

Regular Meeting of the Amherst School Committee

March 17, 2015

6:00 p.m.

Library, Amherst Regional High School

In Attendance:

Rick Hood, Vice-Chair

Kathleen Traphagen, Vice-Chair

Lawrence O'Brien

Maria Geryk, Superintendent

Mike Morris, Assistant Superintendent

Sean Mangano, Finance Director

Debbie Westmoreland, Recorder

Victor Nunez-Ortiz, WW PGO Representative

Tracy Zafian, CF PGO Representative

Liz Larson, FR PGO Representative

Absent:

Katherine Appy

Amilcar Shabazz

1. Welcome and Call to Order 6:04 p.m.

Agenda Review: There were no changes to the agenda. Mr. Hood stated that tonight is the last Amherst School Committee meeting before the election, and he recognized Mr. O'Brien and Mr. Shabazz for their service. He noted that he has really enjoyed serving with both of them in interesting times and has learned from both of them. Mr. Traphagen agreed, expressing her thanks. Superintendent Geryk thanked Mr. O'Brien and Mr. Shabazz for their service on behalf of the district's children.

Approve Minutes: Mr. O'Brien moved to approve the minutes of February 10, 2015. Ms. Traphagen seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

2. Public Comments 6:05 p.m.

Tracy Zafian, Crocker Farm parent, spoke about questions she has regarding the Wellness Policy that was approved at the Regional School Committee meeting. Her concerns centered around the policy's prohibition of celebrating birthdays with food. She asked for clarification in the policy of what other celebrations or events would be included, particularly since the PGOs often serve food at evening events as a way to increase participation.

3. Amherst Subcommittee Reports 6:09 p.m.

a. Amherst Education Foundation—Mr. Hood reported that the Spring Sprint is scheduled for May 9th.

b. Audit Subcommittee for the Town of Amherst—Mr. Hood reported that Sandy Pooler, Amherst Finance Director, is almost ready to call a meeting of the Audit Subcommittee. Ms. Appy is the School Committee representative to this group.

c. ACTV Liaison—Mr. Hood noted that there is nothing to report about ACTV.

d. BCG—Mr. Hood reported that BCG has had their final meeting for this budget planning year.

e. JCPC—Mr. Hood reported that work is wrapping up on capital requests for this year. The next meeting is this Thursday. Ms. Traphagen asked if a request has been submitted for the Crocker Farm playground. Ms. Geryk confirmed that it has been submitted for consideration of repairs and work to bring the playground into ADA compliance.

f. The Collaborative—Mr. O'Brien reported that next week will be his last meeting at The Collaborative as the Amherst representative. He will write up a summary for the School Committee. Mr. O'Brien noted that, based on The Collaborative's new bylaws, it will be important to appoint a new representative as soon as possible, preferably at the April meeting.

4. New and Continuing Business 6:14 p.m.

a. Field Trips

Mr. Morris distributed the School Committee policy on field trips, Policy IICA: Field Trips, Overnight Travel and International Travel. He noted that representatives from each of the PGOs are in attendance to share information about field trips in their schools. Mr. Morris explained that the district administration is interested in hearing more about what the current practices are in the ways PGOs support field trips, whether the PGOs believe the district should standardize field trips or stay with a building-based model, and any other thoughts the PGO leaders want to share. Victor Nunez-Ortiz spoke on behalf of the Wildwood PGO. He

noted that the Wildwood PGO would like for every child to participate in field trips regardless of ability to pay. Each parent is asked to pay for their child plus a little more for scholarships, if they are able. The process followed at Wildwood is for the PGO to approve the field trip and send out information to parents. Typically, the cost of field trips is split 1/3 from the PGO, 1/3 from parents and 1/3 from the Principal's gift account. Tracy Zafian, Crocker Farm PGO Chair, spoke about the Crocker Farm PGO experience with field trips. She noted that the number and type of field trips seems very dependent upon the teacher and whether they enjoy planning field trips. Ms. Zafian stated that it might be beneficial to ensure that every student gets to participate in at least one field trip each year. The Crocker Farm PGO does fund raising for field trips, which they are happy to do in order to ensure that all students have access. Ms. Zafian noted that most of the paperwork is done by the office staff at Crocker Farm. Liz Larson, Fort River PGO member, reported that the Fort River PGO used to pursue Amherst Cultural Council grants to cover field trip expenses; however, the process has changed and grants are now pursued through the district's business office. She noted that the way the grant cycle works, field trips that are taken early in the school year happen before the PGO hears if the grant requests have been approved. Fort River will now be pursuing grants for only spring field trips due to the Cultural Council's challenging funding cycle. Ms. Larson noted that the amount of extra money being provided by Fort River parents for field trip scholarships is declining. Discussion followed regarding the process followed in each school, with general agreement that the Wildwood process is well-liked. After discussion, Mr. Hood requested a written report outlining the field trip data for each school, including what trips are taken and the cost of each trip. Mr. Morris thanked Ms. Zafian, Ms. Larson and Mr. Nunez-Ortiz for taking time to compile the information and come to tonight's meeting to share it. It was agreed that additional discussion is needed on this topic so it will be added to a future agenda.

b. FY16 Budget Vote

Mr. Mangano noted that the only change since the last meeting is the addition of an ELA intervention teacher that is being off-set by a cut of three paraeducator positions. Mr. Hood moved to approve the FY2016 budget for the Amherst Public Schools in the amount of \$21,869,835 and discussion followed. Ms. Traphagen asked if the cuts are necessary made since the proposed budget is \$100,000 under the originally targeted 2.2% increase. Ms. Geryk spoke about the importance of working collaboratively with the town as a department of the town. She noted that as long as we put in place what is needed this year, she would prefer to come in under the targeted amount in case next year is a tighter budget year. Mr. Morris, Mr. Mangano and Ms. Geryk answered brief clarifying questions, and the motion was then unanimously approved.

c. MSBA Update

Mr. Morris reported that the OPM (Owner's Project Manager) Selection Committee interviewed four firms and came up with a unanimous selection, which must now be defended with the MSBA in Boston next week. If the choice is approved by MSBA, the next step is to select a designer which will include a great deal of public participation. Mr. Morris reviewed the three possible options being considered as part of the feasibility study, which include renovating the existing Wildwood building, building a new Wildwood building, and reconfiguring the district. Mr. Morris noted that the design process will kick off in the fall with multiple ways for the public to be involved in the discussion and process. Mr. Morris answered clarifying questions regarding the role of the MSBA in approving the OPM and the OPM's role throughout the process.

d. Fort River Statement of Interest

Mr. Morris briefly noted that the Fort River Statement of Interest is the way to get into the consideration process for a building project at Fort River since it is unknown at this time how the Wildwood Building Project will turn out. Mr. O'Brien then read the Fort River Form of Vote as follows:

Resolved: Having convened in an open meeting on March 17, 2015, the School Committee of Amherst, in accordance with its charter, by-laws, and ordinances, has voted to authorize the Superintendent to submit to the Massachusetts School Building Authority the Statement of Interest Form dated on or before April 10, 2015 for the Fort River Elementary School located at 70 South East Street, Amherst, MA which describes and explains the following deficiencies and the priority category(s) for which an application may be submitted to the Massachusetts School Building Authority in the future

- Priority 1: Replacement or renovation of a building which is structurally unsound or otherwise in a condition seriously jeopardizing the health and safety of school children, where no alternative exists.
- Priority 5: Replacement, renovation or modernization of the heating system in a schoolhouse to increase energy conservation and decrease energy related costs in the schoolhouse.
- Priority 7: Replacement of or addition to obsolete buildings in order to provide for a full range of programs consistent with state and approved local requirements.

and hereby further specifically acknowledges that by submitting this Statement of Interest Form, the Massachusetts School Building Authority in no way guarantees the acceptance or the approval of an application, the awarding of a grant or any other funding commitment from the Massachusetts School Building Authority, or commits the City/Town/Regional School District to filing an application for funding with the Massachusetts School Building Authority.

Ms. Traphagen seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

e. Approve Gifts

Mr. O'Brien moved to accept \$100 from Sharon Nadeau for the Sue Dunbar Instrument Fund; \$25 from John and Kristin Deluca for Fort River for an art donation; and \$385.47 from Target Take Charge of Education for the Fort River Principal's discretion. Ms. Traphagen seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

5. School Committee Planning

7:28 p.m.

The April meeting will include FY15 third quarter budget update; subcommittee reconfiguration and field trips. Mr. Hood requested an update from Amherst Together before the end of the year. Mr. Morris noted that there will be an arts integration update in May. Ms. Traphagen asked that information about PBIS and discipline at the elementary level be included in either the report to the Regional School Committee in April or at an Amherst meeting. Ms. Geryk noted that the Regional report can be overarching K-12 with an additional elementary-only report if needed at the Amherst meeting. Ms. Traphagen requested an equity report from Ms. Hall, which will be added in May.

6. Adjournment

7:35 p.m.

Mr. O'Brien moved to adjourn at 7:35 p.m. Ms. Traphagen seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

Respectfully Submitted,
Debbie Westmoreland