

**Amherst School Committee Meeting
Monday, February 6, 2017
Library, Amherst Regional High School**

IN ATTENDANCE

Katherine Appy, Chair
Phoebe Hazzard
Anastasia Ordonez
Eric Nakajima
Vira Douangmany-Cage

Mike Morris, Interim Superintendent
Sean Mangano, Finance Director
Faye Brady, Student Services Director
Jo Ann Smith, Student Services Administrator
Nick Yaffe, Wildwood Principal
Diane Chamberlain, Fort River Principal
Press
Debbie Westmoreland, Recorder

1. Call to Order and Approve Minutes

6:17 p.m.

Ms. Appy called the meeting to order at 6:17 p.m. Ms. Hazzard moved to approve the minutes of January 17, 2017. Ms. Ordonez seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

2. Announcements and Public Comment

6:18 p.m.

Peter Demling, Amherst parent, spoke in favor of remaining in the MSBA process, noting that it is very impressive that more than 1400 people signed ballot to hold a referendum on March 28 in just the past four days. He encouraged taking more time to understand details about the Town Meeting vote and how the percentage of members in support of the project increased from November to January. Caridad Martinez, SETF member, spoke in favor of withdrawing from the MSBA proposal, noting that debates have been contentious. She spoke about a lack of voice for families of color and said that all she has spoken to prefer a small school setting. Melissa Giraud and Paula Lima Jones, Amherst parents, spoke about a long history of using neighborhood schools to backdoor segregation and noted that the voices of parents of color were not heard at Town Meeting since they were not allowed to speak. They stated that the proposed plan is centered around equity. Laura Quilter, Amherst parent, spoke in favor of withdrawing from the MSBA process, noting that she does not think that the project will pass in a referendum. She stated that all members of the community are working hard regardless of their viewpoint. Felicity Callahan, Amherst parent, stated that the Fort River site is more viable than originally thought based on new information from FEMA regarding the flood zone. Maria Kopecki, Amherst parent, spoke in favor of withdrawing from the process. She said she does not think there will be enough votes to overturn the Town Meeting vote. Rick Hood spoke first about the SETF proposal requesting funding for restorative justice. He then spoke in favor of remaining in the MSBA process, noting that just because there is opposition to the proposed plan does not mean it is not a good plan. He said there would have been opposition regardless of plan presented. Chris Foley Pilsner stated he did his research and the proposed plan is excellent. Andrea Battle, Amherst resident, spoke in favor of withdrawing from the MSBA process, expressing concern that the two separate schools in the proposal will quickly be consolidated into one large school. Chris Riddle, Amherst resident, noted that he wants to echo the sentiment that there are good people on both sides of this issue and we should all come together after the decision is made. Christiane Healey, Crocker Farm and Fort River parent, stated that she believes it is unlikely that the MSBA would approve an SOI from Amherst in the coming year if the town turns down the current grant. She noted that she also feels the referendum will fail, but it at least has a chance. Artemis Roehrig, Fort River parent, stated that we no longer have small neighborhood schools in Amherst, noting that people are still nostalgic about the old schools. She noted that there are a lot of parents who specifically like this project that is being proposed. Heather Sheldon, read a prepared statement in favor of staying in the MSBA program that she was unable to read at Town Meeting because debate was ended. Her statement spoke specifically about the positive impact the new school project would have for students with special needs. Brian DeVorr stated that he does not believe that Town Meeting is the most representative voice for everyone in town, noting that the referendum vote would be more representative. Lisa Solowiej, Fort River parent, read a statement in support of staying in the MSBA program by a parent who could not be in attendance, who felt her voice was silenced at Town Meeting. The statement spoke particularly about the effect of the classroom environment on students with auditory disabilities. Nicola Usher, Town Meeting member and Crocker Farm parent, read a statement in support of staying in the MSBA process noting that she chooses to trust the educators who overwhelmingly support the proposed plan. She noted that a town-wide vote would be much more representative of the town than Town Meeting. Farrah Ameen, Crocker Farm parent, noted that she felt she must speak as a parent of color. She noted that the preschool option is one of the things most important to her in the proposed plan, noting that she cannot imagine saying no to \$35 million in funds for education.

3. Discussion and Vote on Wildwood Building Project Withdrawal from the MSBA Core Program 7:10 p.m.

Ms. Appy noted that a petition for a special referendum was taken out on Thursday and has been passed by the Town Clerk. She then read the referendum in its entirety. Ms. Appy noted that she received an email from the Town Clerk notifying her that there are petitions in the Town Clerk's office with 1400 signatures. She stated that the MSBA has never accepted a new project from a district in the same calendar year in which a district rejects a proposal. Dr. Morris explained that the district began submitting SOIs to MSBA for both Wildwood and Fort River in 2007, annually except for 2011, and none were accepted until the Wildwood project was accepted in 2014. Ms. Ordonez asked how a referendum vote and uncertainty over the next few weeks would impact the FY18 budget process. Dr. Morris explained that there are two distinct streams of revenue--operational and capital. He noted that the process has opened a curtain on the fact that Wildwood and Fort River are not optimal learning environments, and he does not believe the community will allow that curtain to be closed. Dr. Morris noted that the Wildwood boiler is currently on the capital plan for approximately \$500,000 in case the vote did not pass. If the project fails, Dr. Morris noted that he does not believe we can wait for multiple MSBA processes to begin work on Fort River. Ms. Douangmany Cage asked where the moldy and sick buildings are in our district. Dr. Morris noted that he has never described Fort River and Wildwood as sick buildings. He explained that teachers there have made multiple reports of mold in the the building at Fort River over the year. Ms. Douangmany Cage asked if we are addressing the issue. Dr. Morris noted that action is taken anytime a report is made. Ms. Douangmany Cage asked if Dr. Morris is recommending that the School Committee vote to stay in the MSBA process. Dr. Morris stated that he wants to be very clear that this is the School Committee's decision to make, and as with other issues, he is very aware of the role of the Superintendent and that of the School Committee. Ms. Douangmany Cage stated that she believes we have a responsibility to bring those to the table who have not been there. She stated that she applauds the Chair and the Superintendent for bringing the problems with Wildwood and Fort River to the attention of the MSBA through the process, noting that this is what makes her feel confident in removing ourselves from the process and reapplying with a new plan. Ms. Appy explained the difference between the accelerated repair program and the Core program, noting that only about 12% of applications to the Core program are funded. Projects that receive accelerated repair program funds are no longer eligible to receive core program funds. Ms. Ordonez stated that there is absolutely no evidence that we can get back into the MSBA process next year, but we know that 1,500 people signed petitions over one weekend asking for a referendum vote on the project. She noted that we owe it to these people to let their voice be heard at the ballot box through the referendum vote. Mr. Nakajima noted that he was not terribly surprised by the closeness of the vote or the Town Meeting vote on the project. He said he gets uncomfortable when any person on any side of an argument begins to speak as if they are speaking for any large block of people other than just themselves. Mr. Nakajima stated that what he can hear clearly is that we need to do everything we can to continue to engage people, noting that such engagement will need to continue regardless of what happens with a referendum vote in March. He expressed his belief that it will bring the town together more if all avenues are allowed to play out including the referendum vote. Ms. Douangmany Cage stated that it is because we did not listen when people expressed concerns about the educational program that we are in this situation. She spoke regarding the need for trust in the public body. Ms. Hazzard expressed appreciation for everything that has been said tonight. She expressed her belief that the district will not be invited back into the MSBA process this year if we withdraw and explained what the process would look like to start fresh as some community members have suggested. Ms. Appy noted that she is inclined to let the process go forward and let the town decide. Ms. Ordonez moved to withdraw the Wildwood Building Project from the MSBA Core Program. Ms. Hazzard seconded and discussion followed. Ms. Douangmany Cage noted that she believes we can benefit from MSBA funding and she thinks we have done the relationship building with MSBA which would put the district in a good position to have a new SOI approved. Mr. Nakajima again expressed his belief that allowing the referendum to go forward is the best way to help the community come together. The motion to withdraw failed with a vote of four to one (Douangmany Cage).

3. Interim Superintendent's Update 8:39 p.m.

DOCUMENT: Interim Superintendent's Update to the Amherst-Pelham Regional School Committee February 6, 2017

Dr. Morris distributed his update in writing, but did not make a verbal report due to the lateness of the hour.

4. New and Continuing Business 8:39 p.m.

A. Special Education Stabilization Fund Vote

DOCUMENT: Elementary School District (to be voted by the School Committee and Town Meeting)

Mr. Mangano gave a reminder of the purpose of a special education stabilization fund and answered brief clarifying questions from the committee since this was first presented at their last meeting. Mr. Nakajima moved that the School Committee vote to accept the provisions of Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 40, Section 13E, which allows the establishment of, and appropriation or transfer of money to, a reserve fund to be utilized in the upcoming fiscal years, to pay, without further appropriation, unanticipated or unbudgeted costs of special education, out-of-district tuition or

transportation and further moved that the School Committee vote to place an article on the Spring 2017 Annual Town Meeting warrant that requests a transfer of \$150,000 from free cash to the new special education reserve fund. Ms. Ordonez seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

B. School Choice Vote

DOCUMENT: Memo to the Regional School Committee from Kathryn Mazur, Human Resources Director, regarding School Choice dated February 1, 2017

Ms. Ordonez moved that the Amherst School District remain a school choice district for the 2017-2018 school year. Ms. Douangmany Cage seconded and, after brief discussion, the motion was unanimously approved.

C. FY18 Budget Hearing

DOCUMENT: FY2018 Amherst Public Schools Proposed Budget; Amherst Public Schools FY18 Budget Proposal dated February 7, 2017

Mr. Mangano distributed updated pages for the School Committee's budget binders and briefly reviewed the changes since the budget was presented at the last meeting. As requested by a school committee member, Mr. Mangano reviewed the major goals that informed the budget which include:

- Strengthen instruction to meet the needs of our diverse learners through culturally responsive instructional practices, universal design for learners, and through exploring 21st century skills and strategies;
- Strengthen enrichment and wrap around service programming;
- Continuing to expand our systematic family engagement strategies to fully partner with our families on behalf of their children; and
- Promote stability during transitional period.

Mr. Mangano reviewed the additions and cuts to the budget, which result in a total reduction of \$83,906. Mr. Morris addressed what costs would be associated with implementing some of the programs for equity if the building project does not pass or if it does pass and the district chooses to implement them sooner than the new building would be completed. Costs would be estimated as follows:

- Preschool--\$125,000 for an additional classroom
- ELL Students--\$180,000 to create newcomer program at each school
- Special Education--\$180,000 to expand the Building Blocks program or \$534,000 for all specialized programs.

It was agreed that Ms. Westmoreland will conduct a Doodle poll to find a time for the Amherst School Committee to meet just to discuss potential budgeting for these programs prior to the next meeting on March 14. Mr. Mangano and Dr. Morris answered clarifying questions for the committee throughout the presentation. The total proposed budget after additions and cuts is \$22,523,222 which is a 1.7% increase over FY2017.

D. Superintendent's Goals

DOCUMENT: Superintendent's Performance Goals 2016-2017 (revised) dated February 2017

Mr. Nakajima moved to approve the Interim Superintendent's goals as presented and Ms. Hazzard seconded. After Dr. Morris briefly reviewed the goals, Ms. Douangmany Cage suggested adding a PAR component to the fourth goal around food service. Dr. Morris noted that it would be difficult to show evidence of the PAR component of the goal based on the timing of the hiring of the food services director beginning in July. He suggested possibly using the position posting as evidence. After brief discussion, the motion was approved with Ms. Douangmany Cage abstaining..

F. Accept Gifts

DOCUMENT: Memo to the Amherst School Committee from Jill Berry, Treasurer, dated January 25, 2017

Mr. Nakajima moved to accept \$600 from Juan D. Moreno Terero and Dunia Lopez Pintado for Crocker Farm at the principal's discretion. Ms. Ordonez seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

5. School Committee Planning

9:47 p.m.

Presentations on Chromebooks and on co-teaching; budget vote; preschool and newcomer program discussion; building blocks and other special education programs in the schools

6. Adjourn

9:48 p.m.

Mr. Nakajima moved to adjourn at 9:48 p.m. Ms. Hazzard seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

Respectfully Submitted,
Debbie Westmoreland