

**ACTON PUBLIC SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING**  
**Minutes** (approved 12/15/11)

**Library**  
**Merriam School**

**November 17, 2011**  
**7:00 p.m.**

*Members Present:* Dennis Bruce, Michael Coppolino, Xuan Kong, Kim McOsker, Paul Murphy, John Petersen  
*Members Absent:* none  
*Others:* Don Aicardi, Marie Altieri, Deborah Bookis, Liza Huber, Steve Mills, Beth Petr, Acton Board of Selectmen Chair, Mike Gowing (7:05 – 7:30 p.m.)

-----

The Acton Public School Committee meeting was called to order at 7:02 p.m. by Chair Michael Coppolino.

**STATEMENT OF WARRANT**

Warrant #201210 dated November 15, 2011 in the amount of \$182,727.18 was signed by the chair and circulated for signatures.

**CHAIRPERSON'S INTRODUCTION**

Acton Board of Selectmen (BOS) Chair, Mike Gowing, gave an update on Health Insurance Reform. He took a look at what the surrounding communities are doing regarding the new Chapter 69 legislation and said that all of the information is on the Town website. The BOS meets Monday night at 6:30 p.m. The BOS will discuss and decide by 7:00 whether or not to approve Chapter 69.

John Petersen emphasized the importance of having a unified plan design, the same for union and non-union. He also encouraged the BOS to find a way to include the Health Insurance Trust in the investigation to be sure the Trust is represented in the discussion. Since half of the employees affected are Acton Public School District members, he also asked for them to be represented.

Mike Gowing stated that "Acton is in dire straits." He said there is a \$100 million liability in pensions, including \$40 million for the Town and \$60 million for the Schools. Mike Coppolino responded that this issue would be addressed later in the meeting, and in his opinion it is not \$100 million. (Note: Mike Gowing's reference was to the liability described in the Segal report of Oct 18, 2011, "Acton-Boxborough Regional School District and Town of Acton *Actuarial Valuation and Review of Other Postemployment Benefits (OPEB) as of December 31, 2010*". For the period of the next 30 years, the unfunded accrued actuarial liability (UAAL) for the ABRSD is estimated to be \$44 million, for the Town of Acton which includes the Acton Public Schools, \$57 million.) John Petersen pointed out that this \$100 million estimate is a projection over a 30 year time frame, and it is extremely difficult to accurately project over that long a period.

AEA President, Marc Lewis felt Mike Gowing's statement was not accurate because pensioners pay for 95% of the pensions. He said that pensions are matched but not by the taxpayers. Mike Gowing said that the BOS is looking at every option possible to save costs.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

The minutes from the APS SC meeting on October 20, 2011 will be reviewed at the next meeting.

**PUBLIC PARTICIPATION** - none

## **REPORTS**

### **6.1 ENROLLMENT REPORT**

Peter Ashton presented the annual Update on School Enrollment Projections 2011, (Report by Peter K. Ashton & Mary Ann Ashton, Innovation & Information Consultants, Inc.). Enrollment as predicted is declining. Enrollment this year is down significantly from last year and more than projected. The number of single family building permits in Acton has been declining for the last several years with a slight increase in the last two years. Boxborough housing permits have been declining since 2002. Turnover of housing has also slowed. Total Acton enrollment is projected to drop 315 students over the next five years (6.6% decline). Total Boxborough enrollment is projected to drop 161 students over the same period (16% decline). See slides.

Marie Altieri commented that we exceeded the 2004 enrollment peak 2 years ago and were at a plateau from 2002 – 2009. Last year the district dropped 60 students and this year it dropped another 60. That is significant and means that kindergarten has gone from 340 students last year to 300 students this year and 6<sup>th</sup> grades have gone from 400 students to 360 this year and 320 next year. Hopefully this will help lower our class sizes, although chapter 70 aid will decline when enrollment declines. Marie reported that our schools' diversity continues to grow. 24% of our Junior High and High School students and 31% of our Elementary School students are Asian as of 10/1/11.

### **6.2 EDUCATION REPORT**

Ed Kaufman, Merriam School Principal, introduced his classroom teacher, Mary Ann Ayers and her assistant Carol Leandro. Together, they gave a wonderful presentation about Merriam's project based learning philosophy. They emphasized that this type of strong community encourages risk taking that leads to learning. Assistants are important/essential to creating a classroom environment that allows that to happen. Getting kids actively involved helps move them up to higher levels of learning. Students take ownership of their education and this supports life long learning. See slides.

A committee member commented that when people can freely chose and engage in activities, they learn best and are happy. This is the beauty of Acton's school choice, that families can find what is best for their children. Ed concluded that all five of our elementary schools are wonderful and the five principals and staff all try to make sure that all students are well attended to according to their learning styles. He reminded the committee that parents chose a school for their family not necessarily for one child.

## **APS SCHOOL COMMITTEE BUSINESS**

### **7.1 Update on Municipal Health Care Reform**

John Petersen reported on the process for the APSC to consider a health insurance plan design change, including the Board of Selectmen meeting on Monday night. He acknowledged that people are worried about this process but encouraged them to look beyond the first year because health care is long term. Time must be taken to formulate a plan that has merit for all the groups involved, without missing any important deadlines. Mike Coppolino said that the sense of the committee is that there not be a rush to judgment. The mere volume of people that will be affected makes it essential that the right decision be made. This was communicated to Mike Gowing, Chair of the Acton Board of Selectmen, in a letter from John Petersen dated 11/4/11 (see packet).

### **7.2 Long Range Strategic Plan Update**

Steve Mills hopes that the Committee will vote on the Long Range Strategic Plan (LRSP) next month. His first budget presentation for FY13 will also be done at that meeting. The LRSP document lays out the work of our districts for the next 3 or 4 years. Once it is voted, the Superintendent will bring it to every meeting to remind people of the Plan.

It was stated that it is difficult to measure social and emotional growth. When asked if there is a curriculum connection to that as well, Deborah Bookis said that this is seen in the way we involve parents and families in our schools, JD Head's work to make our facilities safe, and how every teacher creates a welcoming culture for learning.

Dr. Mills stated that the values were prioritized by the Steering committee. The discussion of the first and second ones has been much reviewed. Our High School principal strongly agrees about the importance of the top value being about social and emotional wellbeing. A family's job is to teach social and emotional skills, but it is also a job of the schools, not just teaching academic skills. Mike Coppolino asked that the demographics survey done several years ago be reviewed. He also suggested that a regular parent/staff survey be considered, as well as a post-high school survey. Alixe Callen is gathering data from the Class of 2007 now that they have graduated from college. As the Long Range Strategic Plan was being developed, it was agreed to use any existing surveys, including the Youth Risk Behavior Survey.

Dennis Bruce asked why it is not until years 4 and 5 that it is stated what students will do with the technology purchased in years 1 – 3 (goal 4). One of the challenges is that curriculum has to dictate the technology plan and infrastructure must be in place. Xuan Kong asked for a more proactive action plan in goal 5 because financial resources must exist to achieve the values. He suggested that some wording be added about what will be achieved at the end of these 5 years of the Long Range Strategic Plan.

7.3 Update on Meetings with the PTO Co-Chairs and Principals re Before/After School Programs  
Steve Mills reported on his recent meeting with the elementary school PTO co-chairs and principals regarding their before/after school programs. He stated that, "The miracle of Acton is that we preserve the uniqueness of each of the schools. The schools are remarkably different, not better, not worse, just different." He is on a data gathering mission right now and will be very clear when any decisions are being made so all involved will be aware. He will probably bring recommendations to the School Committee in February. Mike Coppolino thanked all of the parents for their input.

#### 7.4 ALG Report

Xuan Kong reported on the 11/10/11 ALG meeting. The next meeting is 12/8/11.

ALG members were asked to get input from their boards on:

1. What is appropriate level of reserve use?

The School Committee felt that the projected use of \$2 million is adequate.

2. Tax Levy Capacity \$239K - Should we "catch up" and tax to the max?

The sense of the committee was that with reserves being at a decent level, it would not be prudent to tax higher, especially with assumptions being made very early in the fiscal year.

3. OPEB (Other Post-Employment Benefits) - What should be our plan of action?

It was suggested that the committee read the report in FYI and comment next month at the Joint AB SC meeting. A difference in this report is that the health insurance inflation is at 6 or 7 % and then it drops. This is a different health insurance projection from a different report by the same group. John Petersen suggested that the Committee should take some action about establishing an OPEB account but it will take time to sort through the details and it is too early to specify numbers. Don Aicardi agreed saying that it is very complicated but that members need to start reading the material. An OPEB account would be set up by the Town as another reserve account set up to pay the pension liabilities.

#### 7.5 Acton Finance Committee Report

Xuan Kong reported that FinCom met Nov 8 and took a vote that Ch 69 be invoked to start the process, acknowledging that there are many questions and clearer information was needed for all. Fincom

unanimously recommended to the BOS and the school districts that they approve Chapter 69 and then have a 45 day period before anything was implemented so information could be distributed and discussion could take place. John Petersen asked what the role of the various bodies with respect to each other is. While well intended, he disagreed with the fincom motion specifying approval of Chapter 69 and a timeframe.

#### 7.6 Health Trust Report

Cash flow is currently negative. Trustees voted to stay at 4%. The Segal Report was reviewed at the last HIT meeting. Looking at the assumptions is very important when reading these reports. HIT recommends that the groups review plans, but not necessarily via Chapter 69. They voted not to use GIC. All of the Health Insurance information is posted on the website.

#### 7.7 Budget Update

Don Aicardi presented the FY' 12 First Quarter Financial Status Report. APSD ended the first quarter with a \$246,725 projected year end fund balance. Highlights included:

- Health Insurance is one of the most complex issues in the budget.
- Circuit breaker reimbursement estimated to be 40%, ended up at 65%.
- Support staff and Teaching salaries are combined and projected to be a deficit, although health insurance savings are expected to offset this
- Lowering salary accounts by factoring in retirements/staff changes, has reduced salary surpluses so far this year.
- Lowering salary accounts utilizing vacancy factor savings has successfully lowered the annual deficit in the substitute account.
- Utility savings have already been anticipated by re-allocating \$92,000 towards the hiring of the two positions last June.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter Report will be done in February, 2012. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter Report will be in May. Don wants to do a facilities study by an outside consultant to stay on top of these needs. Xuan asked to be kept informed about this as facilities is important to the Regionalization Study Committee. Don was complimented on his work and the new quarterly reporting system. A question was asked about the financial software and technology used by the Central Office. Currently, MUNIS, Powerschool and Filemaker Pro are being used. Steve Mills explained Budget Saturday and said that the Committee should make a decision on the proposed date of January 21, 2012 next month.

#### 7.8 Policy Updates

7.8.1 Revised: Use of School Facilities (File: KF) – **SECOND READING** – *Kim McOsker*

7.8.1.1 Proposed Policy Revision (approved 10/6/11 by ABRSC)

Xuan Kong moved and it was seconded and unanimously

**VOTED:** that the proposed Use of School Facilities policy be approved

7.8.1.2 Draft Use of School Facilities Procedures & Fees (File: KF-R)

Suggestions made at the last meeting will be incorporated and the committee will review these procedures at their next meeting.

7.8.2 New: Advertising in Schools (File: KHB) – **SECOND READING** – *Marie Altieri*

7.8.2.1 Proposed new policy and procedures

It was agreed that the policy subcommittee will meet before the 12/1/11 SC meeting and the School Committee will consider this policy and procedures at their December meeting.

#### 7.9 2012-2013 School Calendar

7.9.1 Proposed Calendar dated 11/14/11 – **FIRST READING**

If Labor Day is Sept 5 or later, then the Committee could decide to start before or after Labor Day. Last year's survey said that 2/3 of the teachers prefer starting before Labor Day. Their

contract was changed to say that if Labor Day is before Sept 3, they can start either before or after. It is the School Committees' choice. It was suggested that a list of all holidays be added to the calendar to increase awareness in our community. Because Principals send lists and reminders to their families about many holidays, it was decided to let the schools continue this on their own.

7.10 Recommendation to Accept Gifts to the Merriam School

It was moved, seconded and unanimously

**VOTED:** to accept a gift of \$88,000 from the Merriam School PTO to fund salaries for classroom assistants (grades 1-6) for 18 hours per week from Sept 2011-2012.

It was moved, seconded and unanimously

**VOTED:** to accept a gift of \$92,776 from the Merriam Mornings/After Hours Program to fund costs associated with their programs.

7.11 Recommendation to Accept Gift from the Friends of the Acton Libraries

It was moved, seconded and unanimously

**VOTED:** to accept a gift of \$12,000 from the Friends of the Acton Libraries to the five elementary school libraries.

**FOR YOUR INFORMATION**

Hot showers and meals were offered to local residents during last months' snow storm and were very much appreciated by the community.

**NEXT MEETINGS**

December 15, 7:30 pm APS SC at R.J. Grey Junior High School Library

December 1, 7:30 pm ABR SC at R.J. Grey Junior High School Library JT at 7:00

The meeting was adjourned at 10:56 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Beth Petr

List of Documents Used:

See agenda attached

Long Range Strategic Plan Goal 4 - Revision to addendum draft 11/17/11

## ACTON PUBLIC SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING

Library  
Merriam School

November 17, 2011  
7:00 p.m.

---

### AGENDA with Addendum

- 1.0 CALL TO ORDER
- 2.0 CHAIRPERSON'S INTRODUCTION (7:00)
  - 2.1 Update from Mike Gowing, Board of Selectmen Chair, re Health Insurance Reform Ch 69
- 3.0 STATEMENT OF WARRANT
- 4.0 APPROVAL OF MINUTES
  - 4.1 APS SC October 20, 2011 (*next meeting*)
- 5.0 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION
- 6.0 REPORTS (7:15)
  - 6.1 ENROLLMENT – *Peter Ashton, Innovation & Information Consultants, Inc. (addendum)*
    - 6.1.1 Update on School Enrollment Projections 2011, Peter K. Ashton & Mary Ann Ashton, Innovation & Information Consultants, Inc. (IIC)
    - 6.1.2 2011 Enrollment Projections, IIC
    - 6.1.3 Oct 1, 2011 Monthly Enrollment Report, APS/ABRS
  - 6.2 EDUCATION - *Ed Kaufman, Merriam School Principal (7:45)*  
*with Mary Ann Ayers and Carol Leandro*
- 7.0 APS SCHOOL COMMITTEE BUSINESS
  - 7.1 Update on Municipal Health Care Reform – *John Petersen (8:00)*
    - APSC to consider a Design Change Process
      - 7.1.1 Letter from John Petersen, Chair ABRSC, to Mike Gowing, Chair Acton BOS
  - 7.2 Long Range Strategic Plan Update – *Steve Mills, draft dated 11/16/11 (8:15)*
  - 7.3 Update on Meetings with the PTO Co-Chairs and Principals re Before/After School Programs – *Steve Mills (oral) (8:45)*
  - 7.4 ALG Report – *Xuan Kong (8:55)*
    - 7.4.1 11/10/11 meeting materials with draft minutes
  - 7.5 Acton Finance Committee Report – *Xuan Kong (oral) (9:05)*
  - 7.6 Health Trust Report – *John Petersen (oral)*
  - 7.7 Budget Update – *Don Aicardi (9:10)*
    - 7.7.1 FY'12 First Quarter Financial Status Report
      - 7.7.1.1 Memo and Chart
      - 7.7.1.2 Presentation Slides
    - 7.7.2 FY'13 Update
  - 7.8 Policy Updates (9:25)
    - 7.8.1 Revised: Use of School Facilities (File: KF) – **SECOND READING** – *Kim McOsker*
      - 7.8.1.1 Proposed Policy Revision (approved 10/6/11 by ABRSC)
      - 7.8.1.2 Draft Use of School Facilities Procedures & Fees (File: KF-R)
    - 7.8.2 New: Advertising in Schools (File: KHB) – **SECOND READING** – *Marie Altieri*
      - 7.8.2.1 Proposed new policy and procedures
      - 7.8.2.2 Examples from other communities
  - 7.9 2012-2013 School Calendar – *Steve Mills (9:35)*

7.9.1 Proposed Calendar dated 11/14/11 – **FIRST READING**

7.9.2 DESE list of holiday observances in MA

7.10 Recommendation to Accept Gift from Merriam School PTO and Merriam Mornings/After Hours Program Funding – **VOTE** – *Steve Mills (9:45)*

7.11 Recommendation to Accept \$12,000 Gift from the Friends of the Acton Libraries – **VOTE** – *Steve Mills (addendum)*

8.0 **FOR YOUR INFORMATION** (9:50)

8.1 ESL Student Enrollment Report – November 1

8.2 FY'12 Monthly APS Financial Reports (*addendum*)

8.3 Student Enrollment Numbers/Class Size Info – November 1 (*addendum*)

8.4 Dismissal Schedule for November 23<sup>rd</sup>

8.5 Actuarial Valuation and Review of Other Postemployment Benefits (OPEB) as of 12/31/10 Report dated 10/18/11, The Segal Group, Inc.

8.6 Correspondence from the Community (*additional in addendum*)

8.7 School Newsletters

Conant Crier: <http://conant.ab.mec.edu/pto/newsletter.html>

Douglas Digest: <http://douglas.ab.mec.edu/pto/digest.html>

Gates Gazette: <http://gatesschoolpto.org/gazette>

McCarthy-Towne Bulletin: <http://www.mctptso.org/bulletin/>

Merriam Comm News: <http://www.merriampto.org/Merriam>

Acton Public School Preschool: <http://ab.mec.edu/Preschool/index.htm>

9.0 **NEXT MEETINGS**

December 15, 7:30 pm APS SC at R.J. Grey Junior High School Library

December 1, 7:30 pm ABR SC at R.J. Grey Junior High School Library

**ADJOURNMENT** (10:00)