

ACTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

Library
McCarthy-Towne School

September 21, 2006
7:30 p.m.

Members Present: John Ryder, Marie Altieri, Jonathan Chinitz, Michael Coppolino,
Terry Lindgren, Sharon Smith McManus
Also Present: William Ryan, George Frost, Susan Horn, Elizabeth Huber,
Sharon Summers, citizens and press

The meeting was called to order at 7:35 p.m. by John Ryder, Chairperson.

CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION

STATEMENT OF WARRANT

Warrant #2007-06 in the amount of \$159,746.75 was signed by the chairperson and circulated to the rest of the Committee for signatures.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of August 3, 2006 were approved as read.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - None

EDUCATION REPORT - McCarthy-Towne School

- Marcia FitzGerald, principal, introduced staff and parents present. She first shared short statements of what teachers and students are proud of at McT.
- To address how changing Acton demographics have affected the school, several parents and staff members reflected on their experiences.
- Susan Silberberg, teacher, commented that the changes she has seen have to do with another demographic change, i.e., more and more kids have two working parents, kids are leading longer, structured lives, and are in organized care for longer periods. This impacts the classroom. Kids need more help in social interactions, and it is harder for them to solve small problems. These skills are as important as academic ones.
 - Jayanthi Sampathkumaran, a parent from India, said it had been difficult for parents to fit in. They have to adapt from totally different school structures in India where there is no parent involvement. Indian parents are intimidated when asked to help, and we need to bridge the gap, so parents understand. She noted that children have an easier time fitting in. It's OK to be different.
 - Carolyn Imperato, parent/staff, said she was happy to have the diversity and saw differences as positives. She admitted that the language barrier did make communication between parents difficult.
 - Debbie Hess, teacher, said her mission for every year is 'who you are?' Students are each individual stories.
 - Janet Chinitz, parent, said that, as a stay-at-home mom, she is everybody's emergency phone number. Class lists with many different countries' names showed the ethnic diversity. School choice is often made in order to join the largest group of your nationality.
 - Steve Lowe, parent, commented that his son enjoys the diversity, and it allows students to practice what we teach about accepting differences.
 - Astrid Trostorff, parent/staff, noted some changes: many families with two working parents, more single parents, more stepfamilies, etc. Economics are harder for some.

School Committee comments:

- Marie Altieri felt we could do better in parent outreach. McT has a coordinator, which is great. What can we do to make it easier for immigrant parents to adjust?
- Terry Lindgren asked for some data on economic differences in Acton, as he thinks there is a wide disparity. John Ryder suggested using the US Census. Marcia FitzGerald said we can see how many families are on free and reduced lunch. We have only a few requests for financial assistance for field trips. Astrid Trostorff said there is a lot of need.
- Bill Ryan noted that the Leadership Conference in July discussed diversity and school choice. Twenty percent of our elementary population is Asian. It varies in each school - should this be a concern? Would it be a problem if one school became 50% Asian? He asked that this discussion be continued in the schools.
- Several people commented that the demographics will work themselves out, without any intentional/artificial changes in how school choice works.
- John Ryder felt that the parents need our support - the kids are OK. Marcia agreed, and would like to see something systemwide, perhaps a forum to share ideas to help parents. Sharon McManus and Bill Ryan will explore some ideas.
John Ryder asked what McT would wish for if more money was available. She responded that she would ask for more assistant time, SPED and regular ed. The biggest challenge this year: a new SPED program in primary grades at McT and incorporating it into McT community.

1. ALG Report

- Mike Coppolino reported on the most recent meeting. They discussed capital planning, the new fire station in North Acton, NESWEC funds. He mentioned that we saved \$38M in interest on our building projects, due to timely state reimbursement. The 990 hours requirement will have a budget impact, and the administration is coming up with solutions.
- Marie Altieri asked for a correction in the ALG draft minutes of 9/13/06. She also noted that we need to think about and prepare a financial piece for Nov. 20th State of the Town meeting packet.

2. FY'06 Final Budget Update

- Bill Ryan reported that we are returning \$93K to free cash.

3. FY'07 Budget

- Bill Ryan noted that we are in good shape, but said it is still early in the year.

4. Capital Planning

- George Frost reported that we hope to present something at the state of the town meeting. Internally, we will look at the schools' lists, and how to provide for greater capital needs, such as technology within the budget itself.
- Bill Ryan said he hoped to move forward with these issues - we have roof problems, etc. We have a responsibility to take these items to the town, and hopefully do them this year.
- Marie Altieri said we need to look at more parking at the outlying schools.

5. Health Insurance Trust

- Marie Altieri reported that the first months were very positive. There will be some changes for retirees because of the end of the First Seniority program in January 2007. The trust will be evaluating new plans. Letters are being sent to retirees, and a Health Fair will be held.

6. Conant Principal Search

- George Frost reported that the search committee has met twice, and will meet again in October. They plan to schedule interviews in mid-January for finalists, with an appointment by Feb. 1, '07 J

NEW BUSINESS**1. FY'07 Staffing Update**

- George Frost reported that we are fully hired.

2. Recommendation to Approve the Continued Operation of the Victor School

It was moved (Coppolino), seconded (Lindgren) and unanimously

VOTED: To approve the continued operation of the Victor School in Acton.

3. Recommendation to Accept Gift from Douglas School PTO

It was moved (Coppolino), seconded (McManus) and unanimously

VOTED: To accept, with gratitude, the generous gift of \$38,763 from the Douglas School PTO.

The gift will be used to fund classroom, library and technology assistants.

4. Recommendation to Accept Gift from Douglas School PTO

It was moved (Chinitz), seconded (Coppolino) and unanimously

VOTED: To accept, with gratitude, the generous gift of \$1,000 from the Douglas School PTO.

The gift will be used to fund the new Japanese Language Program at the school.

5. Recommendation to Accept Gift from Gates School PTO

It was moved (Coppolino), seconded (Chinitz) and unanimously

VOTED: To accept, with gratitude, the generous gift of \$59,579 from the Gates School PTO.

The gift will be used to fund classroom, computer and media assistants.

6. Recommendation to Accept Gift from McCarthy-Towne School PTSO

It was moved (Lindgren), seconded (Coppolino) and unanimously

VOTED: To accept, with gratitude, the generous gift of \$98,000 from the McCarthy-Towne School PTSO.

The gift will be used to fund classroom assistants, art integration specialist, parent involvement coordinator and additional library hours.

7. Community Preservation Act (CPA) Proposals

- Bill Ryan noted that the CPC is accepting proposals. He was not aware of any elementary school projects.

8. Recommendation to Approve McCarthy-Towne Overnight Field Trip

It was moved (McManus), seconded (Lindgren) and unanimously

VOTED: To approve the McCarthy-Towne field trip to Groton, MA on October 18-20, 2006.

9. Recommendation to Accept the Parker Damon Building Project

It was moved (Chinitz), seconded (Lindgren) and unanimously

VOTED: That the Acton Public School Committee having had presented to it information regarding the status and completion of the new Parker Damon Building (the "Project"), to house the McCarthy-Towne and Merriam schools, and the settlement of the contract disputes with the general contractor therefore; and having had submitted to it by the Building Committee (who has by delegation of authority from this School Committee overseen such construction process) a request to officially turn over the Project to the School Committee, and after due deliberation and consideration of the same, hereby votes (with thanks from this School Committee for such hard work and efforts) to accept the project from the Building Committee and to henceforth end all of the

Building Committee's authority with respect to the Project and the Parker Damon Building.

10. Recommendation to Approve School District Goals, 2006-07

It was moved (McManus), seconded (Lindgren) and unanimously

VOTED: To approve the 2006-07 School District Goals as presented.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

- George Frost referred to the September APS school enrollment numbers. To date, we have enrolled 2533 students, K-6. The projection was 2547. The Kindergarten class is 38 less than projected.
- Bill Ryan participated today in the Douglas School's Walk for Peace. The Superintendent referred to several other items.
- Regarding the report from the MA School Business Authority, we will file a request for reimbursement for capital projects as soon as possible.

ISSUES FOR THE COMMITTEE

- Jonathan Chinitz and Terry Lindgren will represent the School Committee on the Acton Memorial Library's long range planning committee.
- Douglas Parking issue - There was concern about the legality of parking along Elm Street. As the street is very narrow, when cars are parked, there is a safety issue. There are No Parking signs, which have not been enforced. For big school events, the town has agreed that the No Parking signs will be covered. At other times, no parking will be enforced. Bill will work with the Town Manager about drop off/pick up times. All outlying schools don't have enough parking, one reason being the increase in support staff. Bill Ryan said we need to look at resurfacing, and how to increase space. Marie Altieri asked for a report on feasibility and range of cost. It was noted that the Douglas School parking lot is open after school for fields and BB courts.
- Wastewater resources committee: John Ryder and JD Head attended the meeting. It will affect Douglas and Gates schools. The chair urged the public to familiarize themselves with the plan.
- All-Day Kindergarten - a parent has expressed concern about the high cost of program. This issue will be discussed at budget time.
- Town Elections: Terry Lindgren asked that we write a letter thanking the town for moving the elections from Conant to the Junior High. Marie Altieri also felt that we need something in the Beacon to explain this change to the public. Jonathan Chinitz suggested a joint note from the chairs of selectmen and school committee to the Beacon. George Frost commented that we will see how it goes - there will be crowded periods when school is starting and ending. John Ryder suggested sending home a letter to junior high parents asking them to try not to drop off/pickup that day. Marie Altieri and Terry Lindgren will strategize about this.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

At 9:35 p.m. it was moved, seconded and unanimously

VOTED: To go into executive session under Chapter 39, Section 23 B, paragraph 3 to discuss strategies relative to collective bargaining, and paragraph 6 to consider purchase of real property. Each member was polled individually. All members voted in the affirmative to go into executive session for the stated purpose.

The Committee returned to open session at 10:20 p.m. and adjourned.

NEXT MEETING: October 19, 7:30 pm, at Douglas School

Respectfully submitted,
Sarah T. Lawton, Secretary