

*School Enrollment Task Force Meeting
Town Hall
730 Massachusetts Avenue
Arlington, MA
Monday, November 30, 2015
7:00 PM*

Minutes

Present: *Kathleen Bodie, Superintendent of the Schools,
Adam Chapdelaine, Town Manager,
John Cole, Permanent Town Building Committee
Joe Curro, Board of Selectman
Charlie Foskett, Capital Planning & Finance
William Hayner, School Committee
Diane Mahon, Board of Selectmen (arrived at 7:25 pm)
Cindy Starks, School Committee,
Al Tosti, Finance Committee
Jeff Thielman, School Committee*

Opening of Meeting

Meeting Opened at 7:07 PM

Dr. Bodie reviewed the McKibben Report and said the report is to be a second source to the district projections. Classrooms at the elementary level are at or very near capacity and that we are at capacity at the middle school. As the report indicates, we are expecting 1,000 more students in the next ten years, and we need to figure what we have to do with the additional students. Currently larger elementary cohorts are headed to middle and high school and at the end of 10 years, elementary levels will start to taper off, but will still be above the current numbers.

Options are to make class sizes bigger or create more space; including possibility of taking suprlused schools out of reserve and reactive them. We could revisit our neighborhood schools concept. The middle school will have 200 more students in the next two years; therefore we may need to move from clusters to a junior high model.

Questions about report?

Mr. Joe Curro said enrollment growth is a good problem to have but difficult to solve. Mr. Curro questioned how well has McKibben matched reality, and how should we consider this? Dr. Bodie answered that the McKibben Report and our projections match pretty well, but this year came in below expectations and stated that it is hard to know if we will have more students and how many? Time will tell.

Mr. Curro compared the report to a hurricane cone. What time horizon are we looking at 5 years, or 10 years? Ms. Starks said we have seen this coming, but we are already over capacity at four schools, two under capacity, one right there, and the Ottoson is already over capacity, the problem already exists, and we cannot wait for new numbers. Mr. Hayner agreed with Ms. Starks. Mr. Thielman asked if we should rethink whether we want neighborhood schools; he then asked what size should our middle school be. He also questioned if this was for the Task Force or for the School Committee to answer.

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Mr. Foskett said that we need to come to the end point, and figure out how we solve the problem, but wants members to be aware of the barriers, what our goals look like for each and compare them to solve the solution. He stated the need to compare Capital, land, management overhead, time line, maintain educational quality, maintain neighborhood schools, cost operating, control, academic models, and minimize risk (avoid big bets that turn out wrong). Mr. Chapdelaine wants to maintain quality programming, neighborhood schools, maintain operating cost and, academic models. Mr. Tosti mentioned the rebuild of high school and minuteman, and pointed out the need for an override. Mr. Hayner wants class size as a goal and a consideration.

Mr. Curro and Mr. Chapdelaine agree that our goals, barriers, land space, and needs will disrupt and impact the quality of family life as well as other valued community programs here in Arlington. Ms. Mahon arrived at 7:25 p.m. and brought up the disruptions to Special Education Students.

After this discussion Mr. Chapdelaine and Dr. Bodie said they will work up a statement of goals and barriers.

Dr. Bodie then spoke on the immediate space needs at Thompson. She pointed out that we need to make a decision soon if we want modular or permanent construction at the Thompson. Since construction would start in the fall of 2016, we need to place orders by March 1 and that the spring town meeting would be too late. The discussion was then on cost of modular versus permanent construction, the size of classrooms, the effects on art, music, gym and cafeteria. It was noted that the costs are similar. The space issue at the middle school was included in the discussion as well as the cost and the challenges of completing a plan for enrollment issues across the board. This raised redistricting questions as well as maybe eliminating our neighbor schools. Members agreed that more time is needed to discuss the various issues including the use of the Gibbs School. Mr. Chapdelaine wishes to submit Warrant Articles on Thompson, Stratton and Hardy for the Special Meeting in January and would include language to expand to all elementary schools, if needed.

New Business

The members discussed future meeting dates, and have scheduled, Wednesday, December 9th and Tuesday, December 22 at Town Hall at 7:00 PM.

Public Comment

Ms. Susse invited the School Enrollment Task Force to the Visioning Session about Gibbs School at Town Hall, on Thursday, January 7, 2016 at 7:00 PM

Adjournment

*Recorded by
Diane Johnson, CFO*

*Submitted by
Karen Fitzgerald*