

# **LEXINGTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING**

**Approved Minutes for Tuesday, March 10, 2015**

**Lexington Town Office Building, Selectmen's Meeting Room  
1625 Massachusetts Avenue**

**PRESENT: Superintendent Dr. Paul Ash, Jessie Steigerwald, School Committee Chair,  
Judith Crocker, Alessandro Alessandrini, William Hurley, Margaret Coppe**

**ABSENT: Abigail Schwartz, Student Representative**

**The minutes were taken by Christine Ashness, Recording Secretary**

**The meeting convened at 7:30pm**

**Call to order and welcome:** Chair Margaret Coppe called the meeting to order, and introduced committee members.

**Public Comments:** None

## **Superintendent's Announcements:**

Dr. Ash: There has been significant progress in the search for an Assistant Superintendent for Finance, Operations and Business. They have contacted 3 candidates and interviews will be held on March 23<sup>rd</sup>, in the afternoon, with 11-member team. Dr. Czajkowski will participate in the committee, along with 4 members from the finance and business offices, a principal, Assistant Superintendent Carol Pilarski, Bob Harris, Dr. Ash, Bill Hurley, and Assistant Town Manager Rob Addelson. The candidates will do an assessment/writing sample and will then interviewed by the team. At the end of the day the committee will narrow down to 1 or 2 candidates. He is hopeful that the process will be completed by end of March/beginning of April. The Director of Technology search is going a bit slower.

Pat Goddard: Spoke about the Bridge School. Last week, an extremely large sound was heard and the school was evacuated. The fire department and the building inspector were called, and they determined it was not a safety problem. The students assembled in gym when it was deemed safe to go inside. Pat Goddard and his team, along with the police and fire departments decided to bring in structural and mechanical engineers. The conclusion was that, as heat from the building was rising, snow and ice went over a bubble on the roof. It collapsed in and created a very loud sound. The building is safe and everyone was fine. Margaret Coppe thanked Principal Meg Colella and her staff for their great response.

## **School Committee Member Announcements:**

Margaret Coppe: Coppe and Alessandro Alessandrini went with members of the Youth at Risk Subcommittee and made a presentation to Selectmen on some of the suggested recommendations from the December report.

Jessie Steigerwald: Recommends we take formal action if we want to support any of the Subcommittee's recommendations as we have only received the report.

Judith Crocker: Crocker thanked Bridge staff and students, and thanked the public safety departments as well. A lot of good people did a lot of good work. Crocker thanked Mary Ellen Dunn, Chief Corr, Captain Joe O’Leary and Pat Goddard for their recent safety in schools presentation at the Site-Based School Council Roundtable. Kindergarten registration is next week. Next Tuesday Kindergarten and grade 1 teachers will participate in the annual leprechaun trap exercise. Crocker expressed heartfelt thanks to Captain Ferro of the Police Department, who has been a valuable member of the Lexington community and a great advocate for our students. He was wonderful to work with, and Crocker sends him best wishes in his future endeavors.

William Hurley: Thanked Jessie Steigerwald for organizing the Mock Town Meeting program. It was a pleasure to participate at Clarke and Hurley thanked all the volunteers who participated in the great program. It was wonderful to see young people in 8th grade engaging in civics.

Jessie Steigerwald: The All-Town Mock Town meeting is Monday. They are short a Board of Selectmen member and Steigerwald welcomed Dr. Ash to participate if he is available. Thursday is a half-day for students and a Professional Learning day for staff. On that note, the next Site-Based School Council Roundtable will include Carol Pilarski and Len Swanton to discuss how Professional Learning has grown into an embedded program. Mr. Plati will also be speaking about technology. On March 23rd Dr. Czjakowski will be visiting and the Site Based School Council (SBSC) Roundtable and PTA/PTO Presidents Council (PPC) are hosting a reception from 9:00-10:00 a.m. at Central Office. The retirement recognition for Captain Manny Ferro will take place this Thursday at 2:00 p.m. and she thanked him for his two year service with the School Transportation and Safety Subcommittee.

### **Agenda:**

#### **Reorganization of the School Committee**

Margaret Coppe: Announced we would now move to agenda items and recognized Alessandro Alessandrini.

Alessandro Alessandrini: Had a question about reorganizing and the timing. Said we only reorganize now if the Chair is retiring or if he or she does not get re-elected and is wondering why this is on the agenda.

William Hurley: He requested that it be put on the agenda, because it is his past experience that it is done after an election. He has also never been part of a committee without a vice chair and he believes it would be an appropriate time. He asked about it in the fall. Now as it is right after the election, this feels like an appropriate time if the committee is in agreement. If not that is fine as well.

Alessandro Alessandrini: Asked if the current chair had not done a good job in getting prepared for Town Meeting.

William Hurley: Asked why the question was raised.

Alessandro Alessandrini: Asked why not wait until after Town Meeting. He stated that it is usually done after town meeting and he would rather stick with the chair that brought us to this point until after town meeting. It has always been the practice to reorganize afterwards. He believes it will set a bad precedent and is not good with a new superintendent coming in.

William Hurley: Is not challenging the chair and had a lengthy conversation with the chair in putting this on the agenda. This is not a challenge. It is a practice he is familiar with and if this committee doesn't choose to, then it doesn't choose to.

Judith Crocker: Crocker stated that she is completing her one year anniversary and last year they voted for a new chair on March 26<sup>th</sup> so this is the norm from her perspective. It is around this time of year when the members of this committee discuss its organizational structure. The last six months have been especially busy. The number of added public meetings needed to address the superintendent search and the school master planning process have nearly equaled one year's worth of meetings alone.

Alessandro Alessandrini: Thinks it is a bad precedent.

Judith Crocker: New superintendent doesn't start for three months--

Alessandro Alessandrini: Wants to hear everyone's view. It is a transparent and public meeting.

Judith Crocker: Suggested the committee discuss 3 items: (1) Leadership – given that current chair Ms. Coppe has served admirably for 3 years, plus having managed the added weight of the last 6 months, perhaps it is time to share the position with another committee member. (2) Membership roles – what she has learned from her first year on this committee from working on policy, the heavy recent meeting schedule, and what the operating norms are of other communities is that perhaps we should consider sharing some of the chairperson's responsibilities among the five of us. Our current structure puts a heavy workload on our chair. For example – a vice chair to run a meeting when the chair can't attend and a correspondence clerk to respond to community emails. (3) Liaison roles – some of our assignments on ad hoc committees have ended and other topics call for new subcommittees/working groups.

Margaret Coppe: Corrected that she has been chair for two years.

Alessandro Alessandrini: Sharing the chair is a new concept and he believes you relinquish the chair. He feel she has done an admirable job getting us ready for town meeting and it sets a bad precedent.

Judith Crocker: Doesn't understand why last year we did this in March. She would just like to continue that practice.

William Hurley: It is not a personality issue. It is what I am experienced with and this is not a reflection on the chair. I don't understand what is bad about the precedent. We as a committee have been preparing for Town Meeting. The role of the chair is to lead the individual meetings.

Alessandro Alessandrini: Thinks the chair that brought us to prepare for this should have continuity – we all agree she did a good job, unless someone disagrees, then he wants to hear it.

William Hurley: The role of the chair is to conduct the meeting, to recognize people when they need to be recognized and to take leadership. Hurley sees preparation for Town Meeting as the work of all of us. The superintendent does a great deal of work in preparing us that we then vote, or make modifications to it if there are modifications. So he doesn't tie this to Town Meeting or Special Town Meeting. We can have a Special Town Meeting in the fall, and in likelihood we

will next fall. But we will not tie chairmanship or changing chairmanship to that event. He is not accustomed to tying this to town meeting.

Alessandro Alessandrini: He usually ties it to Town Meeting, not Special Town Meeting.

William Hurley: Will make a motion that School Committee vote tonight to reorganize.

***MOTION to vote tonight to reorganize the school committee. (Hurley, Crocker)***

***The Motion was approved 3-2, with Margaret Coppe and Alessandro Alessandrini opposing.***

Margaret Coppe: Said at this point Dr. Ash would take over and that she would like to read a statement to announce her intention to step down as chair.

*Statement: Before we move on to the first agenda item, I would like to take this time to announce my intention to step down as chair. I have been proud to serve the committee and the community in that role. While I have been chair, the committee has hired a new superintendent, evaluated Dr. Ash under new DESE standards, established the Ad hoc Committee on Youth at Risk, passed balanced budgets that addressed services for many varied groups, including families in transition, approved solar panels on school buildings, completed building projects at Estabrook, Bridge, Bowman, and the high school.*

*I look forward to having more time to work on the initiatives that I have championed over the past two years—the Ad hoc Committee on Youth at Risk, the Elementary World language restoration, and multicultural curriculum issues.*

*I want to thank everyone who has supported me in the past, and who continue to support me.*

There was applause from the committee and from the audience.

Dr. Ash opened the floor for nominations.

Margaret Coppe nominated William Hurley, and said he has a lot of experience and topped the ticket in the last election. It was seconded by Alessandro Alessandrini.

Hurley said he thanked them but turned it down.

Judith Crocker nominated Jessie Steigerwald, and it was seconded by Hurley.

***MOTION to approve Jessie Steigerwald as new school committee chair. (Steigerwald, Hurley)***

***The Motion is approved 3-2, with Alessandro Alessandrini and Margaret Coppe opposing.***

Alessandro Alessandrini stated he voted no because he has worked with Ms. Steigerwald for prescreening superintendent candidates, but when he looks at who can lead a chair, some of the qualities he looks for are objectivity, humility and conviction. It is someone who can bridge gaps, and you need the right person. Humility is somebody who will never be afraid to admit when they're wrong, and that is what he looks for in a chair – when they are wrong they will say they are wrong. Conviction is when you take a vote, you never second-guess that vote – even one or two years later - because it was the right vote at the time for the kids and the staff. That's what he looks for and sees in Ms. Coppe. Abraham Lincoln said everyone can meet adversity but to truly judge one's character is to give that person power, so I reserve judgment. And until then he will extend to Steigerwald the same courtesy that she extended our previous chair.

Jessie Steigerwald became new chair and thanked the committee for the vote of confidence, and told Alessandrini she hoped to earn his respect over time – that she had enjoyed working with him over the last five years. She said she had heard Hurley discuss the importance of a vice chair and agreed. She distributed a handout describing possible division of work between members through new officer roles including a vice chair, corresponding secretary and recording secretary. She mentioned she had offered these ideas last year and possibly the year before but wrote them down to be more clear and specific. She talked about the large volume of email and challenge of responding. Custom was chair had responded.

Alessandro Alessandrini: Questioned receiving this information and asked Mr. Hurley if he had ever seen committees have roles like this before as he did not think that was the case.

Hurley began to answer, Alessandrini interrupted and Steigerwald requested Alessandrini to allow Hurley to complete the answer to the question already posed.

William Hurley: Has had someone serve as a temporary secretary if one is absent.

Margaret Coppe: Some committees may have someone step in as a secretary but we have a secretary so we do not need to do this.

Jessie Steigerwald: As part of the policy review work Ms. Crocker and she had discussed these possible roles with Jim Hardy at the Massachusetts Association of School Committees and our policies allow us to establish officers. She would like to move forward with the vice chair role tonight.

Exchange between Mr. Alessandrini and Ms. Steigerwald.

***MOTION to nominate William Hurley as vice chair. (Steigerwald, Alessandrini)***

***The Motion was approved 5-0.***

Jessie Steigerwald asked if the committee was interested in discussing other officers at this time or another time. Members preferred to read these and return to discuss at a future time. Steigerwald asked everyone to read the information she provided on school committee officers and said she would place it on a future agenda.

Ms. Crocker asked to bring liaison roles up soon as well. Steigerwald said it would be added to an upcoming agenda.

**Vote to Approve a Contract Extension for the Period July 1, 2015, through June 30, 2018, for Ms. Carol Pilarski, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction, and Professional Learning.**

Dr. Ash recommends extending the contract for Carol Pilarski, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction and Professional Learning.

***MOTION to approve a contract extension for the period July 1, 2015, through June 30, 2018, for Ms. Carol Pilarski, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction, and Professional Learning. (Hurley, Crocker)***

***The Motion was approved 5-0.***

**Vote to Approve a Contract Extension for the Period July 1, 2015, through June 30, 2017, for Ms. Ellen Sugita, Director of Special Education.**

Dr. Ash recommends extending the contract for Ellen Sugita, Director of Special Education.

***MOTION to approve a contract extension for the period July 1, 2015, through June 30, 2017 for Ms. Ellen Sugita, Director of Special Education. (Alessandrini, Crocker)***

***The Motion was approved 5-0.***

**Discussion of Governor's FY2016 Budget**

Dr. Ash explained that the governor has made his proposed FY16 budget recommendation. The House of Representatives and Senate Ways and Means Committee will do the same and hopefully by July 1st the three branches of government will agree and vote on a budget. In the governor's budget there are two potential cuts: (1) the elimination of the Kindergarten Expansion Grant (\$227,000 which pays for Kindergarten Assistants), and (2) a reduction in the rate for special education circuit breaker reimbursements (\$251,525). Dr. Ash gave three options on how to proceed. The first was to request additional funds for the FY16 budget, the second was to wait and see how the budget might be adjusted in upcoming weeks, the third was to identify cuts. If he was directed to identify cuts he would need to alert people that their positions might be cut. He recommended waiting.

Members had some questions and comments about the three options.

Coppe recommended we could manage by holding off on action at the current time but gain information on how we might access funds from the special education stabilization account if we needed to do this in the fall at a Special Town Meeting.

Alessandrini preferred to request additional funds at this time. Hurley agreed with Dr. Ash that the budget would likely be adjusted in upcoming weeks. The consensus was to wait and monitor the state budget process.

**Vote on School Building Project Consensus Plan**

The Board of Selectmen took a formal vote in favor of School Building Consensus Plan plan last night. Members discussed the projects and the magnitude. They also discussed forming a subcommittee for redistricting. They thanked Jon Himmel and Joe Pato for all of their work. Steigerwald stated that she did not like the sentence regarding middle school projects as she felt it was too soon for the School Committee to offer a preference regarding allocating all new space at Diamond – and stated that it would be wiser for the committee to hear the architect recommendations to determine whether it was better to have all new space divided between Clarke and Diamond, or at one school but accepted that this was a guiding document and the School Committee would have the opportunity to make informed requests later in the process.

The committee then discussed the language on the final page addressing redistricting and a redistricting study. Dr. Ash explained that he would meet with Maureen Kavanaugh this week, and they would be able to discuss possible options, pros and cons on redistricting, buffer zones, etc., and then he could share it with the committee. He believed there were too many unknowns to have a fully developed redistricting recommendation at this time.

***MOTION to initiate a technical redistricting study to identify plans and provide an analysis of the pros and cons of each so that policy discussions can occur later this year. (Coppe, Hurley)***

***The Motion was approved 4-1, with Alessandro Alessandrini opposing.***

***MOTION to approve the school building project consensus plan. (Hurley, Crocker)***

***The Motion was approved 4-1, with Alessandro Alessandrini opposing.***

Alessandro Alessandrini did not vote for it because he really does not think prefabs at Fiske is what should go there. The words there he cannot agree with.

### **Discussion of Town Meeting Articles**

***Motion to support Special Town Meeting #1, Article 2, Appropriate for School Facilities Capital Project. (Hurley, Crocker)***

***The Motion was approved 5-0.*** Steigerwald to speak to the Article.

***Motion to approve Special Town Meeting #2 Article 6, Appropriate for Authorized Capital Improvements. (Hurley, Alessandrini)***

***The Motion was approved 5-0.*** Hurley to speak to the Article.

Crocker wished to support appropriation for fire engine. Coppe asked for the reason. Crocker felt schools might need fire support. Consensus to let Board of Selectmen speak to that need.

***Motion to support Article 4, Appropriate FY16 Operating Budget. (Hurley, Alessandrini)***

***The Motion was approved 5-0.*** Coppe to speak to the Article.

***Motion to support Article 7, School Bus Transportation Line. (Alessandrini, Hurley)***

***The Motion was approved 5-0.*** Crocker to speak to the Article.

***Motion to support Article 8, parts I, J, K, L and M. (Coppe, Steigerwald)***

***The Motion was approved 5-0.*** Alessandrini to speak to the Article.

Article 10 and 11 need more information.

***Motion to support Article 12 and 13, Sidewalks. (Coppe, Crocker)***

Crocker: Safe Routes to School is advocating for these.

***The Motion was approved 5-0.*** Crocker to speak to the Article.

***Motion to support Article 16, School Capital Projects and Equipment. (Hurley, Coppe)***

***The Motion was approved 5-0.*** Hurley to speak to the Article.

***Motion to support Article 18, everything except H. (Crocker, Steigerwald)***

Need to check on "L" security cameras, could be for schools. Dr. Ash not certain. (H is municipal building envelopes.)

***The Motion was approved 5-0.*** Steigerwald to speak to the Article.

Steigerwald asked about OPEB (Other Post-Employment Benefits). Coppe would not like to speak to it.

***Motion to support Article 28, Debt Stabilization Fund. (Hurley, Crocker)***

***The Motion was approved 5-0.*** Crocker speak to the Article.

Coppe asked about Article 47. Citizen petition regarding marijuana. Consensus to wait and see if schools involved. Alessandrini suggested waiting to see distance from schools as last year it was not within specific distance to school.

***Motion to approve Article 45. (Alessandrini, Crocker)***

Relates to establishing a staff position to coordinate Safe Routes to School.

***The Motion was approved 5-0.***

Steigerwald suggested update from Ms. Dunn and be open to revisiting this article.

***Motion to approve Article 49. Civic Use District***

Civic Use District. Coppe noted we may need more information.

### **Update of School Committee Policies**

There are four sections remaining and the subcommittee is aiming to have Section J reviewed with Dr. Ash by the end of March. Section J includes the Homework policy. Steigerwald does not think we will be ready for the March 24<sup>th</sup> date. Coppe prefers not to meet on that date.

Steigerwald notes that Section J may be able to be addressed across two or three short meetings during Town Meeting, or we might need an additional meeting. Two upcoming Policy Manual Review Subcommittee meetings will be March 16<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 – 8:00 p.m. and March 18<sup>th</sup> at 10:00 a.m., in the upper conference room at Central Office. There will be a hearing on our existing homework policy. If many people are interested, we may suggest making only minor revisions to the existing policy and revisiting the policy next year with a year-long discussion. Or, it may be that interest does not demand that extended period.

Members discussed the policy and public comments from it. Coppe received an email with notes from a school-council meeting wordsmithing the Mission and Vision Policy and asked about information on homework.

Steigerwald explained that Dr. Ash has shared policies with staff. The Mission/Vision Policy had a lengthy process to date and while people may offer input, people should be aware of the stages we have moved through. The committee may decide what feedback to accept. It is the first time the community is officially being invited to provide feedback on this version. On the homework policy, we have reviewed our policy with MASC. They do not have a template policy. A packet was shared in the meeting. The meetings have been open to the public. Alessandrini feels policy should begin with the committee and that policy does not come from the public. Steigerwald feels the public should provide input. Alessandrini believes the committee should start first and wants it to start with committee. Steigerwald notes this process is the same but homework may be more interested in this one and we work with Dr. Ash. You may receive more email on homework.

Dr. Ash: Does not believe homework document has been seen by teachers and would like to share it with Phyllis Neufeld.

Steigerwald notes that we have a policy and people are always able to review it and offer feedback.

Crocker: The meeting that was scheduled to review policies with Dr. Ash would have included a discussion about this, but Dr. Ash had to cancel it. Dr. Ash understood.

## **Consent Agenda**

**Vote to Approve School Committee Minutes of February 10, 2015**

**Vote to Approve School Committee Minutes of February 21, 2015**

**Vote to Approve School Committee Minutes of February 25, 2015 (removed)**

Alessandro Alessandrini requested that the February 25th minutes be removed to capture something differently.

Steigerwald said she would dispense with the Consent Agenda.

Alessandrini continued his requests regarding the February 25<sup>th</sup> meeting. This meeting includes a 3-2 vote for prefabs at Fiske. After the vote we did not adjourn and we had further discussion. The minutes do not include that discussion and he would like to add that. Alessandrini will write the discussion and send it out to everyone to include.

Margaret Coppe requested minutes from the six school committee held in conjunction with the Ad hoc School Master Planning Committee meetings that were in December and January. There were six meetings posted and no minutes. She would like to receive them. Steigerwald noted that Sara Arnold recorded minutes for the Ad hoc subcommittee.

***MOTION to approve Minutes of February 10, 2015 and February 21, 2015 as amended.  
(Hurley, Steigerwald)***

***The Motion was approved 5-0.***

***Steigerwald made a MOTION to go into Executive Session under Exemption 3 to discuss strategy with respect to potential litigation regarding a student residency issue and Exemption 3 to discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining regarding LEA Unit-A negotiations. Further as chair she declares that Executive Session is necessary to protect the bargaining and litigation positions of the School Committee. (Steigerwald, Hurley)***

***The Motion was approved 5- 0 by roll call vote.***

***Coppe: AYE***

***Alessandrini: AYE***

***Steigerwald: AYE***

***Hurley: AYE***

***Crocker: AYE***

The committee went into Executive Session at 9:25 p.m. and adjourned at 10:31 p.m.

Minutes for the Executive Session were taken by Jessie Steigerwald and are in a separate document.

Meeting Materials: Agenda; School Building Project Consensus Plan; Memo from Dr. Ash regarding the Governor's Recommended Budget; Steigerwald's Memo regarding possible Roles of the School Committee