

Andover School Committee
Regular Meeting of February 10, 2011
School Administration Building - School Committee Room

Members in Attendance: Chair Dennis Forgue, Annie Gilbert, Richard J. Collins, David Birnbach, and Paula Colby-Clements

Others in Attendance: Dr. Marinel McGrath, Superintendent, Dr. Susan M. Nicholson, Assistant Superintendent

Invited guests: State Senator Barry Finegold, Representatives Jim Lyons, and Paul Adams, Town Manager Buzz Stapczynski, Board of Selectman Chair Alex Vispoli, Finance Chair Joanne Marden, Finance Committee members Mary O'Donoghue, Jon Stumpf, and Peggy Kruse.

I. Regular Meeting

A. Call to Order

The Regular Meeting of the School Committee was opened at 7:05 P.M. by Chairman Forgue.

B. Opening Ceremonies

Mr. Collins asked for a moment of silence followed by the Pledge of Allegiance led by South School Students, Tony Cocchiario (Grade 1), and Ashley Cocchiario (Grade 4). Mr. Collins presented Ashley and Tony with a Certificate of Appreciation on behalf of the School Committee.

C. Recognition None

D. New Business

1. Joint Meeting with Board of Selectmen and Finance Committee with State Senator Finegold and State Representatives Adams and Lyons

Chairman Forgue introduced and welcomed State Senator Finegold, Representative Jim Lyons, and Representative Paul Adams who are here tonight to discuss Town/School issues and concerns. Board of Selectman Chair Alex Vispoli said a rotating subcommittee of Triboard members will meet periodically with the legislative members for continued dialogue throughout the year. Finance Chair Joanne Marden recognizes how important what happens at the State House affects our budget in Andover. Assigning a rotating subcommittee will keep communication flowing more frequently and allow our legislators to better represent the community. Chairman Forgue added that as specific legislation comes forth we want our legislators to know from us how it will affect us and where we need their assistance.

State Senator Barry Finegold thanked the Committees for having them here tonight to get a perspective on the budget and how it will affect the future. He commends the leadership of the Town for all they work they have done, especially regarding the Triple A Bond rating which is not a minor matter. The picture of the State is a mixed one but with positive signs. He expects an increase in tax collection, revenue growth, growth in retail sales, and personal income. Although projections are for collecting \$20.5 billion in FY-12, the previous year's decision to take Federal Stimulus Funds will leave us with a \$2 billion structural deficit. Hopefully, next year at this time they won't be talking about cuts. The State government gets approximately \$8 billion a year for Medicare from the Federal Government, but with the Federal deficit at \$14 trillion dollars we expect future dollars for Medicare to be decreased. Local aid is expected to be cut 5-8% this year, and the town should be cautious with expectations on the revenue they hope to receive. Mr. Finegold is concerned about Special Education costs and believes the State should cover Special Education Transportation and Out of District Tuition costs. The State is trying to find efficiencies to run more efficiently. Serious discussions surrounding health care are on-going, with the biggest budget buster being Medicare, all stakeholders have to work together to reduce health care costs, and he believes a change in Plan Design will be passed this year. The Secretary of Education is planning to convene a task force to look at provisions for Chapter 70. Mr. Finegold applauds the leadership of the Town for their work with the I-93 project and expects this will open the area up to incredible new growth upon completion.

Representative Jim Lyons is looking forward to meeting on a regular basis with the Triboard subcommittee, and views his role in the process as one of protecting the taxpayer. He feels it is time to draw a line in the sand for local aid, and to look at other alternatives in State spending to allow an increase in local aid. The State spends \$352M tax dollars on illegal immigrants; people are concerned and compassionate, but people want to know why we are spending this amount of money. Issues before us include where State dollars are going, and why local aid is being cut. He would like to see the areas for cost savings outlined in the Pioneer Study looked at more closely.

Representative Paul Adams said a pattern of spending developed over the year that has to be stopped. The National Debt is rising, resulting in future grants and revenues from the Federal Government being reduced or lost. Unfunded mandates need a fundamental overhaul and reformulated. The Plan Design for Employee Health Insurance needs to be passed, and supported unilaterally. He feels local aid numbers put out by the Governor is optimistic. Mr. Adams looks forward to being part of a responsive team for the Town's needs.

Paula Colby-Clements said reimbursements to towns for unfunded mandates are shrinking and she appreciates their comments relative to this; however, last May another unfunded mandate was passed for bullying prevention, adding another layer of costs. When NCLB was passed it was to be funded at 75%, in reality the reimbursement is no where close to that. Dennis Fogue said we are receiving only 19% of Special Education funds for Circuit Breaker and Out-of-District Tuition; last year we received only \$1.25 million when the dollar amount should have been \$2.3-\$2.5 million, causing layoffs in the School Department to cover the deficit.

Joanne Marden said they should be able to get support from all of their colleagues in the legislature on reimbursement for the Circuit Breaker and Out-of-District Tuitions since all communities are experiencing the same problem. She would like to see local aid numbers produced earlier in the budget process (not in July) which would also benefit every community in their planning. State Senator Finegold said although he would be comfortable using the budget numbers from the House Budget, the longer they wait to produce the local aid number the better it might be because more concrete information on revenue is on-hand. He said the Town could move Town Meeting to a later date.

Alex Vispoli said the I-93 Interchange project is very important to Andover and the Board has voted to go forward with the concept design with 8-9 mitigation items that complement why we need the interchange. He is asking all three representatives to make sure they know what the list of mitigation items are and that they support it. Also upon completion of the I-93 project, the area will need fire protection. This would be a good opportunity for a regionalized fire station to reduce costs for the three towns, and he hopes there would be support for this. He requests that the representatives find ways to deliver services at lower costs and keep us informed on the status of the Regionalization Bill.

The Town Manager requested the representatives follow up on the results of the Study Commission for Chapter 70 and Municipal Aid and share the findings with us.

Annie Gilbert commented that on the local level, we are ready to conduct business differently, to do more with less, and have made efforts in this direction but we need help from the Representatives in removing obstacles so we can be more responsive and do business better. Some mandates are important and need to be funded while some need to be removed. The amount of reporting requirements for School Administrators is extremely time consuming, taking time away from principals to be instructional leaders.

What is the status on closing the telecommunications loophole? *Mr. Finegold said there was some movement, money has to come from somewhere and they are concerned the expense will be passed onto consumers.*

D. New Business (Cont'd)

Why can't they freeze Special Education Tuition rates and/or control costs? We budget for one amount and then mid-year they increase the tuition and pro-rate it back to September. *Mr. Finegold replied that the question is a legitimate one and controlling costs is an issue.* Dr. McGrath commented that it would be helpful in preparing the budget if out of district tuition rates were set by June 30th rather than receiving notice mid-way through the year that tuition rates have not only increased, but the increase is retroactive to September. There must be a legislative mechanism that could be put into place that would require a definitive rate set by a designated date each year. This would be helpful with the budgeting. Dennis Forgue said Andover has worked hard and spent considerable dollars (without State funding) to develop in-house Special Education programs. Are there incentives that could be put into place to encourage us to continue developing in-house programs? Dr. McGrath said there is a strong need for alternative programs for high school students that we cannot create in-house and she sees this as a good opportunity for a regionalization program.

David Birnbach would like to see more life skills brought back into the classrooms i.e. personal finance management, great level of interest in financial institutions for these, how can we get pilot initiatives going? *Mr. Finegold said that is something that should be a public/private partnership. If this is something Andover wants, they should be able to find a company to partner with.*

Dr. McGrath said suburban public schools are hurt by the Chapter 70 formula and there are no incentives, benefits, or innovative funds for high-performing districts. She would like to see the legislators speak up on behalf of the districts that are high performing to be eligible for education funds provided to lower performing districts. *Mr. Finegold said a lot of higher performing school districts are partnering with higher education institutions to pilot programs, and suggested we look in that direction.* Annie Gilbert told Mr. Finegold that they did partner with Northeastern University on the STEMS initiative but the State cut the funding. David Birnbach stated they have been working diligently with higher education institutions that are very eager to assist us in jump starting innovative programs. The bigger challenge is on the financial side, we have to build out of our four walls to think and link with higher education to bridge the gap to the 21st Century World. He hopes the legislators continue with this mantra.

Joanne Marden said everyone seems to be on the same side for changes to plan design and would appreciate it if our legislators keep us informed as they start to consider legislation on health plan designs, contact us for feedback on any ideas, stay in touch with the Town Manager's office, and meet regularly with the sub-committee.

The Town Manager said Blue Cross/Blue Shield released information today on a tiered program, and they will look at that as an option to propose to the unions. There are cost savings programs out there, that have the potential to save everyone money. GIC is proposing some cutting edge programs, but it involves us voting on Section 19 which the Board of Selectmen do not want to do.

Mary Carbone, 3 Cyr Circle stated that our budgets biggest problems are salary related. She does not feel the increase in our tax rate can continue and suggests we freeze all contracts in town for one year.

Dennis Forgue thanked State Senator Finegold, and Representative Lyons and Representative Adams for coming this evening and he looks forward to continued dialogue with them and the sub-committee. Mr. Collins left the Regular Meeting at the end of this discussion.

E. **Citizen Input** None

F. **Education**

1. Bancroft School Building Project Update

Annie Gilbert updated the Committee on the status of the Bancroft Project. They are moving forward with the hiring of a construction manager, there will be many meetings coming up, and the architects would like to update the entire School Committee at a future meeting. Bob Marshall, Samos Lane, has safety concerns about building the school while students are still there, the narrowness of the roads and the construction vehicles entering the property. He asked if the required release forms from the Fire Department were received. Annie Gilbert said the SBC has been working closely with the Andover Fire Department throughout the entire process, all releases have been received to date, and that student safety is their first concern. A new access road on the back part of the property is being built and students will be transported to school via the access road, while the construction vehicles will use Bancroft Road to access the site.

2. AHS Program of Studies 2011-2012

Dr. Sharkey presented the 2011-2012 AHS Programs of Studies for the School Committee to approve. The courses removed are those that raised little interest from students and have been replaced with more relevant courses. The courses do not increase the cost of teachers nor do they require additional staffing. The courses will be handled with existing staff or they will not run, and will require a minimum of 21 students to be offered. The document has been reviewed by the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent.

As this is the first reading of the documents, the School Committee will vote on the Program of Studies for 2011-2012 at the March 3, 2011 meeting.

3. Shawsheen School Study Committee Formation

Dennis Forgue talked about the pre-school population currently housed at Shawsheen and West Elementary Schools which will need to be relocated upon completion of the Bancroft School Project. He would like to ask the Town Manager and the Board of Selectmen to appoint a task force to begin investigating options for the future use of Shawsheen when it comes off-line.

On a motion by Annie Gilbert with a second by Paula Colby-Clements, it was voted 4-0 to authorize Dennis Forgue to request the Town Manager consider appointing a Task Force for Shawsheen and make recommendations for its future use.

Dr. McGrath will follow-up with a communication to pre-school parents that the Shawsheen School will be open for three more years.

G. **Old Business**

1. Schedule of FY-12 Budget Workshops and Meetings

Dr. McGrath reported that the budget sub-committee met today and additional budget meetings will be held on February 15, and February 17th with the presentation of the FY-12 recommended budget to the School Committee scheduled for Thursday, March 3 at 7:00 P.M. Meetings are planned for every Thursday through the month of March beginning at 7:00 P.M. with the Public Hearing of the budget on Thursday, March 17th. The Public Hearing will be followed by a week of deliberations by the School Committee and the final budget submitted to the Town Manager by noon on April 1st.

Chairman Forgue said Annie Gilbert will represent the School Committee in negotiations with the AEA on the consolidation to one software program (Gradequick to X2) at AHS. David Birnbach would like to be part of the negotiations with Annie.

H. Consent Agenda

1. Minutes of Tri-board meeting of December 13, 2010, and Amended Regular Meeting Minutes of January 27, 2011
2. Warrants – in order

On a motion by Annie Gilbert with a second by Paula Colby-Clements, it was voted 4-0 to approve the consent agenda items as presented.

I. Adjournment

On a motion by Annie Gilbert, with a second by Paula-Colby Clements it was voted 4-0 to adjourn the meeting at 9:15 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Dee DeLorenzo
Recorder

Documents: AHS Course of Studies Program for FY-2011-2012