

**Meeting of the Amherst School Committee**  
**Tuesday, June 20, 2017**  
**Library, Amherst Regional High School**

**IN ATTENDANCE**

Phoebe Hazzard, Chair  
Eric Nakajima  
Anastasia Ordonez  
Peter Demling  
Vira Douangmany Cage

Michael Morris, Superintendent  
Public and Press  
Debbie Westmoreland, Recorder

**1. Welcome and Call to Order 6:07 p.m.**

Ms. Hazzard called the meeting to order at 6:07 p.m. The minutes of June 14 were tabled.

**2. Announcements and Public Comments 6:09 p.m.**

Katherine Appy, community member, thanked the School Committee for the incredibly hard work they do on behalf of students. She made a statement in support of a short delay in establishing the School Building Committee to allow community input and buy-in up front and in support of having the majority of the building committee be made up of members of the Fort River community. Maria Kopicki, community member, made a statement in support of beginning the collection of data now, particularly regarding the water table data at Fort River. She suggested forming an advisory committee to begin this work while the process of establishing the building committee is underway. Ms. Kopicki noted that she also supports having an advisory committee to look at the health concerns of all of our buildings. Johanna Newman, parent, began by thanking the School Committee for their service. She then noted that her views on the School Building Committee have evolved and she requested that we clarify that the scope of the committee is Fort River by having parent and teacher representation only from Fort River. Additionally, she encouraged the committee to keep the building committee a manageable size. Her comments are included in the minutes. Ms. Hazzard stated that this is a big week in the schools for moving up events and recognition ceremonies, noting that the events highlight that our schools are each unique cultures. She also noted that she neglected to put the Bill S223 vote on tonight's agenda, so it will be on next week's agenda. Ms. Hazzard said the plan is to begin posting the full agenda packet on the district website at least 24 hours ahead of the meeting. Mr. Nakajima noted that he and Ms. Douangmany Cage attended the Employee Recognition event last night, noting that it was a lovely event. He thanked Ms. Westmoreland and Dr. Morris for their work in planning and hosting the event. Dr. Morris spoke about the STARS in Special Education event that was hosted by SEPAC honoring special education teachers and paraeducators and the employee recognition event. He noted that the staff is very appreciative of School Committee members attendance at these events. Since this is the last week of the school year, Dr. Morris ended by thanking and acknowledging all of the staff for the incredible amount of work they do on behalf of students.

**3. New and Continuing Business 6:24 p.m.**

**A. Wildwood Infrastructure**

Ms. Hazzard noted that Mr. Demling suggested at the last meeting that the School Committee have a discussion about what the plans will be with regard to plans for Wildwood over the next 18 months of the Fort River feasibility study. She opened the floor to committee members for comments or discussion. Ms. Ordonez noted that she believes it is still a question for the committee to consider whether we will apply for MSBA funding for Wildwood. Mr. Nakajima noted that he believes it would make sense to apply for

MSBA funding for both Wildwood and Fort River. He said the committee should probably engage in an organized process with the Wildwood community to share what information has already been obtained through the analysis that has already been done on the site and to see what questions still remain for them. Dr. Morris noted that a list of ideas has been developed from parents/guardians and staff with regard to potential short-term improvements to both Wildwood and Fort River. With regard to the MSBA process, he explained that in the application for the MSBA process, the district must identify which site is the priority when more than one school application is submitted. Ms. Hazzard noted that this will be an important conversation to have early on in the process. Discussion followed regarding the MSBA process and the two sites. Mr. Nakajima stated that his root assumption is that we already have a lot of really great information about the Wildwood site from the MSBA process that was just completed. He said there are decisions that need to be made about Wildwood, but they are not at a parallel level with Fort River because we do not have that level of information about that site. Mr. Demling thanked the committee for sharing their thoughts.

### **B. School Building Committee Composition**

Ms. Hazzard noted that there is a potential motion on the agenda. Mr. Nakajima moved to delay the decision on the composition of a School Building Committee until late September, in order to give the community a chance to provide further input on the topic through public hearings and other means. Barring unforeseen conflicts, these public hearings will be scheduled for early August and early September. Ms. Ordonez seconded and discussion followed. Mr. Hazzard noted that the committee has heard from many members of the community regarding this issue, with many opinions that are polar opposites. She said she knows that whatever decision the committee makes will not make everyone happy, but she wants to ensure the community that they are listening and will make the decision that they believe will be in the best interest of students. Ms. Hazzard noted that the goals are to establish a building committee that functions well and fosters community support and buy-in. She noted that she believes more community engagement is necessary to meet these goals and doing such engagement is not effective over the summer. Mr. Nakajima agreed, noting that much more time can be lost if the committee launches into establishing a building committee through a process that the community is not comfortable with. Mr. Demling noted that he thinks the community is still somewhat in the wake of the last process and said he would ask the community for some level of reset for this process. He said he is leaning toward supporting a delay in establishing the building committee, noting that he does not feel ready to take a fully-informed vote. Mr. Demling asked Dr. Morris if there are things it would be possible for the School Committee to authorize him to move forward with, such as the procurement process, in order to minimize the impact of a delay in establishing the building committee. Ms. Hazzard asked the other members of the committee to share their thoughts before Dr. Morris answers Mr. Demling's question. Ms. Douangmany Cage noted that she would like to hear from Dr. Morris before she comments. Ms. Ordonez thanked the community for the input the School Committee has received over the past week, noting that this is not about delaying a decision, rather it is about gathering essential input through community engagement on a more formal basis. She spoke about potential ways in which the committee can engage the community, such as First Night on the common, office hours and other methods. Dr. Morris then spoke to Mr. Demling's question. He noted that having additional time and getting more feedback will help clarify the School Committee's role and the School Building Committee's role since it is not defined by a state process. The funds that were appropriated were for the School Building Committee, so he is somewhat wary of moving forward without it being established since they will be the authorized agent to spend the funds. Ms. Douangmany Cage noted that she will be happy to support the motion if we can get dates, locations and other logistics for the public engagement set over the summer. After further discussion, the motion was approved unanimously.

### **C. Charter Commission Position on School Committee Term Length**

Ms. Hazzard thanked Mr. Rhodes and Mr. Churchill from the Charter Commission for attending tonight for this discussion. Mr. Churchill provided context for the Charter Commission's position that School Committee terms should be for two years. He explained that the commission hopes to engage more voters by holding the local elections in November, which can be complicated for local elections since local candidates cannot be listed on the ballot with presidential or gubernatorial candidates. That would mean that local terms would have to be either two or four years. Mr. Rhodes noted that it is difficult to make decisions such as this. He said that there is power in incumbency, noting that committee members can choose to run again at the end of their two year term. Ms. Hazzard opened the floor for school committee members. Ms. Ordonez noted that her concern is about the effect two year terms would have on the stability of the School Committee and on the administration. She said the number one thing she hears from teachers and administrators about what the school committee can do to support their work is to provide stability. Mr. Rhodes encouraged Ms. Ordonez to speak to school committee members in other districts with two-year terms to see what their experience has been. Mr. Nakajima expressed concern about the loss of institutional memory and stability on the school committee with two-year terms. He noted that four years does seem long in terms of a local election, and said he would be less concerned with two-year terms if they were staggered so the committee is not up for election all at the same time. Mr. Demling noted that he has spoken to the Charter Commission at length about this issue and has submitted his thoughts in writing. He stated that he believes two-year terms is a terrible idea and shared his reasons. Mr. Demling noted that staggering terms results in boards that reflect the ebb and flow of political priorities over time rather than reflecting single hot-button issues. Ms. Douangmany Cage spoke about her support of three-year terms, noting her concern that two-year terms will result in less stability. She noted that she would not want school committee members to serve as rubber stamps. Ms. Douangmany Cage expressed her preference for Town Meeting vote over the school budget rather than a Town Council vote. Ms. Hazzard expressed her concerns about what challenges two-year, non-staggered terms would create for the Superintendent and Finance Director. Dr. Morris spoke about the importance for a superintendent to be able to develop relationships with school committee members. He also expressed concerns about the loss of institutional memory and noted the impact running for reelection has on school committee members. Mr. Churchill said that there are pros and cons to both the two and four year terms, noting that the commission does hear the concerns expressed. He asked if the choice was two years or four years which the School Committee members would prefer. Mr. Demling, Ms. Ordonez, Ms. Hazzard and Mr. Nakajima expressed preference for four year terms, with Mr. Nakajima noting that his real preference is for three year terms. Mr. Nakajima noted that his is more concerned about the loss of institutional memory than about the term length. Ms. Douangmany Cage said she would like to think about it further.

### **D. Approve Policy JQA: Food Services Collections**

***DOCUMENT: Policy JQA: Food Services Collections (approved the the Amherst-Pelham Regional School Committee June 13, 2017)***

Ms. Douangmany Cage moved to approve Policy JQA: Food Services Collections. Mr. Demling seconded and, after brief discussion, the motion was unanimously approved.

### **E. Summer/Fall School Committee Planning**

***DOCUMENT: 2017-2018 School Committee Meetings--Dates and Topics***

The committee discussed the process that will be followed in discussing and voting the composition of the building committee after the public hearings. Ms. Hazzard suggested the possibility of having a one-item

agenda meeting on September 11 to discuss the composition of the building committee with a vote on the composition at the September 19 meeting. Dr. Morris suggested having the September public forum during the week of September 11 not September 4 since that is the week of Labor Day. Discussion followed. Suggested dates were for the week of August 1 for an organizational meeting; August 8, 9 or 10 for the first forum; September 11, 13 or 14 for the second forum; and September 25 for the one-topic meeting. For communication, a draft flyer and email will be developed for the June 27 meeting. Ms. Hazzard and Mr. Nakajima volunteered to develop the text for the full committee's consideration. Doodle polls will be conducted to finalize the dates.

#### **F. Accept Gifts**

***DOCUMENT: Memo to the Amherst School Committee from Jill Berry, District Treasurer dated June 14, 2017***

Ms. Douangmany Cage moved to accept \$5,000 from James Kwak and Sylvia Brandt (Vanguard Charitable) for the Crocker Farm Preschool for use at the Program Director's discretion. Mr. Nakajima seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

#### **5. Adjourn**

**9:05 p.m.**

Mr. Nakajima moved to adjourn at 9:05 p.m. Ms. Ordonez seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

**Statement before the School Committee (Johanna Neumann)**  
**6/20/2017**

Thank you so much for all your service and for the opportunity to speak before you today. My name is Johanna Neumann and I am the parent of a first grader at Fort River and a preschooler who will likely start at Fort River in the Fall of 2018. I'm here to share with you my perspectives on the proposed formation of a Fort River School Building Committee.

First, I'm hoping the school committee can clarify that the scope and reach of this project is limited to Fort River School building and that it will not have implications on Wildwood or Crocker Farm elementary school buildings. One step that will help clarify that is to remove non-Fort River teachers and non-Fort River parents from the building committee.

Secondly, community buy-in and engagement will be critical if we want to move forward with a functional school building committee. Broad buy-in and engagement will also help secure the next phase of funding for the feasibility study, and ultimately, to win funding to secure 21st century learning spaces for our kids and teachers.

Toward that end, I respectfully request that you constitute a building committee that is made up of at least 50% community members, with a focus on the Fort River community, as well as Amherst residents who bring particular skill sets to the process and/or who represent historically underrepresented constituencies. To complement that, I support having no more than 50% of the voting members be school employees and/or town officials.. I also encourage you to go to reasonable lengths to have individuals of color represented on the building committee.

Thirdly, I believe that the size of the building committee should stay manageable where everyone serving should feel like they have an important role to play - in the realm of 10-12 voting members. Town officials who can help inform and who need to report back to their bodies on the proceedings of the building committee can be involved as nonvoting members or be called in when their expertise is required.

To give an example, one potential composition could be:

**POTENTIAL BUILDING COMMITTEE MEMBERS:**

1. Resident Expertise & Guidance: these individuals would apply to serve, would be vetted by the school committee, and then selected randomly out of the pool of applicants with similar qualifications. Ideally, these individuals would also have direct ties to the Fort River community. Some qualifications of interest include:
  - a. Amherst resident with experience in architecture/construction
  - b. Amherst resident with experience in sustainability/green design
2. Fort River Parents/guardians: The Fort River PGO would be charged with developing a process to identify representatives of their community to serve on the school building committee. Those representatives could include but not be limited to:
  - . Current Fort River parent/guardian
    - a. Parent/guardian of former Fort River student
    - b. Future Fort River parent/guardian
    - c. Fort River past or current parent/guardian who can represent the economically disadvantaged/renter community
    - d. SEPAC member
3. School and town officials
  - . Current Fort River Teacher
    - a. Fort River Principal or designee
    - b. School Finance Director
    - c. Superintendent or designee
    - d. Select Board member
    - e. School Committee member

**POTENTIAL NON-VOTING MEMBERS**

1. Town Manager or designee
2. Finance Committee member or designee
3. Director of Facilities or designee
4. Town Finance Director or designee

I believe a short delay in the formation of the school building committee is prudent if it helps engender community buy-in. I respectfully suggest that you consider a process where the formation of the building committee is discussed at a public forum that allows for dialogue and discussion. Then, once the composition has been decided, I respectfully recommend that you advertise the positions widely. Some fora for outreach include an advertisement in the Amherst Bulletin, flyers posted in prominent locations, an email circulated by the superintendent.