



SCHOOL COMMITTEE

BUSINESS MEETING OPEN SESSION MINUTES

August 8, 2023

Meeting:	School Committee
Date:	August 8, 2023
Location:	MERMHS Library
Attendees:	Pamela Beaudoin, Superintendent Avi Urbas, Director of Finance Theresa Whitman, Chairperson John Binieris Jake Foster Kate Koch-Sundquist Anna Lin Mitchell Chris Reed Erica Spencer
Absent:	
Guests:	
Recorded by:	Maria Schmidt
Link to Reports and Presentations	https://www.mersd.org/domain/785

A. Call to Order of Business Meeting Open Session– Ms. Whitman called the School Committee Business meeting to order at 3:15 p.m.

- 1) **Public Comment** – none
- 2) **Chairman’s Report** – none
- 3) **Consent Agenda** –
 - Acceptance of Warrants: FY 23 V1082 and 1083; FY24 V1006 and V1007
 - Minutes for approval: June 26, 2023

Ms. Koch-Sundquist moved to approve the Consent Agenda; Mr. Foster seconded the motion. Ms. Whitman abstained because she did not review the minutes under consideration.

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The motion passed unanimously.

4) Sub-Committee Reports

- **Elementary Facilities/MSBC Sub-Committee** (Theresa Whitman) – No Report
- **Finance Sub-Committee** (Anna Lin Mitchell/Theresa Whitman) – Report. Ms. Whitman and Ms. Mitchell attended the Collaboration Group Meeting, consisting of representatives from the School Committee, Manchester Select Board, Manchester Finance Committee, Essex Board of Selectmen, and Essex Finance Committee. Following the meeting, a summary was delivered to the full board of each stakeholder, including the SC. Ms. Whitman reported that the Collaboration group intends to release one official summary of meeting proceedings to all boards. It will include topics for consideration and input to the boards. The current summary includes two items for consideration by the SC:

1. Purpose of the collaboration group: The collaboration group concluded that it is important to continue to meet. The group proposed to meet as a non-public meeting. They set a goal of developing new financial strategies aligned with the member towns, recognizing that the collaboration is not a decision-making body. The collaboration group proposed providing meeting summaries as a method of addressing the need for transparency. Given that collaboration meeting discussions do not include the input of the full boards, the group recommended scheduling three annual all-board meetings. The agenda for these meetings would be determined by the responses from each board to the collaboration group meeting summary.

SC Action Item: Does the SC support continuing with the collaboration board as proposed?

Ms. Mitchell commented that the reason the collaboration group did not favor a public meeting is so that they can function as a working group. To facilitate transparency, the all-board meetings would be public.

Ms. Koch-Sundquist commented that the negotiation meetings had silent observers in attendance, giving all invested parties the opportunity to hear the thought processes at work. Ms. Koch-Sundquist asked what precludes another member of a board from attending the collaboration group meetings.

Ms. Whitman stated that this was not favored because there might be sensitive information that a particular board is not ready to make public. Ms. Whitman said that the collaboration group did not come to a consensus on whether it would be the same board members representing their boards or a rotating member from each.

Ms. Koch-Sundquist stated that she has reservations about the previous breakdown in communication occurring between the collaboration group and the boards. She said that the summary provided does not give insight into the dialogue at the meeting or which members voiced which viewpoints. Mr. Reed agreed with this assessment.

Ms. Koch-Sundquist made a motion that all stakeholders be able to attend the collaboration group meetings as silent observers. Ms. Spencer seconded the motion

The motion passed unanimously.

2. Addressing the FY 24 budget and beyond: The collaboration group concluded that the group would meet to share long-term ideas about meeting budget needs. The group asked what the district needs from the town partners to start the budget process. They stressed the need for alignment of resources and expectations. The collaboration group proposed that each town share their budget constraints at the fall all-board meeting. The collaboration group will serve as the venue to propose budget solutions. No binding resolutions will come from the collaboration group.

Mr. Foster noted that Ms. Whitman was a strong advocate for changing the functioning of the collaboration group but that the current proposals still position the collaboration meeting as a deliberation group. He asked if Ms. Whitman feels the current proposals represent substantive change. Ms. Whitman stated that the majority of the collaboration group approved of the current direction. Mr. Foster responded that there is public interest in knowing what is going on at collaboration meetings and advocated for the meetings being public.

Ms. Spencer stated that there are pieces missing from the summary that impact her ability to make decisions. Ms. Whitman suggested splitting the action items:

Ms. Whitman asked if the SC would support submission by each town board of budget concerns at the fall all-board meeting.

The SC unanimously voted in favor of this proposal.

Ms. Mitchell inquired about rotating attendance for board members at the collaboration meeting. Ms. Koch-Sundquist pointed out that, without context from the preceding meeting, attending members would lack context. This would be compounded if all boards rotated attendees. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that the collaboration group was formed with the chair and co-chair of each board comprising the group. Ms. Koch-Sundquist asked about the purpose of intermediate meetings if there will be three all-board meetings and the towns are committed to providing financial concerns at the fall meeting. Ms. Koch-

Sundquist stated that the superintendent would then be responsible for constructing the budget and would have needed input to do so.

Superintendent Beaudoin stated that the collaboration group was formed during contract negotiations. The collaboration group allowed the boards to update each other about the negotiation process while observing the prohibition against publically discussing the negotiations while underway. The superintendent said that at the root of the reluctance to make the collaboration meetings public is the desire to preserve an off-the-record space where sensitive messages may be shared. Mr. Urbas stressed that none of the collaboration group members have deliberative authority. The collaboration group goal is to take information back to the boards for deliberation. The group exists for problem identification and ideation. Mr. Urbas stated that he believes the group is a good tool to get the SC out of the political realm and to the problem-solving realm. Mr. Foster pointed out the similarities between the collaboration group and board subcommittees and said that subcommittees meet in public session.

Mr. Foster moved that the School Committee would encourage the collaboration group to be a public meeting.

Discussion: Mr. Foster stated that the lack of public access is troubling. He said that the collaboration group is vetting solutions and influencing how boards decide to move forward. Ms. Koch-Sundquist voiced support for allowing silent observers rather than making the meetings fully public.

There was no second to the motion.

Ms. Whitman moved that the School Committee report back to the collaboration group that allowing silent observers is the best step to understanding the purpose of the collaboration group. Ms. Spencer seconded the motion.

The motion passed 5-2, with Mr. Reed and Mr. Foster voting no.

- **Policy/Communication Sub-Committee** (Erica Spencer/Jake Foster) – No Report
- **Negotiation Team Sub-Committee** (Kate Koch-Sundquist/Chris Reed) –Report

5) Continued Business –

- a. Appointment of Treasurer Recommendation Glenn Bergevin – vote to approve: Ms. Whitman extended the School Committee’s gratitude to retiring Treasurer, Charlie Lane, for his long service to MERSD. Mr. Foster asked why the SC appoints the treasurer rather than administration doing so. Ms. Spencer noted that she learned in training that there are a few positions that are the responsibility of the SC to appoint. Superintendent Beaudoin stated

that the practice meets fiduciary responsibility. Mr. Bergevin said that if anything untoward was uncovered, he would report directly to the School Committee. Mr. Urbas underscored the importance of maintaining a distinction between the business manager, who keeps records, and the treasurer, who manages the cash. It is critical that these separate positions work collaboratively together but report independently to the School Committee.

Ms. Mitchell moved to appoint Glenn Bergevin to the position of district treasurer.

Mr. Reed seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

- b. Turf Field Replacement Update – Mr. Urbas shared that the turf field work continues to wait on completion of testing. All possible steps have been taken prior to ripping up the field. Updates come in daily from the testing company. The carpet test passed, and the final tests are pending. The contractor has committed to starting the work as soon as the tests clear. The current start estimate is August 8, 2023. The current delay has implications in two areas. First, the budget for the project is impacted with change orders necessitated, for a total of approximately \$2,500. Mr. Urbas said that the district is in good shape since we have a contract that included a change order budget. The second area of concern is the impact of the delay on the athletics program. Mr. Urbas said that the start of work at Brook Street is being held so that the district is not without a field. The MERSD athletic director is confident that she can run the program with this adjustment.

Ms. Mitchell asked if Essex would have the final invoice for the field replacements for their planned November town meeting. Mr. Urbas replied that they would. Mr. Urbas stated that there was a timeline buffer built into the contract schedule. Currently, it is believed that the Brook Street field will still be completed per the original schedule. Mr. Foster asked which tests are pending. Mr. Urbas said that the infield and shock pad testing are not done. The conservation commission set a high standard for testing the actual product coming to MBTS, which takes longer. Superintendent Beaudoin confirmed that the athletic schedule will be released as planned. Mr. Urbas clarified that the athletic director and high school principal are responsible for the athletic schedule and program. Mr. Urban and Mr. Waldron are the project managers for the turf replacement.

- c. Subcommittees – The School Committee discussed remaining items on the agenda. Still to be considered are the yearly schedule, appointment of SC members to sub-committee positions, and the bucket list of items proposed by each member for consideration.

*Mr. Reed moved to hold the remainder of continued business for the September 5, 2023 meeting.
Mr. Foster seconded the motion.*

Mr. Foster reminded members to fill out the shared bucket list form with items they would like to taken up for discussion.

The motion passed unanimously:

Discussion:

- 6) **School Committee Comment** – Mr. Reed and Mr. Whitman both offered their appreciation to all members for the long day of work completed during the day's SC summer workshop prior to the business meeting. Ms. Whitman also offered gratitude to Mr. Michael Eatman for facilitating their workshop.

7) Adjourn

Ms. Spencer moved to adjourn the School Committee business meeting; Mr. Foster seconded the motion.

The motion passed unanimously.

Meeting Adjourned at 4:08 pm

School Committee Future Meetings

- Tuesday, September 5, 2023
- Tuesday, September 19, 2023