

SPECIAL BROOKLINE SCHOOL BOARD

MARCH 16, 2021

MEETING MINUTES

A special meeting of the Brookline School Board was conducted on Tuesday, March 16, 2021 at 6:01 p.m.

Kenneth Haag, Chairman, presided:

School Board Members Participating: Erin Sarris, Vice Chairman
Karen Jew, Secretary
Rebecca Howie
Alison Marsano

School Board Members Absent:

Also Participating: Andrew Corey, Superintendent
Gina Bergskaug, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction
Bob Thompson, Assistant Superintendent of Student Services
Donna Smith, Assistant Business Administrator
Daniel Molinari, Principal, Richard Maghakian Memorial School

Due to the COVID-19/Coronavirus crisis, and in accordance with Governor Sununu's [Emergency Order #12](#) pursuant to [Executive Order 2020-04](#) (extended by Executive Order 2021-02), this Board is authorized to meet electronically.

As stated on the agenda, the meeting was aired live via [Zoom](#) (Meeting ID: 936 5699 7014 / Passcode: 902519).

Each member of the Board was asked to state, for the record, where they were, why their attendance in person was not reasonably practical, who, if anyone, was with them, and whether or not they were able to hear the proceedings.

Kenneth Haag

Stated he was participating electronically from home, attendance in person was not reasonably practical due to COVID-19, he was alone in the room he was in, and could hear the proceedings.

Erin Sarris

Stated she was participating electronically from home, attendance in person was not reasonably practical due to COVID-19, she was alone in the room she was in, and could hear the proceedings.

Karen Jew

Stated she was participating electronically from home, attendance in person was not reasonably practical due to COVID-19 restrictions, she was alone in the room she was in, and could hear the proceedings.

Rebecca Howie

Stated she was participating electronically from home, attendance in person was not reasonably practical due to COVID-19, she was alone in the room she was in, and could hear the proceedings.

Alison Marsano

Stated she was participating electronically from her car, attendance in person was not reasonably practical due to COVID-19, she was alone in her car, and could hear the proceedings.

Chairman Haag spoke of the special meeting conducted by the Planning Board concerning the proposed 80-unit workforce housing project, and the desire for the School Board to meet to discuss the issue in advance of this Thursday's scheduled Planning Board meeting.

The Organizational meeting of the Brookline School will be conducted at the regular March meeting.

AGENDA ADJUSTMENTS - None

PUBLIC INPUT

Pete D'Agostino, 9 Louis Drive

Asked if the Board would provide the opportunity for reactionary input to its discussion. Chairman Haag responded that the Board would look to accommodate public input.

Eric Pauer, 12 Westview Road

Spoke of test scores shared in January and the number of students that fell in the middle category of met or nearly met the standard. He is concerned with the impact the workforce housing project would have; particularly given the need for our students to recover from this pandemic and reach the State standard. He believes this will be a challenge if we suddenly have an influx of students. What this would mean educationally for our students is an important consideration.

DISCUSSION

- 80-Unit Workforce Housing Proposal

Chairman Haag commented on the Planning Board meeting conducted last Thursday during which Mr. D'Agostino shared a presentation outlining various concerns. There are four Petition Warrant Articles that will be reviewed and voted on this coming Thursday. They will be available for a Special Town Meeting on March 28th.

Chairman Haag highlighted some of the bulleted points made during Mr. D'Agostino's presentation to the Planning Board:

- Brookline does not have the ability to provide school services for any increase in student population beyond the current New England School Development Council (NESDEC) projections and even may require some creative problem solving.

- According to the NESDEC projections through 2025-2026 school year, the K-6 projected enrollment in Brookline will go from 572 to 638 (increase of 66 students). Assuming the grade level projections are accurate, this may require 3 additional classroom sections.
- Looking into the next school year, some of our projected class sizes are greater than the specs in Policy IIB and other projected class sizes are just below the specs. (meaning we have just about maxed our sizes in all grades).
- After discussing available spaces within our existing elementary buildings, we would have to reevaluate how our specials are taught. We would have to consider options such as taking back the computer labs, the music classrooms, the art classrooms, and STEM lab. The Curriculum would have to be taught within the classroom rather than in a separate space.

That was feedback Mr. D'Agostino had collected from the Administration. Chairman Haag requested the Administration provide feedback.

Superintendent Corey remarked the NESDEC enrollment projection for next year is 618 students as opposed to the 557 we have this year, which is what we were planning for. The potential development could increase that substantially in the next 18 months, and really create a hardship on our buildings. We would absolutely have to recapture some classrooms at certain grades depending on incoming student enrollment, which would mean there is the potential to have to recapture the computer lab or an art room, etc. Those teachers would go back on carts. That is not uncommon in the world of education, but you typically see that during a time when experiencing a bubble (growth in a particular year/grade). If this housing project were to come to fruition, it would be more of a long-term situation.

Superintendent Corey spoke of having conducted some research around transportation. The district would likely encounter the need to increase the fleet by 1 if not 2 buses. One of those buses would likely be shared with the COOP School District. The other would likely be dedicated to a Brookline route. Typical cost of a bus is \$45,000 - \$55,000 (based on mileage and time on route).

When looking at class sizes, that is a concern given the amount of work done to bring class size numbers down. It is believed the district can manage the increase projected by NESDEC internally, but an influx of potentially almost the same amount (50-60) would have a significant impact. It should also be noted the Board, realizing an increase was on the horizon, based on NESDEC projections, is in the process of finalizing a Facilities Committee to review all these issues. In the regularly scheduled meeting next week, the Business Administrator will have the final recommendations for membership on that committee.

Noted was that the Amherst School District completed a facility study this year and proposed building a new elementary school for one of their K-5 buildings, which is very similar to the Richard Maghakian Memorial School. The price tag for that building came in at \$66 million. This potential influx could also impact the middle school. That would be an issue for the COOP School Board, but the building may need renovations. The potential for that was discussed during conversations of the 7th and 8th grades; in some way, shape, or form, in the coming years, there probably will be the need for some building project.

Superintendent Corey stated he has many concerns around the project. He supports workforce housing, development, and the Planning Board making the decision they believe is in the best interest of the Town, but at the same time, he eves it is the obligation of the Board and Administration to provide the Planning Board with information on the potential impact this could have on the school system and ultimately on taxpayers. Chairman Haag commented on having sat through the special meeting of the Planning Board. It is apparent to him that we have a significant wave on the horizon that could really drive costs and impact the offerings we

provide. The growth in a short amount of time versus short growth that we see year over year, would be impactful for many years to come. He stated his support of a study committee.

Vice Chairman Sarris questioned what the role of a study committee would be. Chairman Haag remarked it would allow the Town time to analyze the overall impact and the Board and Administration the opportunity to provide input. The Amherst study that was cited was conducted over a period of a few years. In Mr. D'Agostino's presentation to the Planning Board, the parallels between our towns were easily seen. That \$55 - \$60 million budget impact is huge. The taxpayer burden to support our schools is something that needs to be studied. He would anticipate there would be a commitment for a multi-pronged approach for the study committee, which would allow time to gather the finite details on offerings, impact to students, the overhaul, and overall change (multi-building impact). We would want to coordinate not only with the Town, but with the COOP School Board as well.

Vice Chairman Sarris questioned the status and what would occur following the results of a study committee.

Pete D'Agostino, 9 Louis Drive

Stated 117 voters filed a petition to establish two things; a moratorium and a study committee. The moratorium would require the recommendation from the Planning Board to have a lot of teeth. Town meeting could pass it, but you would want the recommendation of the Planning Board with a finding. Where it sits now is that a special Town meeting has been called for March 28th. He presented to the Planning Board last week. They will consider their action; did not make a commitment one way or another. They may choose to make a recommendation or not to at their meeting on the 18th. That recommendation, along with the moratorium, will go to Town meeting. His hope is that the Town will pass a moratorium strictly for the purpose of determining what we need to do moving forward, and subsequently establish a Town study committee. Perhaps a liaison from the School Board would be included on the Town-wide study committee, which already includes membership from the Planning Board, Police, Fire, etc. The idea would be to take the next year to evaluate what will be done.

The Town of Amherst took a period of 3 years and incurred a cost of \$150,000 to hire a firm to assist in the process. Although Amherst is a larger town, we have nearly the same student population K-5.

It is his hope the School Board will support a letter to the Brookline Planning Board (prior to their meeting on the 18th) reaffirming what we have heard, what he has said antidotally and what the Superintendent has mentioned.

Member Jew asked for clarification what was being suggested was not that the School Board conduct its own study, but that it supports a Town-wide study group.

Chairman Haag stated it is key that the Brookline and COOP School Districts make known what the impacts would be on the schools (tax dollars, etc.). Member Jew spoke of her support for reviewing the Master Plan in general, e.g., the number of housing permits that are issued yearly, the impact it has on the schools, and understanding information such as the number of years the workforce housing would be phased in over.

Vice Chairman Sarris questioned what the worst-case scenario looks like. If unable to pass a moratorium and there is no study committee, what would the process then look like?

Member Marsano stated the entire process is of concern to her. The potential impact on the schools, taxes, etc. are some of many questions that need to be researched. Considering the budget for the Town is 70% school-based, that is a large concern. She stated her support of a study committee.

Vice Chairman Sarris questioned if there is a legal requirement for the Town to have a certain percentage of workforce housing. Chairman Haag stated there is. His takeaway from last week's meeting was that those obligations are being met now and for the foreseeable future. He added, we are meeting the need, and the cost benefit just does not feel like it is there.

Based on the results of this conversation, Superintendent Corey will draft a letter to be provided to the Planning Board prior to its next meeting.

Pete D'Agostino, 9 Louis Drive

Commented although the study committee is of importance, without a moratorium, the development could potentially move forward. He encouraged the Board, if believing it appropriate, to include in its motion, its thoughts around supporting a moratorium to give the study committee time to do its work.

DELIBERATIONS

- To see what action the Board will take, if any, regarding creating a study committee

MOTION BY MEMBER SARRIS TO SUPPORT THE MORITORIUM ON THE 80-UNIT WORKFORCE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT MOTION SECONDED BY MEMBER MARSANO

A Viva Voce Roll Call was conducted, which resulted as follows:

Yea: Rebecca Howie, Karen Jew, Alison Marsano, Erin Sarris, Kenneth Haag

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Nay:

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MOTION CARRIED

MOTION BY MEMBER MARSANO TO SUPPORT A STUDY COMMITTEE TO REVIEW THE IMPACT OF THE 80-UNIT WORKFORCE HOUSING ON THE BROOKLINE SCHOOL SYSTEM MOTION SECONDED BY MEMBER HOWIE

ON THE QUESTION

Chairman Haag spoke of the desire to ensure this is tied in with the overall study committee. He did not believe specific language was required to ensure that occurs.

A Viva Voce Roll Call was conducted, which resulted as follows:

Yea: Rebecca Howie, Karen Jew, Alison Marsano, Erin Sarris, Kenneth Haag

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Nay:

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MOTION CARRIED

Chairman Haag reminded the Board that the Planning Board would be meeting at 7:00 p.m. on March 18, 2021.

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION BY MEMBER HAAG TO ADJOURN

MOTION SECONDED BY MEMBER SARRIS

A Viva Voce Roll Call was conducted, which resulted as follows:

Yea: Rebecca Howie, Karen Jew, Alison Marsano, Erin Sarris, Kenneth Haag

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Nay:

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MOTION CARRIED

The March 16, 2021 special meeting of the Brookline School Board was adjourned at 6:32 p.m.

Date _____ Signed _____