

Bigelow PTO Meeting Minutes
November 2, 2012

Meeting came to order at 8:37am

Present: Todd Harrison, Becky Manley, Mindy Peckler, Ted Everett, Julie Burgoin, Beth Coomber, Leslie Williams, KB Spector, Miriam Alandydy, Una Simmons, Sally Brickell, Berit Ramseier, Marian McDonough, Julia Elhauge
School Committee Members: Claire Sokoloff, Steven Siegel, Angela Pitter-Wright and Superintendent David Fleishman

Welcome/Introductions

Overview. There are 8 School Committee members, plus the mayor, who is ex-officio voting member. Duties include hiring the superintendent, budget and oversight for the whole system, and contract negotiations with teachers' unions.

Background: Expenses were outpacing revenue growth, creating a structural deficit in Newton. Residents did not go for the override four years ago. Food service has been outsourced to make it more efficient. Special Ed restructured to make it more effective. Two years ago there was a four million dollar gap, then brought costs in line. Enrollment growth is beyond 2 ½ percent yearly increase. State had extra money this year, and utility savings. But going into another budget year with tremendous enrollment growth. Classrooms and teachers are needed.

Superintendent David Fleishman: Spends a lot of time in the schools. At Bigelow he has observed the Empower program: a lot more writing for students. More reading support for grade 6. More tech funded by district and through partnerships established with BC and others. Today in Social Studies class he watched tech that worked. Support for Special Ed: cutting edge for middle school. But might not be here next year.

Enrollment growth: 911 new students in last year. Adding 6 classrooms onto Day. There will not be enough space at Bigelow next year. Team sizes need to be consistent. Might add some half teams. At Lincoln-Eliot there are three 5th grade classes. At yesterday's School Committee meeting: a recommendation of how to reduce numbers at Bigelow. Day has more space. That would be incoming 6th graders. Kids starting to move into middle school after 6th grade is a new trend, so it's important we don't dump huge 6th grade classes in. By the end of November hope to let people know who may not be going to Bigelow who thought they would. A form of modified redistricting. It would just be Cabot— the Cabot split would be adjusted. Will be policy that siblings are grandfathered in. Since 1979 it's the largest group of 5th graders. Over 1000 students. That is the new normal in Newton. There are now 935 Kindergarten students. At Lincoln-Eliot can't even add more staff because don't have space. Want to add middle school and elementary teachers. In next 5 years, there will be 400 new high school students. We can't support that with existing staff. At high schools we have the space but not the adults. High school classes typically grow by 100-200 students. Mayor has called for ballot question because of this growth.

Steve Siegel: Override. Three ballot questions totaling \$11.4 million. Vote will be March 12. Driven by enrollment growth and condition of schools and their physical constraints. Need funds to rebuild/renovate Angier: \$1.3 million. Cabot has its own question \$1.7 million. These are debt exclusion overrides. \$8.4 million broken down into \$4.5 million for growth and enrollment increases: staff support, short-term space needs. Renovate and expand Zervas because it's the site that offers fastest path toward capacity expansion and in a good location to draw from buffer zones. \$2.5 million for fire station renovation: Station 3 in Newton Centre. \$1 million for sidewalk and road repairs. These are annual numbers. We have been falling behind as a city in these repairs. Four new police officers \$0.5 million. Uptick in road safety issues.

School Committee Q & A

Q: When will Day School be finished? A: By the fall.

Q: Is that \$11.4 really enough? A: Mayor and CFO presented to board of Alderman. This won't leave us flush with cash. This is a careful, strategic amount. City is working on efficiencies and cost savings. This won't address every issue, but neither is it merely a band-aid. Some of this is to add staff as "make-up money" to catch up with the enrollment. Even if we had no new enrollment, elementary spaces are insufficient.

Q: Is there an explanation for the population growth? A: We know what's coming because the kids are already born. You want population growth for healthy city. Similar to Brookline, but otherwise somewhat unique. Weston losing population, Wellesley staying same. Kids are now moving into Newton during middle school and high school years. It is an in-migration.

Claire Sokoloff: there's a nationwide trend toward families wanting to have more density. Trying to reduce footprint. If anyone is concerned that long-range facilities plan would not be necessary, rest assured buildings are all substandard as they are now. Even if we lost population we are still out of space. The memo is available online. Plans are going to reflect trends as they emerge.

Q: What happens if override doesn't pass? A: We're in trouble. We've used every closet and nook. We are talking about this as one override package. There's no rank order. All three are essential and connected. One plan, three votes.

RE: Angier School: \$1.3 million debt service will support \$37 million elementary school. Cabot is \$1.7 million for a \$45 million project, with 25% reimbursement from the MSBA. The question is renovating vs. replacing. Can't know until feasibility study is done. MSBA has many requirements in place.

Encourage an article in the Newton Tab. Need info about this out in the community. A public hearing will be held November 14th. Board of Alderman will discuss again at end of November, could vote December 3rd. Call and e-mail your Aldermen!

Q: What about the schools' physical design: Is there a standard for elementary schools? A: This is being discussed with the architects who are doing feasibility study. MSBA has identified schools around the state that have been efficient as model school buildings. Reimbursement rate could increase beyond 25% but is based on a lot of factors. Model schools not a solution for every setting because they are generic. Angier is not a candidate for the model schools because none of the existing models is on a site as small as Angier. Angier could become a model school. Cabot is a similar site.

Q: What kinds of checks and balances are on this process? A: A lot. After Newton North, MSBA rewrote the standards and has a heavy influence on the choice of architect. We have high standards to meet. We are highly motivated to meet their requirements.

Q: When will we see changes? A: If override is approved: March is in middle of hiring season. So we will hire 10 or 11 more middle school teachers for next year. Supports in schools will go in immediately for next year. We couldn't hire without the override. We are not expecting a scramble; it is very black and white.

Q: What about Special Ed space issues? It's not cost-effective to ship people out of district. And two hours on the bus is not good either. A: Our out-of-district placements are not any greater than other schools. But space is big issue. We had a new social/emotional needs program at Bigelow this year but it was really hard to find space. It has been a real benefit to the school. A self-contained classroom upstairs 8 kids. Looking at elementary schools next year: where can we house a program for students who might otherwise be placed out of district. Angier is thinking about this in their plans.

Q: Are there maximums on elementary school enrollments? A: There's not a lot of research on school size. Countryside is our largest school: but there are small class sizes. We need to see where can we add on. Certain schools have sprinklers. Zervas can be made larger with permanent space. Philosophy is still for neighborhood schools. Expanding Angier: we don't have the footprint for transportation that comes along with it. Middle school philosophy is to keep it small by creating teams. Team size in high 80s to high 90s. Want consistency among middle schools. Things change when you're at a bigger school, e.g., non-academic stuff such as transportation, making teams, is different. Bigelow is smaller so 7th and 8th graders have a better chance to make teams. Day has 874 students.

Claire Sokoloff: School Committee is committed to maintaining neighborhood schools. Keep kids walking to school. In Newton no assistant principals at elementary schools. Trying to keep enrollments to 465 (such as the new Angier) and bring small schools up to 400s. When you have 2 classes per grade, it's inefficient. But want to keep small class sizes. Ideal: 3-4 classrooms per grade. But might be temporary situations next year.

If Angier is rebuilt the kids will move to Carr school, which will be finished before 2014 school year. Angier is close to a decision. Highly likely it will be a rebuild, to be ready fall 2016.

Expectation is when Carr gets vacated, then Cabot goes in. For Cabot: site visit has been done, expect in early 2013 case will be heard by MSBA.

Q: What can we be doing? A: Talk to other parents. Building Newton's Future: Website is best place to go. Started by parent activists. Contact Emily or Marcia to help organize and mobilize parents and others. Get out the vote campaign. Only 20% of Newton voters have children in the schools. Reach out to others.

Q: What do you need for Override to pass? A: Majority vote. Board of Alderman need a super-majority. Q: Do they seem to be anti-tax? A: We are hoping they are supportive. They seem to want to put this question before the voters.

Q: Can PTO create a forum for Building Newton's Future to present their case? A: Would need to give an opposition group air time. Good for people to hear how positions have changed and what's different from last time when override was voted down.

Q: About MCAS, nine Newton schools got low marks. What about the failure to improve scores of students in the "needs improvement" category? A: Superintendent Fleishman: after No Child Left Behind, MA schools applied for waiver. We have a new system: schools rated 1-5. We have levels 1 and 2. How are we doing with certain subgroups? Proficiency is different from growth. We look not just at one year. Bigelow is Level 1, but under old criteria we were not. Good data. It tells us where we need to improve, and who we need to support. Todd Harrison: a greater focus on improvement. "High needs" is new group. Are we closing achievement gap? How many kids are we moving into advanced level of MCAS? How many are we moving out of warning categories? Now have a broader measure of performance. Saw a lot of subgroup growth, especially in math.

Q: What are we doing for intervention? A: Using Title 1 money. Have had a math coach the last few years and a change in math curriculum. Full-time literacy specialists. A lot of work during school day and after school. Better classroom instruction and more differentiated teaching. Working hard on the bubble group: Good success with that. Six-week MCAS prep class after school last year: Moved almost all those kids up a category. School committee money went toward that.

Q: Is there anything in the 5-year plan about the preschools? A: Two sites is not ideal. Space is terrible at the Ed Center. Would love to get it somewhere else but can't do it in existing schools. And have accessibility issues. Q: But if it doesn't have a line item in the 5-year plan might it not happen? A: The plan is reconsidered every year. Preschools are on the radar. Parent group is organized now.

It has been great to have the Committee here so soon after the Mayor's news came out. More information is available on the website.

PTO Agenda

-Vote on Minutes: accepted.

-Upcoming events:

-Bake Sale November 6. Julie and Sally: Presidential election year. We need 100 bakers. Have 20-25 now. Still need people for staffing the tables. Please sign up for even an hour. The school sent a notice out. Todd: Can we add the cartoon about bake sales/elections? Beth will send another announcement. Instructions for bakers are available. 6-8 pm Monday prep will be done at Anna's house: packaging is as important as the baked goods.

Q: Could we do a raffle? No: have to pull a permit. Can we put a donation box out? Yes.

Mindy/Becky will look into getting something to raffle and timing of the permit.

-Magazine drive: Berit. We are on track. Friday 16 Nov. Kick off will be in the auditorium around 12:30. Beth will put it on website. Renewal info will be in email blast Sunday. Don't renew through notices: have to go through fund-raising company to get the 40% for Bigelow. New website name. New school ID. Kids will come home with packages in a couple of weeks.

-Turkey Bowl. November 15, Bigelow Big Night Feb 9. Volunteer sheets going around.

-Soup Stroll: A success. Raised \$3100. 100 people.

Todd: Q for Ted. Need another \$364 to finish paying teachers for work over summer. Teacher deadline was Monday. Ted: we are over budget by about \$100. Need to be clearer in standard going forward: should not be for school supplies that can be obtained through school.

Todd: Quick update. We survived Sandy and Halloween all in one week. We had the second day off because still more than 4000 homes without power. Lots of trees still being cleaned up. One teacher had to go to New York to help his mother: she's ok. October was a good month. Lots of team building. Sports teams: girls and boys soccer teams winning records. Cross country teams competed yesterday. Boys football team: they love it. They keep losing but good group. Playing big schools. 6th grade: good field trips Camp Chickami. 6th grade Social was good. Whole school dance went well. Trying to get kids connected - that definitely has happened. Kids engaged in learning. Progress reports came out last week. Comments put in by staff: fabulous. Please let teachers know. Q: Report cards from last year are gone. Could that be left online a little longer? Or have a notice about when it will be deleted. A: You can call office and they will print it out.

Next meeting January 4, 8:30-9:45am.

10:05am adjournment

Additional update from Beth Coomber:

1. Website has been updated to include the following:

Sidebar

- Links to both PTO Parent Calendar and Student activities calendars now – the parents text is purple and students is blue. You can toggle between the two if you want. To the right of the word “agenda” is an arrow. Also, you can sync with outlook or other calendars if you want.
- Upcoming events appear in the sidebar (I think it is next 10 things)
- Ournewton.org is a link in the in sidebar
- Translate button of entire site is there
- Donate buttons up for general PTO, technology and Scholarship fund

Your PTO Page:

- Has minutes and schedule of all meetings now

Technology page:

- Video and brochure are up (per last meeting)

Donate page:

- Added matching gift information
- Added Scholarship fund information

2. Newsletter has been updated and now has recent postings as links at the top.