

Amherst and Pelham Joint School Committee Meeting
Tuesday, October 17, 2017
Library, Amherst Regional High School
21 Mattoon Street
Amherst, MA 01002

IN ATTENDANCE

Phoebe Hazzard, Chair, Amherst
Peter Demling, Amherst
Eric Nakajima, Amherst
Anastasia Ordonez, Amherst
Peter Demling, Amherst
Cara Castenson, Chair, Pelham
Emily Marriott, Pelham
Jessie Jean-Louis, Pelham
Vira Douangmany Cage, Amherst (arrived @ 6:48 p.m.)

Mike Morris, Interim Superintendent
Sean Mangano, Finance Director
Debbie Westmoreland, Recorder
Public and Press

ABSENT

Ron Mannino, Pelham

1. Call to Order and Approve Minutes

6:05 p.m.

Ms. Hazzard called the Amherst Committee to order and Ms. Castenson called the Pelham Committee to order at 6:05 p.m. They both announced that the meeting is being recorded and live-broadcast by Amherst Media. Mr. Nakajima then moved to approve the Amherst School Committee minutes of September 25, 2017 as presented. Ms. Ordonez seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

2. K-6 Regionalization Discussion

6:07 p.m.

Ms. Hazzard welcomed the Pelham School Committee members and thanked them for attending the joint meeting. Ms. Castenson then briefly reviewed the process that led to the request that Pelham Town Meeting form a committee to study regionalization with Amherst. She then read the warrant article, which was almost unanimously approved at the Pelham Town Meeting on October 16, noting that she changed the request from a K-6 study to a PreK-6 study. Ms. Castenson then utilized a Powerpoint presentation to outline the steps that will be taken if Amherst Town Meeting also approves of a PreK-6 Regionalization Study and to highlight the major areas of focus for such a study. Ms. Hazzard noted that a representative of SEPAC approached her to inquire why the study was K-6 instead of PreK and, after confirming that there are no legal impediments to expanding it to PreK, it makes sense to do so. Dr. Morris expressed his opinion that it is best to include PreK in the study so that all options are on the table. Mr. Demling noted that the potential benefits to both towns make him comfortable to vote to support the regionalization exploration. He asked if regionalization was the clear choice of the Pelham School Options Committee or if there are any concerns from the community. Ms. Castenson reported that it was a unanimous decision of the School Options Committee to recommend a study of regionalization with Amherst, noting that other regionalization options had been considered. She noted that all of Town Meeting seemed responsive to exploring regionalization again, with some concern about being a much smaller district working with a much larger district, potential loss of autonomy or even the closing of a school that is so important to the town. Ms. Ordonez asked about the timeline for the steps if both warrants are passed. Ms. Castenson noted that she is not sure of the timeline, but emphasized it will be important to have adequate community engagement throughout the process. Dr. Morris agreed that an intentional effort will be needed to reach school families as well as the broader community. Mr. Nakajima asked if there is a best-practices way to fill out the membership of the Regional School District Planning Board if the warrant passes in Amherst. Dr. Morris noted that Acton-Boxboro, which is doing a regionalization study, reached out to PGOs to help with this. Mr. Mangano noted that the last regionalization study included one Finance Committee and one Select Board member on the Board so they could report back to their boards. Ms. Hazzard asked if Pelham is

looking at any potential reconfiguration or other models for Pelham School. Ms. Castenson noted that an Innovative Small Schools Working Group is currently meeting to explore whether Pelham should consider any other educational model. Ms. Marriott noted that the recent financial issue faced by Pelham with the unknown charter costs has brought awareness to the community about the importance of looking at the finances for Pelham School. Discussion continued about the process and timeline for the potential regionalization study. Dr. Morris noted that it seems likely that, even in a best case scenario, a regionalization proposal from the Regional School District Planning Board would not be available for consideration until the 2018-2019 school year. Ms. Ordonez noted that she is in support of having the study done, but expressed concern about some of the unknown variables including the timeline, what kinds of decisions the committees will be making, and the cost. Ms. Hazzard noted that she, Mr. Mangano and Dr. Morris spoke to the Finance Committee and Select Board last night about the regionalization warrant article, and the Select Board voted unanimously to support it. Ms. Marriott moved to adjourn the Pelham School Committee at 7:00 p.m. Ms. Jean-Louis seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

3. Announcements and Public Comment

7:00 p.m.

There were no public comments. Ms. Hazzard noted that a parent training series on autism is coming up, and information about the sessions is available on the ARPS SEPAC Facebook page.

3. Interim Superintendent's Update

7:01 p.m.

Dr. Morris reported on the following events and topics:

- The Town of Amherst has entered into the UMass Strategic Partnership, which will include evaluation of student costs in tax-exempt housing. The consultants from the Donahue Institute who will be doing the study anticipate it will be about a three-month study, ending in January;
- An event jointly sponsored by the Town of Amherst and the schools to plan for supporting families moving to the area from Puerto Rico in the wake of Hurricane Maria is scheduled for November 2 in the ARMS library;
- The AEF Trivia Bee is scheduled for October 26 in the ARMS auditorium;
- The next episode of *A Window into ARPS* on Amherst Media will feature the PGOs from Amherst;
- The PGOs are assisting in gathering feedback from parents/guardians regarding the Homework Draft Guidelines;
- Fort River received a grant, which includes \$2,500 and \$1,000 in supplies, from Crayola's Champion Creatively Alive Children grant program for the project *BioInspire! Inventions Inspired by Mimicking Nature*; and
- All of the schools reported very successful Open Houses.

Ms. Hazzard reported that the subgroups of the Enrollment Working Group are continuing their work. Dr. Morris noted that the groups are doing incredible amounts of complex, engaging work.

4. New and Continuing Business

7:17 p.m.

A. K-6 Regionalization Discussion and Vote

Ms. Hazzard noted that she and Mr. Demling are attending the warrant review next Tuesday. She opened the floor for any discussion about whether the committee wants to endorse the article. Mr. Nakajima noted that he does not see the open-endedness of the regionalization process as a negative. He stated that he supports endorsing the regionalization study. Ms. Hazzard stated that she is also prepared to support it, noting that she believes there are enough facilities and enrollment issues in Amherst to make this worth exploring. After brief discussion and clarifying questions, Mr. Nakajima moved that the School Committee endorse Article 10 at the annual town meeting to form a regionalization planning committee. Mr. Demling seconded, and the motion was unanimously approved.

B. PVCICS Letter

Mr. Demling reported that the deadline for PVCICS to respond to DESE's request for an updated proposal is tomorrow, October 18, and December 15 is the deadline for submitting feedback to the Commissioner. He noted that he can revise the letter based on the PVCICS revised proposal, and the committee can vote on the letter at the November meeting. Ms. Hazzard noted that the Select Board was very supportive of the Town Meeting article regarding the Charter expansion at their meeting last night, and they expressed an interest in seeing the Amherst School Committee's letter to inform a letter they want to write on the topic.

C. Budget Guidance Process

Mr. Mangano distributed and reviewed a document outlining the first phase of the FY19 budget planning process, which is the goal review. He discussed how the budget supports four primary goals/investments made over the past few years:

1. 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;
2. Strengthen enrichment and wrap-around service programming;
3. Expand our systematic family engagement strategies to fully partner with our families on behalf of their children; and
4. Increase the percentage of educators of color to better match the percentage of students of color.

Discussion followed regarding the goals, particularly how to evaluate their effectiveness and educational outcomes since they have been in place for some time at this point. Mr. Mangano suggested including a discussion of outcomes in the strategic program review portion of the budget process. Ms. Ordonez asked if there have been any conversations about incentive programs for recruitment or retention of educators of color that may have budgetary impacts. Dr. Morris noted that both local and national research shows that school culture and climate have a large impact on recruitment and retention, even more so than financial incentives. He said that this is the area in which we want to make our investments. Ms. Ordonez clarified that she is interested in developing creative ideas around this goal, not in financial incentives. Mr. Mangano noted that the next step in the budget process will be looking at key indicators that will impact the budget.

D. Fort River Building Committee Members Selection and Mission Statement

Ms. Hazzard explained that the mission statement for the Fort River Building Committee does not mention PreK and asked if the committee is comfortable changing the language to reflect PreK instead of kindergarten. Mr. Demling noted that he would not want to restrict the committee's work and would be comfortable adding PreK. Mr. Nakajima noted that it would make sense to have this information. It was agreed by consensus to make the change. Ms. Hazzard turned to selection of the two community members at large, one community member with green building/architectural background, and one parent/guardian/caregiver at large. She noted that she and Ms. Ordonez reviewed the applications and recommend that the three applicants who only gave only their names and no statement about why they want to serve be removed from consideration. Ms. Hazzard noted that applicants 10 and 16 have been appointed to the committee already as the Fort River PGO representative and the SEPAC representative. Applicant 14 identified herself as a person of color and is highly qualified according to her statement. Ms. Hazzard and Ms. Ordonez recommend selecting her as the parent/guardian/caregiver at large since the committee agreed that they may give preference to candidates of color. For the remaining positions, the committee agreed to select from the remaining applicants by random selection. Ms. Westmoreland drew a number from the two applicants for the green energy/architectural position and the random selection was number 11. She then drew two numbers from the eight applicants for the community member at large positions and the selections were numbers 5 and 20. Discussion turned to which School Committee member will serve. Ms. Douangmany Cage took herself out of consideration due to time constraints. Mr. Demling noted that he will serve if no one else is able to do so. Ms. Hazzard asked if the

committee wants to consider having a person of color serve in the interest of meeting their commitment to having 50% representation by women and people of color. Ms. Ordonez noted that she considers this one of the most important things school committee members can do at this time; however, she is part of a subcommittee for the Region that is incredibly time consuming. After discussion, Mr. Demling moved to nominate Mr. Nakajima to the Fort River School Building Committee. Ms. Douangmany Cage seconded and the motion was unanimously approved. The only positions unfilled are the teacher and staff member from Fort River. Dr. Morris noted that he spoke with APEA President Jean Fay today, and she will reach out to staff again to try to find volunteers. The next steps are for Ms. Hazzard and Ms. Westmoreland to identify all of the appointees, get the information out to the press and conduct a Doodle poll to schedule the first meeting.

E. Bulletin Column Authorship

Ms. Hazzard reported that she spoke to Marc Terry, the districts' attorney, again about authorship of columns in the newspaper. He confirmed that a column is acceptable if it is written by the Chair, or a designee from the Committee and it covers information that has been discussed at open meetings. Discussion turned to who should write the column. Ms. Ordonez expressed her opinion that it should be only the Chair of the committee since it is a formal way of communicating with the public at large what the committee has considered and decided.

F. Town Meeting Planning—Charter School Funding and Expansion of Town Meeting Article Discussion

Ms. Hazzard reported that she worked with Dr. Morris to develop the materials for Town Meeting, which were due to the Select Board office at noon today. She noted that the materials were forwarded to the School Committee members. Discussion turned to whether any additional materials should be available at Town Meeting. Mr. Nakajima suggested delegating this to the Chair and Vice-Chair to decide on materials for the Regionalization Article. It was agreed that Ms. Hazzard, as Chair, will present both of the articles. For the Charter funding article, Mr. Demling noted that we should expect an organized opposition to be present from PVCICS. He noted that we need to focus on being firm and clear, but not combative. Ms. Hazzard noted that she received a suggestion that the Charter Funding article be amended to include the Governor as a recipient of the article once passed. It was agreed, by consensus, that Ms. Hazzard will make this amendment from the floor of Town Meeting.

6. School Committee Planning

9:17 p.m.

PVCICS letter, Appoint BCBG representative, Budget process step two, Interim status of Fort River Principal, MCAS status, Possibility of PGO coming to give presentations to School Committee

7. Adjourn

9:22 p.m.

Ms. Ordonez moved to adjourn at 9:22 p.m. Mr. Nakajima seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

Respectfully Submitted,
Debbie Westmoreland

MEETING DOCUMENTS:

1. *Minutes of September 25, 2017*
2. *Update from the Superintendent to the Amherst School Committee, October 17, 2017*
3. *Survey Monkey Responses--Fort River Building Committee Application*
4. *Amherst/Pelham Regionalization Study: Implications of Potential K-6 Study*
5. *Amherst Public Schools FY19 Budget Guidance Phase 1: Goal Review dated October 17, 2017*

Approved by Pelham October 7, 2017

Approved by Amherst November 21, 2017