Maya Plotkin also noted that the Committee needs to consider what can be done for the remaining elementary school, if that building is not part of the MSBA project.

Charles Donahue noted that it will be important, either the Sheehan or Deerfield will also need to be addressed; as well as the middle school. The critical part of this project is that there is State funding tied to it.

Emily Parks presented the idea of talking with the town about the option of financing one project through the MSBA and addressing the remaining school through local funding and what a potential timeline for such a process might be. The least expensive option in this scenario would be to pursue a combined Hanlon/Sheehan project through MSBA and locally fund a Deerfield project.

Tim Bonfatti reviewed typical approaches to community outreach, including:

Session 1 - explaining the process, introducing the team (architect, OPM) and soliciting initial feedback. It can be helpful for this session to break people into smaller groups based on particular interests (e.g., educational programs, site amenities, etc). The

feedback collected is then reflected back to the community. This session can be led by a consultant or be a member of the architectural firm.

Session 2 - get input about specific options. Whereas the first forum is more listening, the second is putting forward ideas/solutions. You want to get people excited about the possibilities and solicit more granular feedback.

Each forum should start with a review of why we are doing this. You should also find a way to underscore the benefits that everyone will see, community-wide (not just in one school).

Committee members discussed various options for follow up to the first session, including smaller, site-based sessions (coffees, pizza parties, etc), use of social media and Westwood Media Center to share out results, a well-crafted online survey, or virtual listening tour

Now that designer selection has been moved out to October, a more realistic timeline will put the community vote in the spring of 2021. Mr. Bonfatti will send a revised timeline to the Committee shortly.

Mr. Bonfatti reminded the Committee that back-to-school nights are a good opportunity to share information about the community forums and encourage participation in the process. He also confirmed that he will be the point person from Compass who participates in the community forums.

Superintendent's Report

Ms. Parks provided an update about the proposed expansion of solar panels in Westwood. Ameresco will be attending the Select Board meeting on Monday, July 22. Lemma Jn-Baptiste, Director of Business and Finance, will attend from the school administration. The Select Board is considering a solar panel field site on the Shuttleworth Property adjacent to the Hanlon School site. Such a project could prove beneficial to the town and schools, financially, so long as it does not in any way impede the building project. Town Energy Manager Tom Philbin would like the Select Board to move forward with the proposed project now in order to guarantee the most favorable return rates. The agreement would be non-binding and the location of the solar fields still possible to change.

Ms. Parks shared that she is a member of the selection committee charged with identifying 3-5 finalists for the role of Town Administrator. Mr. Jaillet has officially retired but is staying on for several months while the Committee and Select Board find his replacement.

Ms. Parks reported that an unforeseen delay with the availability of univent parts for the Middle School HVAC project means that the project cannot be completed this summer. Ken Aries, Director of Operations, is currently working with the vendor to schedule the installation

for after school hours in the fall. If the work cannot be scheduled then, it will be completed over the December break.

Ms. Parks shared news that Hale Reservation will be initiating a conversation at Monday's Select Board Meeting about the formation of a working group or task force charged with selling a parcel of reservation land. Hale's Board is seeking funding from the towns of Dover and Westwood as well as some State and private funding in order to provide financial security for Hale and protection from development. The Select Board has already indicated their commitment to prioritizing school needs.

Ms. Parks shared updated enrollment information and outlined various options to address the needs of classes at Deerfield, Downey, and Hanlon. The School Committee encouraged Superintendent Parks to move forward with a plan for an additional K/1 classroom at Deerfield and a reconfiguration at Hanlon that would allow for the creation of an additional grade 2 class. The Committee recommended that Ms. Parks wait until later in the summer to make a decision about the possible addition of an instructional assistant to support grade 3 at Downey.

Public Participation

There was no public participation.

Discussion (cont.)

Reflections on Past Twelve Months

Mr. Donahue reflected on the success of the second year of J-Term and commented on the continued grade 3 coding program. He would like to continue focusing on the achievement of students with disabilities and ways to share innovative practices.

Mrs. Jowdy commented that she would like to know how our college admissions results compare to other districts. Ms. Parks will follow-up with the Director of Guidance.

Mr. Mullin asked if there was any feedback or reflections about last year's School Committee meetings.

Mrs. Jowdy commented that Mr. Donahue had efficiently chaired the meetings and that School Committee members had interacted respectfully.

Ms. Parks noted that she felt the relationship between the Superintendent and Chair had been effective and that the structure of having scheduled meetings to plan agendas and check-in and then debrief after meetings had worked. She said that, as agreed, she had communicated primarily with the Chair and reached out to all members when there were significant issues. She asked if that level of communication had worked for everyone.

Mrs. Lewis said that it had. She also thinks that the School Committee's practice of having questions or comments from the public be addressed through the chair and having the chair respond on behalf of the Committee works well. The Committee agreed to continue this practice.

The group discussed the length of presentations at School Committee meetings. Mr. Mullin suggested that there be a parameter of 15-20 minutes for presentations. Mrs. Jowdy commented that the School Committee is an executive board and that presentations can be high-level.

The Committee discussed inviting one principal each year to highlight school improvement efforts in his or her building, similar to the presentation that Mr. Redmon gave this year about the middle school.

Roles and Responsibilities

Members reviewed the "commitments and takeaways" previously created by the group and agreed that they continue to reflect expected norms and protocols.

Social Media/Press Communication

Mrs. Plotkin raised questions about how, or if, the School Committee should respond to social media posts by members of the public, particularly if the post is disseminating erroneous information. She is concerned about how misinformation can spread, and the impact of that misinformation particularly with respect to the building project.

The Committee discussed the need to have a standard response that directs people to official sources of information and/or encourages communication with the School Committee through appropriate channels (e.g., contacting the chair, attending a SC meeting, etc.)

Ms. Parks informed the Committee that she met earlier in the week with the District's communications consultant and that we will be continuing to generate articles about what's happening in schools next year to provide to the local press. Next year we will also make sure to Tweet links to the articles when published online. Mr. Mullin asked that the links be sent to School Committee members as well. Mr. Donahue asked if journalism students could also be encouraged to submit articles. Ms. Parks also noted that she is looking into possible changes in the quarterly newsletter that is currently shared between the Town and the School Department.

School Committee Liaison/Subcommittee Assignments and Role

Mr. Mullin presented proposed liaison assignments. Mrs. Lewis volunteered to serve on the District's social studies curriculum review committee. She also said that she is interested in an assignment to a municipal group if a need arises. If a working group regarding Hale is formed,

she would be willing to serve as the School Committee rep. The group agreed to the remaining liaison assignments as presented¹.

2019-2020 School Committee Agenda Schedule

Ms. Parks shared proposed agenda topics for next year's meetings. The group agreed that it made sense. Ms. Parks commented that this was the basic framework, but that items would be added throughout the year as things arise.

Action Items

Mrs. Jowdy made a motion to approve the minutes of June 13, 2019. Mrs. Lewis seconded.

Ms. Parks asked to amend the minutes on p. 6 by changing "school improvement goal" to "district improvement goal" and "operations" to "state rubric standards."

Vote: 5-0-0.

Result: Approved (Unanimous)

Mrs. Lewis made a motion to ratify the Administrative Assistants' contract. Mr. Donahue seconded. Vote 5-0-0.

Result: Approved (Unanimous)

Mrs. Plotkin made a motion to ratify the Custodians' contract. Mr. Donahue seconded. Vote 5-0-0.

Result: Approved (Unanimous)

Mrs. Jowdy made a motion to accept a grant of \$4,250 from Dedham Savings for an elementary science virtual sandbox. Mrs. Lewis seconded. Vote 5-0-0.

Result: Approved (Unanimous)

Mrs. Lewis made a motion to accept a total of \$26,700 in grants from the Foundation for Westwood Education. Mrs. Plotkin seconded. Vote 5-0-0.

Result: Approved (Unanimous)

¹ 2019-2020 Liaison and Subcommittee Assignments

The grants approved include:

- Elementary Science Sustainable Schools -- \$9,000
- Integrated Preschool Naturalist -- \$4,000
- Diversifying School Library Texts -- \$4,000
- Deerfield School Learning Lab -- \$6,700
- Hanlon School Cultural Competency -- \$3,000

Mrs. Plotkin made a motion to accept a \$60,000 Safe Schools and Communities' Local Equipment Technology grant from the Executive Office of Public Safety and Security. Mrs. Lewis seconded. Vote 5-0-0.

Result: Approved (Unanimous)

New Business

Mrs. Plotkin inquired about the status of the draft letter to residents regarding the building project. Ms. Parks responded that she and Mr. Mullin had discussed waiting until fall to send the update. Other Committee members agreed.

Executive Session

Mr. Donahue made a motion to go into Executive Session to conduct strategy sessions in preparation for negotiations with nonunion personnel (the Superintendent of Schools) and not to reconvene in Open Session. Mrs. Plotkin seconded.

Roll Call Vote:

- Mr. Donahue: Aye
- Mrs. Jowdy: Aye
- Mrs. Lewis: Aye
- Mrs. Plotkin: Aye
- Mr. Mullin: Aye

Result: Approved (Unanimous)

Mr. Mullin noted that the Committee would not be returning to public session.

The Committee entered into Executive Session at 8:27 pm.