

WHITMAN-HANSON REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING
Minutes of December 19, 2017
Held at the Whitman-Hanson Regional High School
600 Franklin Street, Whitman MA

Meeting convened: 6:01 p.m.

Meeting adjourned: 7:10 p.m.

Members present: Robert Hayes, Frederick Small, Michael Jones, Robert O'Brien, Jr., Daniel Cullity, Alexandria Taylor, and Kevin Lynam (left at 7:03 p.m.)

Members absent: Robert Trotta, Christopher Howard, and Steve Bois

Administrators present: Dr. Ruth Gilbert-Whitner, Superintendent of Schools
Kyle Riley, Assistant Superintendent of Student Services
Christine Suckow, Executive Director of Business Services
Chad Peters, Director of Technology Services

Chair Hayes brought the meeting to order at 6:01 p.m. and announced the meeting was being recorded.

Chair Hayes announced the purpose of the meeting was to discuss the budget and tasks involved in the closing of the Maquan Elementary School and determine whether to stay with the current timeline or to amend it. This is a result of recent deliberation at the last regular School Committee meeting and Facilities Sub-committee held on December 13, 2017. Concerns were raised regarding funding, timelines, and tasks associated with each of the four phases of the project. Chair Hayes also stated that a request to consider holding a special town meeting in the Town of Whitman and the Town of Hanson in February 2018 would be considered to see if the community could vote to secure the necessary funding to complete the closing of the Maquan School project.

Dr. Whitner provided a brief synopsis of the history of the School Committee's first discussions in February 2017 to close the Maquan School, relocate the grades and programs from the Maquan School, and turn the building back over to the Town of Hanson in September 2018. Numerous factors were considered in the decision. Discussions with the Town of Hanson Capital Improvement Committee regarding available funds to cover repair costs for Maquan School were not encouraging. The result was established based on the current building conditions, the costs to make repairs (\$5 million), additional cost to bring the building up to code, a component to help reduce the school district budget deficit, and declining enrollment in both towns. The building project was not feasible for the 2017-18 school year, but seemed feasible for the 2018-19 school year. The Board of Selectmen participated in conversations about the proposal to close the Maquan School and on April 12, 2017 the School Committee voted to approve closing the Maquan School and return it to the Town of Hanson. Dr. Patrick Dillon, former assistant superintendent, began working on the project. Since his resignation, the remaining administrators took on the various responsibilities and task assignments related to each phase of the project.

At the December 13, 2017 School Committee meeting, the closing of the Maquan school was discussed. The estimated costs, along with the previously discussed timelines and phases of the project were presented. Dr. Whitner indicated that at the Facilities Sub-committee meeting, also held on December 13, 2017, concerns were raised by Mike Jones and Robert O'Brien about meeting the project timeline and securing adequate funding. Dr. Whitner agreed that if funding is not appropriated, the project will not be carried out. At the last School Committee meeting, there was insufficient time for a thorough discussion. Therefore, a special meeting was scheduled for this evening.

Dr. Whitner reported that several administrators had a positive visit to the Braintree Public Schools with a similar high school/preschool set up.

Chair Hayes discussed options for augmenting the project to a more staggered timeline or request an earlier town meeting from each town to see if the town would support the project now to remain on the current timeline.

Christine Suckow reviewed the cost impact to the towns and itemized the cost of each phase.

Phase I move preschool to the high school: \$428,267.50 (cost split between the towns)

Phase II move grades 1 and 2 to the Indian Head School: \$332,568.25 (Town of Hanson)

Phase III move grade 5 to Hanson Middle School: \$8,875 (Town of Hanson)

Phase IV move special education programs to Duval: \$23,750 (cost split between the towns)

Chair Hayes itemized the tasks associated with each phase.

Mr. Peters discussed the task for moving technology and computer lab classes, (to make three pre-k classrooms) remove tech, carpets and install tile. Computer labs will be moved to the third floor of the high school. This entails relocating current computer labs as well.

Mr. Sandland discussed the configuration and installation of the new entry door for the three pre-k classrooms. Adding the security of the entrance will be dedicated to pre-k student entry and exit only. Also, the three pre-k classrooms will have inter-connective doors to each other. Mr. Sandland and Chair Hayes discussed strategies for interactions between the preschoolers and high school students. This included exiting strategies, emergencies and everyday interactions.

The decision to develop a separate entrance for the preschool at the high school building was discussed. Assistant Superintendent for Student Services, Kyle Riley, discussed safety and interaction issues designated for preschool population. In addition, considerations include the access road, vehicle traffic, and foot traffic in and around the school building.

Mike McCue, Hanson Town Administrator, spoke to the project and funding. The Town of Hanson is in favor of the current timeline, supporting the transition to occur as soon as possible. He cited enhanced liabilities if the project were delayed another year and incurring additional costs that would be better spent elsewhere. Mr. McCue also acknowledges as the project moves forward unknowns and unanticipated costs may be discovered but appreciates working with the District for providing costs estimates and appropriate timelines. An additional meeting with the Board of Selectmen would be welcomed. However, he supports moving forward as quickly as possible and will do what he can to effectuate that.

Chair Hayes reported a 45-day notice is required to call a town meeting, which would bring a date during the first or second week in February. The Committee would need to seek approval if the Town of Hanson has interest in holding a special town meeting, prior to the May Annual Town meeting, for the purpose of a warrant article to fund the closing of Maquan School project. Mr. McCue stated he will bring the request to the Board of Selectmen for recommendation. In addition, Mr. McCue indicated he has already been in discussion with the town accountant regarding options to appropriate funding the project and perhaps borrow money as a short term loan in an effort to stay within the timeline and original intent date of the closing. He added, by putting money forward, we are saving money in the future.

The Committee discussed delaying phases of the project to later dates. Also discussed where unanticipated costs once construction began at the Indian Head School. Dr. Whitner reminded the Committee that Hanson taxpayers have spent over \$540,000 in repairs in the past three years to keep the building operating. Laura Kemmett, a member of the Hanson Board of Selectmen, asked if there was a plan should the article fail at town meeting. Dr. Whitner cited the closing of the Maquan School project was precipitated by a meeting with the Hanson Capital Improvement Committee who had no plans for securing the requested funding for capital repairs to the Maquan

School. Furthermore, engineers recommended not renovating the school as building items would need to be brought up to code, including the installation of a sprinkler system. In spite of the ongoing infrastructure problems at the Maquan School, the Facilities Department has done well maintaining the building over the years.

Community members voiced concerns with having the preschool located at the high school and if other school locations have been considered. The Superintendent explained all school buildings were analyzed for space and program relocation and the best fit was determined to be the high school. The high school is the newest building in the district, has room for the preschool program and risk of unanticipated unknowns and costs post-construction is minimal as compared to Indian Head or Duval School. In addition, these decisions have been based on enrollment projections over the next few years. Dr. Whitner confirmed no major renovations have occurred to date in preparation of the move.

Chair Hayes asked the Committee to determine if they would like to request each town hold a special town meeting to in order to maintain the current estimated transition timeline and to approve a warrant article to move the preschool to the high school. The requested funding to the Town of Whitman would be \$256,189.62 and to the Town of Hanson \$172,077.88. Amending the request to the total project cost estimate should also be considered.

Mr. Sandland supported the current estimates and timeline as realistic. However, is concerned about losing valuable construction time during the February school vacation week if funding is not appropriated. Mr. Sandland reported abatement contractors assessed Indian Head School and is currently unsure of removal dates but is obtaining quotes on that and the retro-fit. Mr. Sandland is confident in prioritizing and managing the work load and project needs. Some funding has already been allocated for the preschool move to the high school, and he and his department are ready to move forward.

VOTE: Mr. Small motioned; Mr. Jones seconded; voted to notify the Boards of Selectmen in the Town of Hanson and the Town of Whitman that the intent of School Committee is to request a special town meeting is held in February 2018 in order to fund the estimated costs associated with the closing of the Maquan Elementary School project, at an amount to be determined. The motion carried unanimously.

Warrant Presented at Meeting

Payroll: P12217 for \$1,210,224.72

Accounts Payable: AP121917AP for \$619,451.92

VOTE: Mr. Small motioned; Mrs. Taylor seconded; voted to adjourn the meeting at 7:10 p.m. The motion carried unanimously.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Michelle Lindberg

Meeting materials and handouts:

- Meeting agenda December 19, 2017