



WHITMAN-HANSON REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING
Minutes of March 12, 2020
Held at the Whitman-Hanson Regional High School
600 Franklin Street, Whitman MA

Meeting convened: 7:00 p.m.

Meeting adjourned: 9:50 p.m.

Members present: Robert Hayes, Frederick Small, Jr., Robert O'Brien, Jr., Michael Jones, Daniel Cullity, Christopher Howard, Steve Bois, Dawn Byers and Alexandria Taylor (arrived at 7:08 p.m.)

Members absent: Christopher Scriven

Administrators present: Jeffrey Szymaniak, Superintendent of Schools
George M. Ferro, Jr., Assistant Superintendent of Schools
John Tuffy, Interim Business Manager

Chair Hayes brought the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. and announced the meeting was being recorded and broadcast live. Chair Hayes announced School Committee member, Mr. Steve Bois, will participate remotely. All votes will be done by roll call.

VOTE: Mr. Hayes motioned; Mr. Bois seconded; by roll call to approve Mr. Bois participate remotely.

Steve Bois - Yes

Christopher Howard - Yes

Michael Jones - Yes

Robert O'Brien, Jr. - Yes

Daniel Cullity - Yes

Fred Small - Yes

Robert Hayes - Yes

Dawn Byers - Yes

The motion passed unanimously.

Meeting Minutes Approval

Meeting minutes of March 4, 2020

VOTE: Mr. Small motioned; Mr. Cullity seconded; voted by roll call to approve the meeting minutes of March 4, 2020 as presented.

Steve Bois - Yes

Christopher Howard - Yes

Michael Jones - Yes

Robert O'Brien, Jr. - Yes

Daniel Cullity - Yes

Fred Small - Yes

Robert Hayes - Yes

Dawn Byers - Yes

The motion passed unanimously.

Superintendent's Report

Mr. Szymaniak congratulated the Whitman-Hanson Regional High School Boys' Basketball team, who won the Eastern State semi-finals at TD Garden on March 11. The Superintendent commended the students, fans and spectators, adding a TD Garden representative commented the students and fans were the best group out of the two days of play. Unfortunately, due to the decision of Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association

(MIAA) and current circumstances surrounding COVID-19, the state finals games have been cancelled. Whitman-Hanson was scheduled to play in the Division II state final this Saturday. As a result of the cancellation, both Whitman-Hanson and Taconic were named co-state champions of Division II.

Corona Virus - Precautions

The Superintendent discussed the precautions and steps the District is taking in the face of the Corona virus pandemic. A conference call with the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary (DESE) Commissioner Jeff Riley and school superintendents was rescheduled until Friday, March 13.

The Superintendent announced any families or parents choosing to keep their children home from school, while school is in session, may do so. The District is working to prepare in the event of a school shut down. Mr. Ferro will share information regarding possible on-line learning opportunities and plans. Mr. Szymaniak asked that all be patient during this evolving time and not compare Whitman-Hanson to other communities that may have already shut down or cancelled upcoming events. There are currently no known or presumptive cases in either town. The District is working with the local boards of health and town administrators to follow MA Department of Public Health (DPH) guidelines for safety, security and cleanliness.

As of today, the Superintendent has cancelled all events, including field trips, through March 20. Further scheduled events will be reviewed next week. Mr. Szymaniak reported two of the school buildings will be thoroughly cleaned over the upcoming weekend. Mr. Szymaniak added there is an average cost increase of about \$8,000 for deep cleaning over the weekend for two buildings, which was not anticipated in the current budget. The First Student bus transportation company has also been contacted to insure school busses are being thoroughly cleaned after each run. There will be an associated cost for this as well. Both town Boards of Health will be conducting unannounced spot checks on the busses.

Mr. Szymaniak reported he has released an extensiveness amount of information on-line and in communications with families, about Corona Virus, how to talk to your child about COVID-19 and how to deal with stress. The information and correspondence is also listed on the District website.

Mr. Szymaniak reported he is awaiting the conference call with Commissioner Riley for additional direction. Nothing is certain at this time regarding MCAS testing or school closings. The Commissioner has waived the attendance and parents should not be concerned with excused or unexcused absences at this point in time. The will only be enforcing the 185 day school year rule. Whitman-Hanson has used one snow day to date.

Mr. Szymaniak discussed other factors that must be considered with any potential school closures. He reported that 33% of Whitman-Hanson students are free and reduced breakfast and lunch eligible, and if there is a school closure, the district needs a contingency plan for those students. Also, students on Individual Education Plans (IEP's) will require services. The District is working out a plan to take care of students academically, socially and nutritionally. It is anticipated that more information will be available after March 13. Mr. Szymaniak reported that the Whitman Hanson Education Association (WHEA) is also working with the District through this unprecedented time.

Mr. Ferro discussed concepts for online, continued class learning. He discussed providing Chrome books for students without equipment and how internet access may be possible. He reported that 93.4% of families are on line and have the ability to participate in on-line learning. Paper packet resources may also be available. The District will provide a myriad of resources for math, ELA using Google classrooms. Grading and accountability is unsure at this point in time. It was noted both that the Whitman Public Library and Hanson Public Library have hotspots for internet access and that Comcast will be increasing speeds and offering affordable platforms at this time.

Mr. Szymaniak announced the tentative cleaning schedule for schools. On the weekend of March 14, Conley and Duval Elementary Schools will have a deep cleaning. On the weekend of March 21, the middle schools and Indian

Head School will be cleaned. The high school will be cleaned the weekend of March 28. Mr. Small offered to donate commercial disinfectant to the bus company.

Mr. Szymaniak alluded to the unknowns surrounding AP exams, MCAS assessments and other items as the situation remains fluid. The additional cost of deep cleaning and supplies may be supported by the snow removal line due to the light winter. The Committee discussed possible reimbursement for cleaning costs since the situation has been declared a state of emergency.

Mr. Szymaniak reported the last day of school for Whitman-Hanson would be June 19, 2020, based on the Commissioners waivers for attendance and 185 day rule. A school year may not go longer than June 30. Mr. Ferro reported DESE will stop using data as a grading point for school accountability on March 2 through the end of the school year.

The Committee discussed possible issues with meeting a quorum and the required budget timelines, as the next meeting is not scheduled until March 25. Mr. Szymaniak reported resolutions are currently being reviewed in the Legislature and Attorney General's office regarding live quorums and that emergency legislation may supervene. The Superintendent added that the District has resources to process meetings remotely.

The Superintendent thanked the Boards of Health in each town, the school district Lead Nurse, Lisa Tobin, and Fire Chiefs in both towns, as community support has been outstanding during this time. All have been involved in the planning aspect. The community must also be mindful of HIPPA violations.

Budget FY2020 Update - John Tuffy

Mr. Tuffy stated line item transfers will be passed over at this time. The YTD Expenditure Report was provided at the last meeting on March 4, 2020.

MARS Consultation Update

Mr. Szymaniak reported on a consultation meeting with representatives from Massachusetts Association of Regional Schools (MARS) on March 4. Present at the meeting were MARS Consultants, Steve Hemman and Maureen Marshall; Superintendent Szymaniak, John Tuffy and School Committee Chair Hayes, Whitman town officials Randy LaMattina, Frank Lynam and Justin Evans from Whitman and Hanson town officials Ken McCormick, John Stanbrook and Laura Kemmett. Town officials in both towns were interested in learning how Chapter 70 is deduced by town, given to the District and how it is allocated to the communities. Mr. Szymaniak reported the District receives a lump sum from the state and it is not broken down by town.

Points of interest:

- Mr. Hemman provided a breakdown of FY2021 Chapter 70 /Foundation Budget /Required Contribution per town - taking into account the school districts receives \$4.6 million more than Foundation Budget in "Hold Harmless"
- Concerns with the cost of de-regionalization were discussed and not recommended as not fiscally feasible
- It was noted the de-regionalization process is difficult and costly and may take 3-4 years
- MARS reps urge communities to agree on a budget and are not in favor of having state fiscal control
- Attempts to file suit/take legal action Dept. of Revenue (DOR) are fruitless
- The Superintendent will forward the October 2017 State Auditor's study on Regional Schools by request.

FY2021 Budget and Local Assessment

Per the School Committee's request on March 4, Mr. Szymaniak presented additional operating assessment scenarios that included four additional teachers in the FY2021 operating budget proposal in response to the recommendation to reduce class size. Mr. Tuffy reported that the assessment for capital items for the Town of Hanson listed on the assessment scenario are currently "TBD" to be determined. In speaking to Hanson Town Accountant, Todd Hassett, they discussed an amount of \$22,300 in interest to the HVAC project in Hanson and how Hanson will fund that. If that amount is added to the assessment, it will only affect the Hanson assessment, not the Whitman assessment, as it is for a project that is in Hanson only.

The new operating assessment scenarios were discussed at length, and included the addition of four teachers to curb class sizes (Duval -two classrooms grade 1 and 2, Indian Head -grade 4 and High School-chemistry). Increased class size in all schools was discussed as well as teacher certification accountability. Mr. Szymaniak stated even with the addition of four teachers, the schools remain understaffed. Another potential impact to increased class size is the amount of unknown new registrations and move-ins for next year and over 200 new housing units coming to Whitman. WHEA President, Kevin Kavka, spoke to class size at the high school and teachers being flexible to teach outside of their license discipline, but only for a period of time.

Mr. Bois motioned and then withdrew his motion to approve the FY2021 assessment scenario #2 in the amount of \$27,681,067.54 and assessments (Hanson) \$12,123,655.54 and Whitman 15,547,412. Mr. Small seconded but the motion which was withdrawn. It was confirmed the Committee typically votes the total operating budget and two local assessment amounts, and did not include capital or non-mandated bussing costs per town. The notification letter would include the capital and non-mandated bussing assessments.

Mr. Small motioned to set the FY2021 total assessment at \$28,528,937 (to include the operating budget, non-mandated busing and capital items (High School and Town of Hanson technology and HVAC as TBD), as presented. Mr. Cullity seconded.

Mr. Szymaniak reminded the Committee the Hanson capital is “TBD” capital amount in Hanson. Mr. Tuffy is waiting to hear back from Hanson Town Accountant Todd Hassett on the capital amount obligation.

Hanson Town Administrator, Laura Kemmett, discussed concerns of the potential of the state to take fiscal control over the school budget, should the present figures be used, under the statutory method of assessment, and brought to the voters of Hanson. Mr. Howard maintained a budget for next year should have some kind of compromise. Mrs. Kemmett reported there is no formal compromise in place with Whitman town officials, only discussion. Mrs. Kemmett briefly discussed the reasons the town is looking in to the cost of de-regionalization as asked by some community members.

There was a lengthy discussion on a number of reasons not to impose any more budget cuts to the school budget. It was noted that last year, the school budget was cut \$1.9 million. The Committee also discussed the consequences of de-regionalization and suggestions to amend the Regional Agreement that included tiered warrant articles that would be contingent upon each other to pass a budget. Again, the discussion moved to consequences of a budget not voted approved and working with a 1/12th budget in July.

Transferring funds from the Excess & Deficiency (E&D) line to supplement the operating budget was also discussed. However, it was noted that special education costs are already over budget. Mr. Szymaniak confirmed the E&D account is about \$650,000.

Mr. Szymaniak reported legal counsel advised him that the budget must be set by the School Committee no later than thirty days prior to town meeting, or March 30. The Superintendent discussed any further reductions to the proposed budget will result in the infrastructure failing, no reading program for students, an inability to address class size and would mean the loss of a number of employees. There was a brief discussion to rescind the method of assessment for FY2021, however, it was explained the parameters to rescind the vote are past, under the Robert’s Rules of Order to do so. Mr. Howard inquired if there were other grounds (or means) for the School Committee to set a different assessment methodology after previously voting one type of methodology. Mr. Szymaniak agreed to look into it.

Mr. O’Brien suggested a subcommittee be formed with town officials to come up with an agreeable budget figure. Mr. Small suggested eliminating the School Committees budget line item in an effort to reduce the proposed budget by \$20,000. A motion made by Mr. Cullity and seconded by Mr. O’Brien, to have a school committee member from each town meet with the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent, the Town Administrator in each town and report back to School Committee on budget, was withdrawn.

The Committee moved to the operating budget and assessment vote.

VOTE: Mr. Small motioned; Mr. Cullity seconded; voted by roll call vote to set the FY2021 total assessment at \$28,528,937 (to include the operating budget, non-mandated busing and capital items (High School and Town of Hanson technology and HVAC (TBD), as presented.

Christopher Howard – No

Michael Jones - No

Robert O'Brien, Jr. – No

Daniel Cullity – Yes

Fred Small – Yes

Robert Hayes – No

Alexandria Taylor - Yes

Dawn Byers – Yes

Steve Bois – Yes

The motion did not pass 5-4-0.

The motion did not pass as seven yes votes are required of the School Committee to pass an operating budget.

Mr. Tuffy will review the current FY2020 budget to determine if any line items are under budgeted that be transferred to the E&D account as surplus. The Superintendent reviewed expenditures from the school committee budget line items as a reference, noting that the associated costs are basically annual membership dues (MARS and MASC) and the MASC/MASS Joint Conference.

John Galvin, Whitman Finance Committee, inquired about the Town of Whitman capital warrant article #37 for the installation of thumb locks in the Whitman schools. Mr. Ferro confirmed the district received the \$45,000 grant and the installation of thumb locks was completed by the school. The Town of Whitman never issued any monies to the School District for the capital item. The Town of Whitman should still have the encumbered amount which would either go back into their free cash or town budget. Since the grant money was issued directly to the District from the state, and no monies were received from the Town of Whitman, no monies are owed.

After further deliberation, it was determined that, at the next meeting, two additional operating budget assessment scenarios would be created; one illustrating a level service and \$2.59 million budget reduction from the current required proposed budget and the other illustrating a \$1.3 million budget reduction from the current required proposed budget.

VOTE: Mr. O'Brien motioned; Mr. Cullity seconded; roll call voted to schedule a school committee meeting on March 18 with both Boards of Selectmen for additional budget discussion.

Christopher Howard – Yes

Michael Jones - Yes

Robert O'Brien, Jr. – Yes

Daniel Cullity – Yes

Fred Small – Yes

Robert Hayes – Yes

Alexandria Taylor - Yes

Steve Bois – Yes

Dawn Byers – Yes

The motion carried unanimously.

Regional Agreement Amendment Committee

Whitman resident, Christopher George, reported to the School Committee that he was appointed as the Citizen-at-Large for the new Regional Agreement Amendment Committee by the Whitman Board of Selectmen. Laura

Kemmett reported the Hanson Board of Selectmen have not voted to date but plan to at the next Selectmen's meeting.

Mr. Small reported at the Town of Whitman Facilities and Capital Expenditures Committee met earlier in the evening, and discussed funding options for a feasibility study in the amount of \$850,000 for the Whitman Middle School.

Hanson Cell Tower Update

Chair Hayes reported the Hanson Board of Selectmen executed the cell tower lease amendment at their meeting on February 25, 2020, after another set of hearings. The amendment is for the change of location of the cell tower and requires the signature of the School Committee Chair.

VOTE: Mr. Small motioned; Mr. O'Brien seconded; voted by roll call to authorize the Whitman-Hanson Regional School Committee Chair, Robert Hayes, to sign the first amendment to the Hanson Cell Tower Lease Agreement, as presented.

Christopher Howard – Yes

Michael Jones - Yes

Robert O'Brien, Jr. – Yes

Daniel Cullity – Yes

Fred Small – Yes

Alexandria Taylor - Yes

Dawn Byers – Yes

Steve Bois – Yes

Robert Hayes – Yes

The motion carried unanimously.

Superintendent Szymaniak reported Governor Baker issued an Executive Order that certain provisions of Open Meeting Law and that public meetings may be conducted remotely.

Adjournment

VOTE: Mr. Small motioned; Mr. Bois seconded; voted by roll call to adjourn the meeting at 9:50 p.m.

Christopher Howard – Yes

Michael Jones - Yes

Robert O'Brien, Jr. – Yes

Daniel Cullity – Yes

Fred Small – Yes

Alexandria Taylor - Yes

Dawn Byers – Yes

Steve Bois – Yes

Robert Hayes – Yes

The motion carried unanimously.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Michelle Lindberg

Signature of School Committee Secretary

Meeting Handouts:

- Meeting agenda for March 12, 2020
- Meeting minutes of March 4, 2020
- WHRSD Draft FY2021 local assessments and budget scenarios
- Hanson Cell Tower agreement and memo from Town of Hanson