

**Amherst School Committee Meeting
Tuesday, September 19, 2017
Library, Amherst Regional High School
21 Mattoon Street
Amherst, MA 01002**

IN ATTENDANCE

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

Mike Morris, Interim Superintendent
Timothy Sheehan, Curriculum Coordinator
Debbie Westmoreland, Recorder
Public and Press

1. Call to Order and Approve Minutes 6:01 p.m.

Ms. Hazzard called the meeting to order at 6:01 p.m. She announced that the meeting is being recorded and live-broadcast by Amherst Media. Mr. Nakajima moved to approve the minutes of August 8, September 11 and September 12, 2017 with minor amendments. Ms. Ordonez seconded and discussion followed. Mr. Demling requested that the minutes be considered separately since he prefers not to vote on minutes for meetings he was unable to attend and voting in a block makes that difficult for members. Mr. Nakajima withdrew his motion and Ms. Ordonez withdrew her second. Mr. Demling then moved to approve the minutes of August 8, 2017 as amended. Mr. Nakajima seconded and the minutes were unanimously approved. Mr. Nakajima moved to approve the minutes of September 11 as presented. Mr. Demling seconded and the motion was unanimously approved. Mr. Nakajima moved to approve the minutes of September 12, 2017 as presented. Ms. Ordonez seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

2. Announcements and Public Comment 6:08 p.m.

There were no public comments. Ms. Hazzard announced that she and Ms. Ordonez met with Stanley Moulton, Opinion Editor, of *The Daily Hampshire Gazette* to see if they can write periodic columns. He reached out to say they can have space on September 29. Discussion of authorship issues and open meeting law will be on the agenda for discussion at the September 25 meeting.

3. Interim Superintendent's Update 6:09 p.m.

Dr. Morris reported on the following events and topics:

- The renovated ARHS gym will be dedicated at a ceremony at 2:00 p.m. this Saturday, September 23, and all School Committee members are invited to attend. Dr. Morris acknowledged Rob Morrow of the Town of Amherst Facilities Department who did a fantastic job of overseeing the project.
- The Embrace Race event was held at the high school last night, with 25 people in attendance. He noted that attendees reported it was very helpful to process some of the challenging topics with other parents. We will be working with Embrace Race to continue the momentum of last night's work.
- The new SuperKids second grade materials are in and have been distributed to schools. Dr. Morris noted that the new illustrations meet our expectations regarding diversity. Ms. Hazzard asked that a copy of the materials be made available for the School Committee to see. Dr. Morris will bring a copy to a future School Committee meeting for their review.
- Open houses at the elementary schools are September 27 at Wildwood, October 11 at Fort River, and October 12 at Crocker Farm.

4. Subcommittee Reports

Ms. Douangmany Cage reported that Amherst Media needs advance notice of three weeks to schedule meetings due to limited staff and budget. Dr. Morris thanked Amherst Media for being incredibly accommodating with the new video series that the schools are doing. He reviewed the episodes that have been filmed and the next two that are upcoming.

5. New and Continuing Business 6:19 p.m.

A. PVCICS Expansion: Town Meeting Article and School Committee Resolution

● **Town Meeting Article**

Ms. Hazzard noted that the article that was approved at the last meeting was submitted to the Town Manager's office before yesterday's deadline. She said that she believes Town Meeting is concerned about finances; however, they are very

sensitive to the community. Ms. Hazzard noted that she believes further focusing the language in the article around the financial issues of PVCICS expansion would allow more Town Meeting members to support the article. The deadline to change language of a submitted article is September 26. Ms. Hazzard distributed and read a revised version of the article she is submitting for the School Committee's consideration and discussion followed. Mr. Demling noted that he has spoken to a number of Town Meeting members since he submitted that resolution that was approved. He said most have expressed overwhelming support of having a resolution against the charter school expansion, but noted that they would be uncomfortable voting in support of the resolution due to some of the language regarding demographics. Mr. Demling said he does not believe the language regarding demographics is problematic; however, he can understand the concerns. Mr. Nakajima noted that the near-term goal is to prevent a fiscal disaster due to an expansion of the charter school, emphasizing that the most important goal is to submit an article that Town Meeting will vote to support. Ms. Ordonez thanked Ms. Hazzard for developing a new draft for consideration. She noted that the community should care deeply that neither the School Committee nor any elected body in town has any oversight over PVCICS, which receives public dollars. Ms. Ordonez noted that some community members have expressed confusion by the parenthetical phrase "or the maximum 9% of net school spending." She suggested working on this language to make it more understandable to the general public. Ms. Douangmany Cage said she does not have any problems with the passages that were removed. She noted that it would be good to have materials at Town Meeting that show the demographic breakdown of PVCICS compared to our district. Discussion followed regarding next steps. Mr. Nakajima moved to substitute for the article previously submitted for consideration at Town Meeting the draft developed by Ms. Hazzard. Ms. Douangmany Cage seconded and the motion was unanimously approved after brief comments.

- **School Committee Resolution**

Mr. Demling distributed and reviewed a draft resolution for the Amherst School Committee to consider submitting to DESE. He also reviewed information from documents received from PVCICS and DESE through public records requests that illustrate DESE's view of demographics at PVCICS. Ms. Ordonez thanked Mr. Demling for pulling all of this information together. She noted that she feels strongly that a letter is a better and more effective form than a resolution for the School Committee to use in communicating with DESE. Ms. Ordonez agreed with Ms. Douangmany Cage's earlier suggestion that the data Mr. Demling shared from PVCICS and DESE be made available at Town Meeting. Mr. Nakajima noted that he agrees that it should be a letter rather than a resolution. He noted that the committee should not vote on a letter until they have seen the revised PVCICS application that they must submit by October 18 so that the letter will address the revisions directly. Ms. Hazzard asked Mr. Demling to revise the format to change the resolution to a letter. It was agreed that Mr. Demling will develop a draft by the October 17 Amherst School Committee meeting. The topic can be tabled if the revised PVCICS proposal is not available by that time. At Ms. Douangmany Cage's request, Dr. Morris will email the PVCICS proposal submitted to DESE in August to the full committee since those proposals are shared with local superintendents.

B. Fort River Building Committee Forums Review

Ms. Hazzard reviewed the process she used in synthesizing the information from the Fort River School Building Committee listening sessions. She noted that the committee has really valued and considered all of the information that has come to them from the public. Ms. Hazzard then opened the floor for discussion. Mr. Demling noted that he believes having a defined, specific mission statement is important, including a statement that co-located schools are outside the scope of this committee. For specific composition, he believes it is vital to have the Fort River Principal, a Fort River teacher, a Fort River parent, a school committee member, a green building specialist, and someone specifically tasked with community engagement. Mr. Nakajima noted that the committee needs to vote a mission statement that includes only what the committee is covering. He said he supports the idea of sunseting the committee since it highlights the reality that there is much to be done after this step. Mr. Nakajima noted that he fully embraces the idea of zero net energy buildings and believes there should be a committee member with that expertise. Ms. Ordonez noted that she agrees with what has been stated. She said she believes it is important to have a member of the committee who is from one of the schools other than Fort River in order to have the outsider perspective. Ms. Ordonez stated that she does not feel it would be helpful to specifically have members of SASS and BOLD on this committee since this is a new project. Voting members on the committee should include a school committee member, the Fort River principal and the Superintendent or his designee. Ms. Douangmany Cage said she believes it makes sense to bring in the voices of those who have to live and work in the Fort River building, and she wants to make sure that someone from special education, food service, the front office and transportation are represented on the committee. She noted that she likes schools that are walkable. Ms. Douangmany Cage would also like the Family Center, families from the Fort River area apartments, and the PGOs to have representation, if not on the committee, through targeted listening sessions. Ms. Hazzard asked the committee to look at the work chunk by chunk in order to move forward with the necessary decisions. Mr. Nakajima moved that the committee limit the mission of the Fort River feasibility building committee on analysis and options for a K-6 elementary school at the Fort River site and

further that the committee will draft a mission statement for subsequent review and approval by the committee; and further, that the Fort River Building Committee will sunset upon delivery of its results. Mr. Demling seconded and discussion followed. Ms. Ordonez expressed concern about the possibility that the committee is boxing itself in if the feasibility study is limited to consideration of only a K-6 model. Mr. Nakajima said he thinks openly authorizing the committee to go in other directions would be a profound mistake. Mr. Demling noted that the motion may need to be changed to pre-K to six rather than K-6. Dr. Morris noted that, because this is a feasibility study and not a full design, he is in agreement with Mr. Nakajima. That would mean there is still space and time to make changes since this is not at the schematic design level. Ms. Hazzard stated that she is comfortable moving forward with Mr. Nakajima's motion. Mr. Nakajima moved to amend the original motion to end with "completion of its deliverables and presentation of its results" instead of "delivery of its results." Mr. Demling seconded and the motion to amend was unanimously approved. The amended motion that the committee limit the mission of the Fort River feasibility building committee on analysis and options for a K-6 elementary school at the Fort River site and further that the committee will draft a mission statement for subsequent review and approval by the committee; and further, that the Fort River Building Committee will sunset upon completion of its deliverables and presentation of its results was then unanimously approved. The committee adjourned for a break at 8:12 p.m. The committee reconvened at 8:18 p.m. with the agreement that they will spend an additional 15 minutes on this topic. Discussion turned to expertise and membership on the committee. It was agreed that the committee should include:

- a green design/net zero energy advocate
- someone with an architectural background
- the Fort River Principal or designee
- a Fort River staff member
- a Fort River teacher
- a SEPAC designee
- a school committee member
- the facilities director or designee
- the Superintendent or designee
- a Fort River PGO appointee

It was agreed that Ms. Douangmany Cage and Ms. Hazzard will develop a draft list of committee membership, and Ms. Ordonez and Ms. Hazzard will draft the mission statement, for discussion at the next School Committee meeting.

C. Charter/Choice/Private School Survey Presentation

Dr. Morris reviewed the results of the surveys that were conducted of Amherst families who have chosen to send their children to private, choice or charter schools. The information reviewed included the survey methodology, the principles and purposes of the survey, the overall responses, and details from each of the separate surveys (choice, charter and private school). Ms. Hazzard noted that this data will be relevant to a lot of work going forward. Ms. Ordonez asked if this data will be part of the communications plan. Dr. Morris noted that it will inform the communications plan going forward.

D. Enrollment Working Group Update

Dr. Morris provided an update on the work of the Enrollment Working Group, noting that it is functioning at a really high level. He noted that several subgroups have been created to explore specific issues including:

- Declining Enrollment Group
- Language Immersion Group (which Ms. Hazzard is a member of)
- Preschool Demand, Access and Need
- Socio-economic Balance
- Special Education and Specialized Programming

Dr. Morris noted that he will ask the group when they will be comfortable coming to a School Committee meeting to provide a more in-depth presentation. Ms. Ordonez suggested putting something on the website that will provide information on what each of the subgroups are working on. Dr. Morris noted that the subgroups' purpose may evolve as they begin their work, so they wanted to wait to share their description publicly. Dr. Morris will email the subgroups to see if they feel comfortable posting the descriptions online and sharing them with the School Committee. At Mr. Demling's request, Dr. Morris reviewed the anticipated timeline for the work of the Enrollment Working Group.

E. Homework Working Group Update

Dr. Morris gave a brief overview of the process the Homework Working Group utilized in developing a homework practice document for consistency across our schools and across grade levels. Mr. Sheehan reported on plans for sharing the document and getting feedback from the Pelham, Crocker Farm and Wildwood faculties at tomorrow's early release work

time. Fort River will review it and provide feedback at a later date. Mr. Sheehan noted that Dr. Morris will be requesting feedback from families in his newsletter this Friday and will host feedback sessions for families in cooperation with the PGOs. The working group will utilize the feedback to develop an updated draft. Feedback will be gathered on the second draft and incorporated into the document, with the goal of developing a final document in December for implementation after the first of the year. Dr. Morris answered brief clarifying questions for the committee. Ms. Ordonez noted that it would be helpful to share this information with the broader community to address the various perceptions of homework and its value. Ms. Hazzard and Mr. Nakajima expressed their agreement with Ms. Ordonez about the importance of sharing this information broadly throughout the process as it moves forward.

6. School Committee Planning

9:31 p.m.

For Monday, September 25: PVCICS Town Meeting Warrant article (Ms. Hazzard will email her draft to the committee); Language around Mission Statement; Fort River Feasibility Building Committee composition; Budget Guidance (potentially)

7. Adjourn

9:37 p.m.

Ms. Ordonez moved to adjourn at 9:37 p.m. Mr. Nakajima seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

Respectfully Submitted,
Debbie Westmoreland

MEETING DOCUMENTS:

1. *Minutes of August 8, 2017*
2. *Minutes of September 11, 2017*
3. *Minutes of September 12, 2017*
4. *Update from the Interim Superintendent to the Amherst School Committee, September 19, 2017*
5. *Pioneer Valley Chinese Immersion Charter School (DESE Minutes)*
6. *Pioneer Valley Chinese Immersion Charter School Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes of March 2, 2017*
7. *Letter to Charles Bagley, Board of Trustees Pioneer Valley Chinese Immersion Charter School from Alison Bagg, Director, Office of Charter Schools and School Redesign at DESE dated March 5, 2017*
8. *Letter to Board of Trustees, Charles Bagley, Board of Trustees Chair, and Richard Alcorn, Executive Director of Pioneer Valley Chinese Immersion Charter School from Alison Bagg, Director, Office of Charter Schools and School Redesign at DESE dated August 10, 2017*
9. *Comparison Index (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/finance/chart/cart-enrollment.xlsm>)*
10. *Synthesis of Fort River School Building Committee Listening Sessions--PH Notes*
11. *Survey of Families With Children in Private, Charter or other Public Schools*
12. *School Committee Article: Regarding the Expansion of the Pioneer Valley Chinese Immersion Charter School*
13. *Town Meeting Resolution (revised) "To see if the Town will adopt the following resolution"*
14. *MSBA SBC Membership/SBC Membership of Elementary School Building Project*