

ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE (ABRSC)  
MEETING APPROVED MINUTES

Administration Building Auditorium  
15 Charter Road, Acton

December 16, 2021  
7:00 p.m.

To view the meeting (no participation): <https://www.youtube.com/actontv1>

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Members Present: Evelyn Abayaah-Issah, Ben Bloomenthal, Kyra Cook, Ginny Kremer, Amy Krishnamurthy, Adam Klein, Tessa McKinley, John Petersen, Andrew Schwartz, Yebin Wang  
Members Absent: Nora Shine  
Others: Marie Altieri, Deb Bookis, Peter Light, Beth Petr, Dave Verdolino

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**CALL TO ORDER (7:00)**

The ABRSC was called to order by Chairperson Adam Klein at 7:01 p.m.

Adam stated that the meeting was being recorded and would be posted on Acton TV's website at [actontv.org](http://actontv.org).

a. Chairperson's Welcome - *Adam Klein*

Adam began by sharing some observations from the previous meeting. The Committee had then, and again this evening, a difficult decision regarding the school calendar. He apologized if members of the committee didn't feel as if they had the opportunity to contribute to the conversation last time. He will strive to make sure that everyone gets the chance to speak because it is in the open meetings that members get to discuss and deliberate together. He noted that it is the diversity of experiences that each member brings to the meetings that help the Committee embody the district values of wellness equity and engagement.

b. Public Participation

John Petersen announced that to support planning on the part of the School Committee and the decision-making process of potential candidates, he will not be running for re-election.

Three members of the public expressed disappointment and anger about how public comments made at the previous meeting regarding the mascot retirement decision were received. One of the speakers emphasized again her belief that the Committee planned to get rid of the mascot all along, and asked why the district was using lawyers to keep public records from them.

c. Superintendent's Update - *Peter Light*

Since Thanksgiving break we have had 55 cases of covid which far outpaces our previous numbers. We are still not seeing much in school transmission. The vast majority is spread within families. The take away seems to be that whether you are vaccinated or not, if people are around others without masks, they are getting the virus. State guidance says that the vaccine reduces some side effects so people aren't getting as sick as those who have not been vaccinated. The State

expects the number of cases to climb in January. There is no plan to close schools at the state or AB level because our protocols are working. That said, we will not be relaxing our mask requirements in January as we had previously talked about. Five cases were identified at the High School just this week. Everyone must continue to be cautious.

Of note are the schools' excellent vaccination rates. The elementary schools are over 70% vaccinated. The secondary schools (Jr High and High School) have a 92% vaccination rate. Even if we see transmission, the effects should be less severe than before the vaccine.

Mr. Light thanked Dawn Bentley, all of our school nurses and the Town Public Health workers who recently ran four vaccine clinics for our younger students.

Dr. Chris Whitbeck has announced his retirement as the Douglas School Principal. Mr. Light thanked him for his 30 years of service. Lucia Sullivan will continue as Interim Principal until the end of the school year. An update on the new search will be given at the next School Committee meeting.

## **ONGOING BUSINESS (7:10)**

### **d. CASE Collaborative Capital Plan 2022 - *Peter Light***

- i. Recommendation to Approve the Establishment of a "capital reserve fund" in conformance with the provisions of 603 CMR 50.07 (10) - **VOTE**

CASE has developed a plan to improve learning spaces for students at its Post Office Square (Acton) location. In order to fund this plan, each CASE member school committee must first approve a Capital Reserve Fund and the CASE Collaborative Capital Plan. District Superintendents serve as the CASE Board of Directors. If a majority of member districts approve the plan, the CASE Board can then vote to fund and execute the plan.

John Petersen moved to approve the establishment of a "capital reserve fund" in conformance with the provisions of 603 CMR 50.07 (10). Ben Bloomenthal seconded the motion.

A question was asked regarding the financial implications of this decision. CASE has a reserve and this money could be sent back to the districts, but this vote would instead use it to build the gym and playground. CASE is allowed a 25% cap of their operating budget. They are currently at 37% so districts will get some back, even with this approval.

The ABRSC unanimously **VOTED** to approve the motion.

- ii. Recommendation to Approve the December 3rd, 2021 C.A.S.E. Collaborative Capital Plan - **VOTE**

John Petersen moved, Ginny Kremer seconded and it was unanimously,

**VOTED:** to approve the December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2021 CASE Collaborative Capital Plan.

- e. FY23 School Calendar - Second Reading - **Possible VOTE** - *Peter Light (7:25)*
  - i. Four (4) FY23 School Calendar Drafts for Discussion
  - ii. FYI: ABRSC Calendar Subcommittee Report, November 30, 2018

Mr. Light acknowledged that this is not a simple decision. Based on feedback from the committee and community, four possible drafts were shared. #1 was the original from the previous meeting. #2 added Diwali, Lunar New Year and Eid al Fitr as no school days (noting Lunar New Year and Eid al Fitr fall on weekends next year) and moved the Professional Day from Election Day to Thursday 11/10/21 to provide more continuity to the school week. #3 added only Diwali and moved the Professional Day. #4 had only federal holidays as no school and was for discussion only.

Mr. Light recommended Draft #2, which provides for an expansion of “no school days” in recognition of the diverse cultures of the community. He would like to try it for a couple of years and see how it works. It is important that all of our communities are seen and heard. He noted the importance of the District supporting strong school attendance while simultaneously recognizing the diversity of our community.

School Committee members’ comments included:

- A member who has been on the Committee for 11 years noted that the school holidays have been discussed often. In 2016, she advocated strongly to get all of the holidays recognized as days off.
- All the emails from the public were appreciated.
- Equity is also socio economic. Our school calendar is incredibly difficult for anyone with a job who cannot easily take a day off. Challenge Success gave us all kinds of things to work. While letting people be seen is important we don’t recognize that things beyond academics are also important.
- Making up the homework/tests for these days off adds to students’ stress and mental health issues. This is another kind of equity.
- In favor of #2, but when you have young kids, the early release days are disastrous for single parents especially regarding child care. It’s important that as we recognize these holidays, we should try to make accommodations for child care coverage and transportation. We need to support these families.
- Teachers should explain what the holidays are about so kids know.
- Nothing is more critical to student success than family support. The need for child care is important.
- Regarding making up work, we need to recognize that people can do different amounts of work. Not everyone is wired the same way.

- Giving these religious holidays off is how we as a district can recognize and contribute to the whole person. It tells people they are seen and appreciated.
- Members discussed whether to keep the holiday names on the calendar and “say out loud that this is why we are taking it off”, vs. not listing them on the first page but being inclusive and keeping them all listed together on the back page.
- We may see a compromise to the continuity of learning at the beginning and end of the year depending on the no school days.
- By recognizing all holidays the Committee is “kicking the can” because a future School Committee will have to decide when a school year starts too soon or goes too long.

Many members of the public, including students, spoke in favor of adding the holidays to the calendar as a way of showing how proud we are of being a diverse community. A comment was made that recognizing someone’s holiday is “about being seen” and shows that “everyone is welcome here”. Mr. Light and the Committee were thanked for bringing Draft 2 forward because it has been difficult at times to keep the holidays on the calendar.

Kyra Cook moved, Ben Bloomenthal seconded and it was unanimously,

**VOTED:** to approve FY23 Calendar Draft #2 with an amendment to include all of the observed holidays, including those that fall on the weekends, on page one of the calendar.

f. Subcommittee and Member Reports (8:10)

i. Policy - *Nora Shine (12/8/21)*- none

ii. Budget - *Kyra Cook (12/6/21)*

Members are learning what they can do to aid in the budget process. Peter Light and Dave Verdolino were thanked for their “heroic” efforts to pursue state and other funding sources and reimbursements.

iii. Community Engagement - *Andrew Schwartz (12/3/21)*

Engagement Policy, Research Plan

- Open meeting law compliance will guide our policy
- Potentially disseminating information via a structure that will focus on a Hub and multiple distribution threads
- Utilization of un-anonymous content

Reviewed Similar District Policy Implementations

- Directed research into school district policies from similar districts
- Additional research into Open Meeting Law and Social Media

Identified need for Policy Committee Social Media Discussion Alignment

- Goal is to allow the coordination of social media policy between the two committees

Next Steps

- Research into Open Meeting Law – a brief presentation
- Research into similar districts – brief presentation
- Map out our coordinates for the social media policy

Next meeting: Friday, December 17, 2021 at 10:30 am

iv. Capital Improvement - *Yebin Wang (12/14/21)*

JD Head gave an overview of FY22 capital projects progress and FY23 budget plan. The Capital Improvements website is being worked on. Two potential projects were discussed: renovations to the Administration Building and a districtwide phone system upgrade. It is believed that none of the Admin Building issues require FY23 action. The subcommittee is working on a plan/funding strategy for the non-Douglas-Gates phone system upgrade. Next meeting is Jan 11

v. Health Insurance Trust (HIT) – *John Petersen (12/8/21)*

Cook & Co. presented the cash flow showing a YTD loss of \$0.2 million. The projected loss for FY22 is \$1.5 million. The Treasurer's report for Q1 was consistent with the reported cash flow. Frank Serreti representing Powers and Sullivan presented the draft audit report. For FY21 the Trust had expenses of \$20.3 million an increase of 16% while revenues of \$17.5 million increased by 7%. This resulted in a net loss of \$2.8 million and reduced the unrestricted assets of the Trust to \$3.1 million. Claims incurred but not received (IBNR) were stable. The Trustees will review the management discussion before finalizing the report at the January meeting.

The Trustees followed a budgetary rate recommendation process consisting of reviewing:

- the past five years of Trust performance,
- current financials and reserve,
- Cook & Co projected gain/loss based on a 10 % increase in rates, and
- comparison of FY22 HIT rates to rates in other self-insured plans.

Based on carrier and Trust actuarial experience, the Trustees voted to increase the rate for HSA plans to 85% of the HMO rate up from 82% of the HMO rate. The Trust voted budgetary guidance for the Town and District of a 10% increase in the weighted average of rates for FY23 although only in the most optimistic scenario is 10% projected to be a breakeven rate. The Trustees will vote final rates in January.

The Trustees discussed the chair's draft HIT report for the Town of Acton annual report. Next meeting: January 20th at 8:15am.

vi. Acton Leadership Group (ALG) – *John Petersen, Kyra Cook (12/16/21)*

YTD revenue and expense are aligned with budget expectations for both the school and the town. The schools are showing some expense favorability relative to budget associated with hiring challenges.

The ALG model has been updated to include the Town Manager's budget proposal, \$39 million, a 3.35% increase in the municipal budget. The Town Manager also issued a Capital Plan for Acton. The model was updated with the current school "dashboard" budget which results in an Acton assessment of \$70.5 million a 4.46% increase. Peter commented that the schools were working to reduce this number although this is very difficult because COVID related revenue loss in school revolving funds is causing cost to shift from revolving entities to the general budget. The Minuteman assessment for FY23 is about \$3 million, an increase of \$0.8 million over FY22. John commented that we need to keep pressure on Minuteman with respect to per pupil costs and as a District we need to retain students who will be best served by the District's programs. As it stands, the Acton deficit is \$1.8 million. Acton is at the Proposition 2 1/2 levy limit so no additional revenue is available via taxation without an override. There was a discussion of Acton community reserves across all types of accounts (free cash, E&D, capital, revolving, HIT). Reserve use will be a standing ALG agenda item for this year.

Peter commented that the District is facing a perfect storm with respect to our ineligibility for various programs (ARPA, early education ..... ) because of our status as a school district and the ways in which school districts are treated differently than schools. David Martin commented that maybe there are some school capital projects that can be funded with federal monies. John added that Boxborough had taken a pragmatic approach to ARPA by requesting all funds as revenue replacement thereby freeing general funds for distribution to town and school projects.

Acton voted final FY22 property tax rates. Although there was some shift of the tax burden from commercial property to residential property, the shift was modest as both residential and commercial valuations showed strong increases.

vii. *Mascot Screening - Peter Light*

Ben Bloomenthal, Andrew Schwartz and Peter reviewed the 17 community members who expressed interest in serving on this subcommittee. They also reached out to the Athletic Director and Performing Arts Director, many alumni, community members, parents, reps from youth sports, and people with professional experience in branding. Additional community members were added to the group, as well as a rep from the coaching staff. Several students will participate in this subcommittee and bring information to and from the Student Working Group. First meeting is 12/22/21. Everyone looks forward to getting started.

Martin Benson asked where the call for applications was posted. The notice was on our homepage and both Towns sent it out on their own email lists. New applications were no longer being accepted. A student

asked about the separate student working group and how that was publicized. Mr. Light explained that information was sent out several times to High School students. He will forward the emails to her.

- g. Consent Agenda - **VOTE** - *Adam Klein*
  - i. Approval of ABRSC Meeting Minutes of 12/02/21- *Adam Klein*
  - ii. Approval of Donations Valued over \$1,000 - ABR PTSO - *Adam Klein*

Amy Krishnamurthy moved, Kyra Cook seconded and it was unanimously, **VOTED**: to approve the consent agenda.

- h. Statement of Warrants/Recommendation to Approve – **VOTE** – *Adam Klein*

Tessa McKinley moved, Kyra Cook seconded and it was unanimously **VOTED**: to approve the warrants (see memo language)

#### **FYI**

- Monthly Student Enrollment, December 1, 2021
- [This Month in the Division of Open Government](#), November 2021
- NEXT Community Coffee: Wednesday, January 12 at 7:00 p.m. via zoom

#### **ADJOURN**

At 8:23 p.m., Kyra Cook moved, Ben Bloomenthal seconded and it was unanimously, **VOTED**: that the ABRSC be adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,  
Beth Petr

List of documents used: see agenda

#### **NEXT MEETINGS:**

ABRSC on January 13 and 27 at 7:00 p.m. in the Admin Building Auditorium