

**ACTON PUBLIC SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING**  
**Minutes** (approved 3/17/11)

**Room 204**  
**Acton Town Hall**

**March 8, 2011**  
**6:00 pm**

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*Members Present:* Mike Coppolino, Herman Kabakoff, Xuan Kong, John Petersen  
Sharon McManus  
*Members Absent:* Terry Lindgren  
*Others:* Don Aicardi, Marie Altieri, Steve Mills, Beth Petr

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John Petersen called the APS School Committee meeting to order at 6:05 p.m.

The Joint School Committee meeting for tomorrow (3/9/11) was cancelled. There is a Joint School Committee meeting scheduled for Friday night, 3/11/11. This will be an Executive Session, possibly followed by an Open Meeting to vote on the AEA 2010-2013 Collective Bargaining Agreement.

The Committee met tonight to confirm their position regarding the Acton Leadership Group (ALG) Plan because the warrant is going to press on Thursday.

**FY'12 BUDGETING FOR COPS PROGRAM**

The 3/5/11 memo from John Petersen and Lauren Rosenzweig-Morton was in response to questions at the last APS School Committee meeting on 3/3/11. Sharon McManus asked the Committee to vote on how the COPS funding is included in the FY12 budget

Dr. Mills said that at the 1/27/11 meeting with Steve Ledoux, Chief Widmayer and Lauren, it was agreed that the \$72,000 should be moved to the Town for FY12. Three officers are in the program. Two of them have always been funded out of the municipal budget. The third officer has been funded by the APS budget but last Spring the Committee said that they would only fund the position for FY11 and then it was expected that the municipal budget would pay for it. Sharon thought that Steve Mills and the Police Chief said that they would not necessarily keep the other two officers in the program. Sharon is opposed to the impact that this could have in FY13 because there is a chance that the COPS program may disappear by doing what this memo outlines. Xuan pointed out that last year a survey was done and it showed that no other comparable community has three police officers in their schools. Since then, Assistant Principals and other important positions have been added, perhaps decreasing the need for three officers. The Town is committed to funding two for FY12, but there is no commitment from the BOS to continue funding the third officer in future years.

Sharon asked Xuan if he thought the town was committed to funding the two officers after FY12. Xuan said that it was not brought up. Steve Mills stated that it was implied that moving this cost to the municipal budget meant that this line item would continue there. He felt that Chief Widmayer agreed to continue to staff the positions in the future. John Petersen said that the Police Chief was clear that over time there would likely be shifts as his needs moved. John advocated for having the Police Chief controlling the totality of the police resources. Mike Coppolino said that it appears that funds were transferred from the school to the town budget. He asked if this decision was counter to discussions that the Committee had a few months ago about COPS

funding. He concluded by asking that in the future, the ALG reps keep the School Committee informed about any changes like this when they happen.

**Herman moved that the School Committee accept the strategy as delineated in the ALG spreadsheet for FY12 with respect to transferring \$72,000 to the municipal budget to cover the COPS program per the memo dated 3/5/11 from John and Lauren.**

Heather Harer spoke from the audience and agreed with both Sharon and Mike. COPS is a very important program in both of our school districts.

Herman noted that he was very deliberate in his motion that he was talking about FY12 only.

It was moved, seconded and unanimously,

**VOTED: that the School Committee accept the strategy as delineated in the ALG spreadsheet for FY12 with respect to transferring \$72,000 to the municipal budget to cover the COPS program per the memo dated 3/5/11 from John and Lauren.**

### **REVIEW OF ALG PLAN ASSUMPTIONS**

John Petersen began by referring the Committee to the ALG consensus plan of March 2<sup>nd</sup> and stating that he would be remiss not to mention that Acton taxpayers fund most of the budgets.

**He asked the School Committee to decide what assumptions should be reflected in the ALG Plan so that could be communicated to the members of ALG.**

As shown on slide 5, the budgets that were voted require a Pay Forward of \$372,000.

### **Slide 8 – APSC Recommendations**

- Mike Coppelino is comfortable deferring to ALG that Chapter 70 is at 2% below House 1. He repeated his suggestion for the future, that Acton Town Meeting be scheduled a month later than it currently is so that more definite budget information is available. He agrees with the use of reserves and tax levy of 2.5% without the \$293K.
- Sharon McManus and Herman Kabakoff agree with Mike on the first three bullets. Herman confirmed that the current ALG plan says 2.5%.
- Xuan Kong agreed as well on the assumptions for state aid, use of reserves and tax levy. Following up on what Sharon said, he stated that to not tax the \$293K capacity is our choice. State local aid funding levels are our wish. He thinks the current ALG proposal reversed FinCom's contingency plan priority orders. [If additional revenues materialize, do not tax \$293K (FinCom Contingency Plan) versus Do not tax \$293K and if revenues come below expectation, find alternative solutions (ALG Proposal)].

Bill Mullin spoke from the audience and said that this is not the waterfall. He said that the decision to not tax the \$293,000 means that if state aid is below our assumptions, the deficit will need to be handled internally.

Steve Mills and Don Aicardi commented that there is still great uncertainty about the level of funding the state will provide to local government this year. Steve's colleagues and legislative

contacts have provided a wide range of estimates. Roger Hatch, who is usually willing to make relatively concrete predictions at this time of year, is uncertain about the level of State Aid to local government.

John said that to be clear about how the ALG plan works, if local revenue came in not at minus 2, but at minus 5, how would that be addressed? For example, if APS Chapter 70 comes in \$155,000 below our budget, what is the impact on the local school budget? Don Aicardi responded that Chapter 70 is part of the local revenue pool (tax levy, fees, state aid) and reduction of the pool for any reason would (in this example of APS Chapter 70) result in a need to reduce spending which would be shared by the town and the local schools.

John said that if substantive new information was received before Town Meeting, the Board would relook at it and discuss. Assuming no substantive change prior to Town Meeting, the School Committee agreed to execute the ALG Plan. Minor changes could be absorbed, but major ones would be reconsidered. Bill Mullin agreed with John's statement that given a radical change it would be discussed again.

**At tomorrow's ALG meeting, John will affirm that the School Committee unanimously supports the ALG Plan.**

#### **Slide 9 – School Budget FY12-FY14**

John Petersen asked the Committee if 3% of budget growth over these 3 years is correct to take back to ALG. (Note: Due to COPS, these numbers will be slightly higher now.)

Herman does not agree with the 3% increase. He does not think it is consistent with taxpayers' resources. Mike feels that it should be 3% – 3.5%. When asked, Steve Mills agreed with Mike. Particularly at the Region, Steve said that he will need to come in at significantly above a level service budget for FY13 due to some of the needs outlined by Dr. Callen for the High School and the NEASC Report. Sharon agreed with Mike and said some of the "gifts" this year, like the savings in health insurance, may not be reproducible year after year.

Xuan commented that the Committee needs to be realistic. The ALG plan is to inform taxpayers what is known to our best knowledge. He asked if Don has any more concrete numbers. Don reported that the level service estimate for FY13 looks like 3.5% according to his calculations. This does not include using the EduJobs money. This would lower the percentage if that money is used.

The Committee was asked what number should be taken back to ALG tomorrow. Herman said 2% for planning. The other members said 3.5%. **John will take back a 3.5% increase for FY13 and 14 for the school budget portion.**

#### **Slide 11 - APS Capacity Utilization – FY11**

With a reasonable handle on capacity now, John asked the Committee which particular issues should be addressed at year end:

- Mike said assistants.
- Sharon appreciated the recent presentations on this subject and would leave it up to the Superintendent's discretion.
- Herman said that as a matter of policy, money should not be spent on recurring expenses. He advocated for one time items like textbooks, not classroom assistants. He felt strongly

that it is premature to discuss what and how much until we know how much money exists. He wants to give Dr. Mills guidance using a percentage basis.

- Xuan said that professional development has been a consistent request, and the time value of implementing this sooner rather than later is important for the students. He stated that it is important for School Committee to provide direction to the Central Office and Superintendent because that is their responsibility regarding the budget. Nonrecurring items like textbooks are high priority for Xuan.

Bill Mullin appreciated that the positions taken by the School Committee are consistent with FinCom's budget planning. Although not required, he suggested that it could be valuable for the School Committee to come to the FinCom for their input before taking a vote in the future.

The schedule for decision-making around this will be on the 3/17/11 APS School Committee agenda to be sure decisions are consistent with wisdom of the committee.

Mike asked to qualify his statement regarding assistants. Despite the challenge, he is willing to accept more of the cost in the operating budget but he advocated for some leveling of the playing field regarding the number of assistants in each school. He said that the School Committee might have to consider a statement like, "You cannot use PTSO funds for people."

The meeting was adjourned at 7:14 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Beth Petr

List of Document Used: See agenda attached

**Note:** Steve Mills and Don Aicardi presented the FY' 12 School Budget at the Acton Finance Committee meeting that followed at 7:30 p.m.

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**AGENDA**

1. CALL TO ORDER
2. REVIEW OF ALG PLAN ASSUMPTIONS
  - 2.1. Draft Minutes of ALG Meeting on 3/2/11
  - 2.2. Memo from J. Petersen and L.Rosenzweig-Morton re FY'12 Budgeting for COPS Program
  - 2.3. ALG Spreadsheets dated 3/4/11 (January and March 2011)
  - 2.4. Presentation Slides
3. ADJOURN

Note: Steve Mills and Don Aicardi to present at Acton Finance Committee meeting at 7:30 p.m.