

**ACTON PUBLIC SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING  
MINUTES (approved 2/25/10)**

**Library  
R.J. Grey Junior High School**

**January 21, 2010  
7:30 pm**

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*Members Present:* Jonathan Chinitz, Michael Coppolino, Xuan Kong, Terry Lindgren, Sharon Smith  
McManus, John Petersen  
*Others:* Marie Altieri, Susan Horn, Liza Huber, Stephen Mills, Beth Petr

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The meeting was called to order at 7:33 pm by Xuan Kong.

**CHAIRPERSON'S INTRODUCTION**

Amy Hedison announced that she is running for a School Committee seat.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

The minutes of December 17, 2009 were approved as amended (2 modifications).

**STATEMENT OF WARRANT**

Warrant #201014 dated 1/12/10 in the amount of \$134,323.05 was signed by the Chair and circulated to the Committee for approval.

**PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Approximately 75 people were in the audience. No one spoke publicly.

**UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

**1. ALG Report**

The merits of covering the APS debt out of reserves were discussed. FinCom wants to see the whole budget plan, including how Minuteman fits into the education plan for our students. What would we do if Minuteman closed for those students? If we take no action at Town Meeting on the Minuteman Capital article, it means we support it. FinCom also wants to see what happens with the meal tax. Jonathan Chinitz noticed in the minutes of ALG a request that the fiscal year actuals be added to the ALG plan. He felt actual to budget should not be used. He has a problem with that because it attempts to diminish and erase any cuts/reductions that the entities have made in their budgets. ALG is a modeling tool that is based on budget to budget and reflects a need in an entity at a point in time for comparison. Jonathan asked that his thoughts be conveyed to those in the public that are asking for this. Marie Altieri said that ALG requested that the FY09 revenue actuals be added in, not the expense numbers being updated with actuals. Xuan Kong will bring that question back to ALG.

**2. Acton Finance Committee Report**

At the 12/22/09 FinCom meeting, Tom Michelman presented on the stretch code issue – a building code that has a higher requirement on energy efficiency. This may have some financial incentive (up to \$10M annually in grants and loans to qualifying communities). FinCom discussed the possibility of using additional reserve for covering APS debt service for the transition year. FinCom members would like to make a decision on this in the context of overall budget consideration.

At the 1/13/10 FinCom meeting, Bill Mullin expressed disappointment that in the face of budgetary challenges, the districts are obligated to allocating a half million dollars for ERI benefits. Bob Evans commented on the 26+ FTE staff reduction and asked whether the Schools' Director of Finance position should be combined with the Town's similar position. The Finance Committee unanimously adopted a

resolution: “The Chair discuss with the School Superintendent and the Town Manager, working through the Board of Selectmen and School Committee, the consolidation of town and school finance functions and request the posting of the position described as the Director of Finance/ Treasurer and circulated January 6, 2010 be delayed pending these discussions.” A meeting was held this morning (1/21/2010) to discuss the timeline of resolving the inquiry from FinCom.

**3. FY’10 Budget Update**

Possible cuts were identified and even though the 9C cuts discussed last Fall are not required, Dr. Mills has indicated that some of them (campus monitors) have been made to prepare for next year.

**4. FY’11 Budget**

Dr. Mills referenced his presentation powerpoint from the 1/7/10 meeting. The House 1 Budget will be announced on Monday. He believes that tomorrow the Governor will announce that he will not make any Chapter 70 cuts. Dr. Mills reiterated that the budget process is a rollercoaster.

**a. The COPS (Community Oriented Policing Services) Program and Survey**

Liza Huber shared a memo and chart showing that of 29 local towns, most of their schools’ Police/Youth Officers are funded by the town. After much discussion, Sharon McManus made the motion:

“That we fund the COPS position for this year and work with the Town through the leadership process over the next few years to convince the town that they should pick up the position and fund it.”

Xuan Kong stated that the Committee agreed that they would not vote on the same night that a motion was made. John Petersen did not want to vote on parts of the budget piecemeal. He emphasized the need to look at the totality of the budget and consider the COPS funding as part of the big budget discussion. When asked for a sense of the Committee regarding the vote, Jonathan Chinitz said that the Committee has made their opinion known on the COPS funding. Sharon McManus withdrew the motion.

**b. Bus Ridership/Student Transportation and Possible Fees**

JD Head and Kim Trahan began by saying that everything starts and ends with safety in their department. 1709 children are transported to and from school every day, making theirs a \$2 million operation. They shared a chart showing that 93 out of 311 districts charge a bus fee, with a lot of variation. 889 of our students live within 2 miles and could be charged a fee. This would involve huge administrative tasks. More families would pick up their children to avoid the fees. Our schools were not designed for this. The carbon footprint would also be a big issue.

Xuan Kong asked if running an after school bus for a fee at a few central locations had been considered. Kim said that 15 years ago there were late buses but they were empty. Kids did not want to wait until 4:30, which is the soonest our buses could get there because they are used for all of the routes. The PTSO has surveyed families in the past and sufficient demand was not there. It was concluded that we are running an efficient transportation system for our students, and it would not be effective to charge for busing within two miles.

BOS member Lauren Rozensweig mentioned that the new Acton shuttle bus program will start soon. Users will call to arrange for pick up and pay a fee.

**c. Classroom Assistants in Elementary Schools**

Sharon McManus and Jonathan Chinitz removed themselves from the discussion because they both have a family member employed as an assistant in the school system. The new state ethics laws have a strict definition of what is a conflict of interest and this would apply.

Steve Mills said that his last budget presentation had a proposed cut that included instructional assistants that would affect some schools more than others. He is aware that there are differences between the two after school programs at Merriam and Douglas and that this has benefited those schools. He also does not want to punish schools that have worked hard in the past, or to subsidize schools differently based on what they have or what they are doing. It has been proposed that the profits from the after/before school programs run by Community Education be allocated 75% to the school and 25% to Community Education, as opposed to a 50-50 split currently. This will help alleviate some of the funding imbalance.

Dr. Mills was thanked for his thoughtful reflection on the differences in our schools. It was noted that with so much PTO money funding assistants now, it is getting close to the core educational needs. Xuan Kong asked the Principals and education leaders to give the School Committee more quantitative guidelines about appropriate classroom assistant time that is needed to enhance the learning experience in our public schools. The Douglas School PTO was thanked for their letter on the topic.

**d. Joint Task Force on Cost Savings Update**

Jonathan Chinitz and Xuan Kong shared a memo dated 1/13/10. Next step is to consolidate information from the Town and get staff together to talk about the ideas that have been identified and move forward. Implementation may take time.

**4. Health Insurance Trust Report**

There was no quorum at this morning's meeting. Rates will not be set until the end of February.

**5. School Committee Liaison for each Elementary School**

Xuan Kong read the names of the Committee members assigned to each school.

**6. Solar Contract re Douglas School**

Installation at the Douglas School will be soon. No major hurdles coming up.

**7. Reconsideration of 1/7/10 VOTE to Request that Town of Acton Adopt OBRA**

Xuan Kong asked for a revote of the 1/7/10 vote because he felt that he did not supply sufficient information to the Committee prior to voting.

Sharon McManus and Jonathan Chinitz recused themselves from the vote for the same reason as the Classroom Assistants discussion. John Petersen's wife does part-time substituting at the High School. Legal counsel advised that he can vote on this local issue, but should not vote on a similar regional one.

It was moved, seconded and

**VOTED: Acton Public School endorses Chapter 29, Section 64D (OBRA) subject to the approval of the Board of Selectmen.**

(Vote: YES - Coppolino, Kong, Lindgren, Petersen ABSTAINED: Chinitz, McManus)

The Board of Selectmen will discuss this issue on Monday, January 25.

NEW BUSINESS

**1. Communications within the Community – Lamplighter**

The Lamplighter is now electronic only. A postcard was not mailed due to cost but may be sent for the March Budget issue. Copies have been left at the local libraries, Town Halls, and school offices. A message may go out in the town's property bill notices per a suggestion at ALG.

**2. Kindergarten Information Meeting Report**

Registration is March 16 and 17. K Night was very successful last Tuesday. 250 people attended. Many questions were about before and after school care so they did a special section of the meeting at the end and it worked well. In early registration for siblings and walkers - 27 more registered than this time last year.

**3. Recommendation to Accept Gift from Community Education to Conant School**

It was moved, seconded, and unanimously

**VOTED: To accept with gratitude a gift of \$4,995. from Community Education to Conant School, representing surplus from the first three sessions of Enrichment classes run in conjunction with Conant this year.**

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

**1. FY'09 APS School Lunch Report**

John Petersen asked that the new Finance Director look at each of our accounts to ensure consistent accounting practices. The goal is that line items can be compared to each other, over time and between departments, and it can be easily determined where particular items are recorded.

NEXT MEETINGS –

**Educational Values Meeting - Jan 28, 7:30PM, JH Library (*addendum*)**

**AB Meeting – Feb 4, 7:30PM, JH Library – Open Budget Hearing**

**Joint SC Budget Presentation, Feb 6, 9:00AM-3:00PM, JH Library**

**JT/APS Meeting with Acton and Boxborough Finance Committees – Feb 25 7:30PM,  
JH Lib - Open Budget Hearing**

The meeting was adjourned at 10:16pm.

Respectfully submitted,  
Beth Petr