

MINUTES OF THE LINCOLN SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Tuesday, March 17, 2015
Reed Gym, Ballfield Road Campus, Lincoln, MA
OPEN SESSION

School Committee Present: Jennifer Glass (Chairperson), Tim Christenfeld (Vice Chairperson), Al Schmertzler, Peter Borden, Becky McFall (SBAC Co-Chair and Superintendent), Buck Creel (Administrator for Business and Finance).

School Committee Absent: Jena Salon, Preditta Cedeno (METCO Representative).

Board of Selectmen Present: Renel Fredriksen (Chair), Peter Braun, Tim Higgins (Town Administrator).

Board of Selectmen Absent: Noah Eckhouse.

Finance Committee Present: Peyton Marshall (Chair), Christian Kasper (Vice Chair), Laura Sander, Jeff Birchby, Eric Harris, Jim Hutchinson.

Finance Committee Absent: Sanj Kharbanda.

Capital Planning Committee Present: Andy Beard (Chair), Al Schmertzler, Peter Braun, Audrey Kalmus.

Capital Planning Committee Absent: Jacqueline Apsler, Jim Henderson, Carol Lovell, Peter Montero, Tim Moynihan.

Town Moderator: Sarah Cannon Holden.

I. Greetings and Call to Order

Ms. Glass, Chairperson, called the meeting to order at 7:10 pm.

II. Agenda

Documents: 1) Frequently Asked Questions, undated; 2) Multi-Board Meeting: Preparation for Town Meeting, March 17, 2015

Ms. Glass will present on warrant articles about the school buildings for the Annual Town Meeting on Saturday, March 28, 2015. The Board and Committee members will ask each other questions, and the audience will have an opportunity to ask questions.

Ms. Glass asked which way should the Town go to maintain the school buildings: renovation or repair? Dore & Whittier identified and developed three families of options. Option one addresses the facility needs only at an estimated cost range of \$12 to \$29 million. Option two addresses repairs plus a la carte educational enhancements at an estimated cost range of \$30 to \$47 million. Option three is comprehensive renovation which addresses repairs and most all educational enhancements at an estimated cost range

of \$54 to \$66 million. The second question is, if the Town chooses renovation, should the Town apply to the Massachusetts School Building Authority [MSBA] for reimbursement for a project?

Ms. Glass said that at the forums that were held this fall, overwhelming support seemed to coalesce around a project that included some level of educational enhancement, which would cost the Town at least \$30 million. The warrant article questions at Town Meeting will test that feedback.

The first warrant article, article 30, asks the Town to appropriate \$750,000 for a feasibility study to develop renovation choices for the school buildings. Along with needing to ask for the feasibility study funding, the School Committee wants to see how much support there is for a renovation project so that they can show the MSBA what the Town wants. Ms. Glass noted that the Town must vote on this article with the understanding that the cost of a project would likely be at least \$30 million. If it passes, Town Meeting would continue on to warrant article 31. If article 30 fails, Town Meeting will go on to warrant article 32.

Article 31 asks if the Town should file a Statement of Interest [SOI] with the MSBA. If it passes, the School Committee will pass over article 32. If article 31 fails, article 32 asks the Town to appropriate \$650,000 to develop repair options for the school buildings. Ms. Glass noted that for articles 30 and 32, residents also need to vote on the ballot question 1 at the Town Election on Monday, March 30, and the question needs only receive a majority vote.

If article 31 passes, the School Committee and the Board of Selectmen would submit the SOI by the MSBA's April 10 deadline. Ms. Glass said that the Town would hear whether it was invited to the MSBA process in the November 2015 to January 2016 timeline. As the articles are currently structured, if article 31 fails, the feasibility study money voted for in article 30 would be used for a Lincoln-only renovation project. If article 32 passes, the School Committee would bring a cohesive repair project to Town Meeting. If article 32 fails, the School Committee would bring individual repair choices to Town Meeting through the Capital Planning Committee process on a yearly basis. She noted that the School Committee wants a clear answer to move forward with the buildings. If they spend less than the amount voted on for the feasibility studies in articles 30 or 32, the money would be returned to the Town, as the Committee did for the SBAC study. They cannot structure the warrant articles without specific amounts of money.

Ms. Glass said the Board of Selectmen and School Committee have co-sponsored warrant article 33, which asks for \$75,000 to hire consultants to prepare a master plan of the Ballfield Road school campus. If the article passes, it would also require a simple majority vote on ballot question 2 at the Town Election. Mr. Higgins said the master plan would study traffic circulation, septic and wetlands issues, parking, and other matters. Mr. Higgins said they had consulted with many firms about the plan's budget, and \$75,000 should be sufficient to complete the work.

Andy Beard, Chair of the Capital Planning Committee, talked about the long-term plan for the Town for the next 23 years, which looks at what is needed to maintain the Town's existing assets. He said at this point, the one large expenditure was done in 2009-11 when the roads were repaired, and in 20 to 25 years the roads will need to be done again. He mentioned that the Maguire Report, which was commissioned by the

Capital Planning Committee, stated that there were major repair needs at the school, and he believes it is still the case. He said that the Town could afford a project and said a project would be in line with the Town's budget. He said the Town needs to do something, and asked if the residents wanted to afford it, which is another question.

Peyton Marshall, Chair of the Finance Committee, noted that the Finance Committee has not yet made any recommendations on these warrant articles but will deliberate on them at their Monday, March 23 meeting. He gave context for the Town's tax position and said that the growth in the average tax bill for Lincoln property owners is the lowest among Lincoln's neighboring towns. Lincoln has not made many capital expenditures. The Town has to spend and noted that something will have to be done for the school buildings, and the starting point would be \$30 million. In addition to the school, the needs of the Council on Aging and the Recreation Department are parts of the conversation. He noted that they will have figures ready with the borrowing of \$30 million, \$40 million, and \$50 million with costs and tradeoffs so that residents will know the increase in their tax bill. The green sheet that was available at the meeting estimated that for a median home (assessed at roughly \$884,000) that for every \$10 million the Town borrows, the tax bill would increase by \$321 to \$451. Mr. Marshall said that a rough finance limit for the Town is a total of about \$50 million. Given current advice, if the Town borrows a total above \$50 million, it could impair the Town's bond ratings and alter the financial profile. Maturing debt is coming off the tax bills, and he said that if articles 30, 32 and 33 passed, there would be an increase of 3.9% on the tax bills, which is within range and below average.

Mr. Borden arrived at 7:47 pm.

Regarding article 33, Peter Braun and Renel Fredriksen said there is still work to do on the specifics and details, and that the feedback he has heard is that the schools and the Community Center Study Committee need to coordinate. Article 33 is essential.

Residents had several concerns. Adam Greenberg was concerned that that the MSBA would not like the campus planning done before the Town would be invited into the funding pipeline because it could prejudice the bidding process. Ms. Glass said the master plan was to understand the context of the campus, and Mr. Higgins and Mr. Creel said the master plan should not be an issue with the MSBA.

Ms. Glass said the School Committee has voted to support warrant articles 30 and 31, which are their strongest recommendation. If those articles do not pass, she said the Committee would like article 32 to pass so that they could do a cohesive project.

Robert Blackwell thanked them for the report and was concerned about the \$30 million start. He wanted the article to say not more than \$30 million. Ms. Glass explained that the \$30 million figure is the cut off between repairs and renovation, and they want the Town to know that the renovation will be at least \$30 million. She noted that the choices are either repair or renovation, and the Committee knows it does not have a blank check.

Mr. Christenfeld arrived at 8:03 pm.

Mr. Marshall said that it is tough to know the amounts, especially not knowing whether the Town will be invited into the MSBA process and funding pipeline. He said the Town will be able to do more to the buildings with MSBA funding than without it, and it will be tough to set limits until the Town knows it is invited by the MSBA. Eric

Harris noted that the MSBA looks at a combination of benefits for the educational value, and so it does not make sense to give an exact limit of what the Town will spend.

Mr. Greenberg noted that by choosing to apply to the MSBA, voters would choose a more expensive proposal. Katie Walker asked if that was the case. Ms. Glass said there will still be a decision point on a specific project if the MSBA invites the Town to participate. If the Town is not invited, they will do a Lincoln-only feasibility study.

John Snell asked why the Town would submit an SOI only once and asked about the timing of an MSBA project or a Lincoln-only funded project. Ms. Glass noted that some major projects on the buildings have been deferred, and the Committee cannot let the school buildings get run down. If they were to do some of those major projects, the MSBA might not invite the Town, and if the Town is invited, the project would start in 2018. If that does not work, the Committee will have to do some of these projects.

Harriet Todd wanted to know how they would gauge support and asked about a 2/3 vote. Ms. Glass urged residents to think carefully about what their individual vote would mean. Town Moderator Sarah Cannon Holden said that Town Meeting procedures allowed anyone at the meeting to call for a standing vote count to know what the numbers are.

Steve Perlmutter, a member of the former SBAC, said it was important for people to understand what they were voting on. He said that if the sense of the Town was to go back to the MSBA, the Town needs to send a clear message. He said that when they discuss the \$30 million minimum, in the MSBA process, that could mean a \$55 million project minus the 30 to 40 percent reimbursement from the MSBA. He asked that when they present the costs at Town Meeting, that this point needs to be made.

Jennifer Grandstock asked how long into the future does the repair only option move the Town? Ms. Glass said Dore & Whittier categorized 180 needs, and the most immediate needs were within the five to ten year time frame. Mr. Creel noted that the repairs would likely have additional costs of staging, borrowing, and escalating costs each year. He said if the Town selected the lowest amount of \$12 million, they would do the balance of the repairs in the next five to ten years. He noted they would need to gauge the impact of these repairs on the educational programs. To have construction ongoing for that period of time is disruptive. He noted that there would be project costs too. Ms. Grandstock asked if \$29 million was enough money.

Maggy Pietropaolo, a member of the former SBAC, asked if the Board of Selectmen has voted on its recommendations on the warrant articles. Ms. Fredriksen said the Board will discuss the warrant articles at their next meeting. She noted that their consensus seemed to be that they should support a project with the MSBA. Ms. Pietropaolo asked about the Capital Planning Committee. Mr. Beard said they have not yet met to consider the warrant articles before Town Meeting. Mr. Marshall said the Finance Committee will consider all of the warrant articles together at their next meeting, noting that last time, they wanted MSBA funding.

Residents asked at what time the Town Meeting would be considering these warrant articles. Ms. Cannon Holden said that they cannot predict that, but if it gets to be 11:30 or so, she would not want to split up the four articles and roughly predicted that they would come up after lunch. Mr. Braun asked that all residents attend the entire Town Meeting and exercise their democratic franchise. Ms. Glass said that the Reed

Gym would serve as overflow for Town Meeting. They will have shuttle buses at the commuter parking lot too. She thanked all for attending.

III. Adjournment

Ms. Glass moved, and Mr. Christenfeld seconded, the motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:36 pm. The Committee voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting. The next School Committee meeting is scheduled for Thursday, March 19 at 7:00 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Sarah G. Marcotte
Recording Secretary