

**Regular Meeting of the Amherst School Committee  
October 20, 2015  
Library, Amherst Regional High School**

**IN ATTENDANCE:**

Katherine Appy, Chair  
Vira Douangmany-Cage  
Phoebe Hazzard  
Rick Hood

Maria Geryk, Superintendent  
Mike Morris, Assistant Superintendent  
Sean Mangano, ARPS Finance Director  
Tom Murphy, JLA Project Manager  
Jim LaPosta, JCJ Principal Designer  
Nick Yaffe, Wildwood School Principal  
Bobbie Finocchio, Fort River Principal  
Derek Shea, Crocker Farm Principal  
Faye Brady, Student Services Director  
Monica Hall, Equity & Professional Dev Director  
Carol Ross, Media & Climate Communication Specialist  
Marta Guevara, Student & Family Engagement Director  
Ron Bohonowicz, Maintenance & Facilities Director  
Community members & press  
Kimberly Stender, Recorder

**ABSENT:**

Kathleen Traphagen

**1. Welcome & Call to Order**

**6:04 p.m.**

Ms. Appy called the meeting to order and reviewed the agenda. She stated that the Enrollment Update should be removed from the agenda as it will be incorporated into the Amherst (Wildwood) Elementary Building Project Update. She announced that the public is invited to attend the Hurricane Re-Visioning Summit on Saturday, November 7, 2015 at Amherst Regional Middle School from 9:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m. Ms. Appy provided materials from the Four Boards meeting to all members for review. She also distributed a copy of a letter from a community member regarding the Amherst (Wildwood) Elementary Building Project. Mr. Hood moved to accept the minutes of September 21, 2015. Ms. Douangmany-Cage seconded and the motion passed with one abstention (Hazzard).

**2. Announcements & Public Comment**

**6:08 p.m.**

Ms. Appy thanked the community for participating and explained the parameters of public comment (3 minute time limit per speaker). She encouraged all to attend the Amherst (Wildwood) Elementary Building Project public forums on Monday, October 26, 2015 at 3:30 p.m. or 7:00 p.m. in the Amherst Regional High School Library. Ms. Appy called the first speaker to the microphone. Stephen Lott (FR 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade teacher) expressed his concern to the health and structural issues as well as the ineffectiveness of open classrooms at Fort River. Mary Crouse (WW 4<sup>th</sup> Grade parent) stated that Wildwood is an amazing place because of the supportive staff and environment and is concerned that re-structuring would potentially cause climate and culture to dissipate. She stressed that the “gem be preserved.” Michelle Markstein (WW 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade parent) was curious to know if re-configuration was the only solution and if the size of a Grade 2-6 school would be too large. She was concerned that the most vulnerable students would be negatively impacted. Tim Sheehan (FR 4<sup>th</sup> Grade Teacher and resident of Amherst) echoed the opinion of colleague Steven Lott added that the same issues that plague Fort River also are quite evident at Wildwood. He implored parents and community members to listen to the architect and consider the educational program for the sake of teachers, staff and students at these schools. The idea of two schools in one building is appealing. New schools would attract highly qualified teaching candidates and would raise property values in town. He stated that the concept of “neighborhood” schools has not existed in Amherst for a very long time. Julie HawkOwl (WW parent) was impressed with the welcoming environment at Wildwood and was concerned that building materials are causing health issues at the school. She believes that the school committee should take time before rendering a decision because many families will be split between grades and schools. Nicole Usher (ARHS Pre-School parent) believed that public education is a basic right and the current decision process is exclusive and undemocratic. She implored the committee to reach out to under-represented groups and renters in the community prior to a

decision. She would like to see a parent of a future ARPS learner on the committee. Maria Kapicki (CF Parent) believed that schools should be K-6 and remains unconvinced that the arguments pertaining to re-configuration are based on research and asked that more time be set aside prior to a thoughtful decision. Bobbie Finocchio (FR Principal) echoed the sentiments of her colleagues (Lott & Sheehan) regarding health and structural issues. She stressed that student emotional and health safety is of utmost importance to prepare students to be 21<sup>st</sup> Century learners. All principals build community – “please do not leave Fort River behind”. Laura Quilter (WW 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade parent) stated that a new school would be ideal but a longer, thoughtful process is necessary to render a collaborative decision. The challenge to the school committee is to listen to residents while providing the community better assessment and more data. She stressed the community should move forward together. Joanna Morse (CF parent) is concerned about health issues at Fort River. She is concerned that cost will be a major issue and implores a longer, more thoughtful approach be implemented before a decision is made. Community and culture is important at each school and inter-age schools are a major factor of positive student –to-student modelling. Oliver Broudy stressed the timeline and believes the current process is a threat and divisive to the entire community. He would like to see other solutions considered and would like the committee to think in terms of a 100 year plan. Len Lucien (WW parent) thinks the timeline is a concern and five weeks seems irresponsible. Parents need more time to look at research because “making decisions in a vacuum is not the way to go.” Re-districting seems inevitable and an 800-student school will be immense. Lisa Amato (CF parent) was impressed with the amazing climate and culture at Crocker Farm and believes it should be modelled in the Holyoke Public Schools in which she is employed. The timeframe is a huge concern and communication from ARPS is lacking. She was concerned how this change will impact income-eligible students and students of color. She thinks that inter-age schools are important. Catherine Corsin (WW parent) stated that parents and staff care about schools and the fear of losing a school is high. She is concerned that the three major projects happening simultaneously which have tremendous impact on the community (real estate values, education systems, and business) and thinks that many answers will come after the decision is made. A long-term plan should be considered. Betsy Dinger (ARPS educator) is concerned that if two state-of-the-art schools exist, and one school is left behind than the entire community would be impacted. More time is needed to build consensus but she urged the community to not wait too long as students and staff deserve the best building. Michelle Spirko (ARHS, ARMS & FR parent) decided to live in Amherst because of the great reputation of the public schools. The environment and culture of the schools is so impressive and the work of the staff is greatly appreciated and admired. She believed the woefully inadequate conditions at Fort River and Wildwood will propel the school committee to be morally obligated to do what is best for all current and future students and staff. She stated that it is morally distasteful to leave a school behind in this process and perhaps an over-ride or political process may be necessary if all are not on board. Simon Raine (ARPS pre-school parent) stated that small and good schools exist in Amherst and more time is needed before a decision is made. He said better outreach and communication is necessary and many parents are underrepresented at this forum. Bruce Baird (WW parent) thinks that because Fort River is so decrepit it should be repaired first and then attention must be given to Wildwood. Nick Yaffe (Wildwood Principal) commented that the community is essential in this critical decision and to please consider the condition of both Fort River and Wildwood Schools as well as a student’s ability to learn and be healthy in buildings.

### **3. Superintendent’s Update**

**7:00 p.m.**

Ms. Geryk invited school committee members and the community to attend the *Juntos We Play* event on October 24 from 11:30 a.m at Colonial Village; the meet and greet with new ARPS ombudsperson, Paul Wiley is scheduled for October 23, 2015 from 6:30 p.m.-7:30 p.m. in the ARHS Library; and the *They Made it So Can We* presentation is scheduled for October 30 at Crocker Farm School. Ms. Appy invited all to attend the annual AEF Trivia Bee on October 29 at 7:00 p.m. in the ARMS Auditorium.

### **4. New & Continuing Business**

**7:06 p.m.**

*Educational Program & Grade Configuration Recommendation 10/20/15; Amherst Public Schools Educational Program 10/20/15; Memo from Supt Geryk Re: Educational Program for the MSBA Building Project 10/16/15; 3.1.2 Educational Program explanation January 2015; Newton Cabot*

***Elementary School Part 2: Educational Program 2/27/15; Brookline Edward Devotional Elementary School Educational Program***

Mr. Morris explained the many components of the educational program throughout the lengthy presentation including guiding principles; 21<sup>st</sup> Century learning goals; communication vehicles (2013-present); infrastructure; transportation plans; budgetary and educational program implications; enrollment; re-districting; and financials of the two scenarios (re-configuration and K-6 model). Mr. Murphy explained the MSBA timeline and deadlines. Mr. LaPosta explained operational efficiencies and building life-cycle costs. He also showed photographs of newly built schools in other communities (Framington, CT, Bridgeport, CT and Weston, MA) with various configurations and designs. Ms. Geryk recommended that the Educational Program with a reconfiguration of Crocker Farm as a PreK-Grade 1 school and a new school be created to educate all Grade 2-6 students be accepted by the school committee on November 3, 2015. Mr. Morris explained next steps and invited all community members to participate in the October 26 community forums in the ARHS Auditorium at 3:30 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. Ms. Appy thanked Mr. Morris, Mr. Murphy and Mr. LaPosta for a highly comprehensive presentation and opened the floor to questions from committee members. Mr. Hood had no questions because the school committee had been well-informed since 2013. He stated that he had not heard any new concerns since the process began and had not heard of alternative solutions from the public. He further stated that more time to render a decision and vote would not be needed. Ms. Douangmany-Cage noted that the conversation had become more about the health, structural and safety issues of the school buildings. She stated that it is demoralizing that the community has become so divided. She asked if the administration had considered other MSBA options and programs to repair schools. Mr. Bohonowicz explained that he had and believed that the route currently undertaken was the best possible plan. Ms. Geryk added that since 2007 conversations between MSBA and the district have been very public. Officials from the town and the schools make decisions which impact school buildings regarding repairs and maintenance. She thanked Mr. Bohonowicz and his staff for their work and quick responses to teacher and staff concerns and complaints. Ms. Douangmany-Cage asked about non-ADA compliance and Mr. Bohonowicz answered that both Wildwood and Fort River were built before federal accessibility laws were enacted. Ms. Douangmany-Cage suggested that the public become more familiar with programs the MSBA offers to municipalities. Ms. Hazzard thanked Mr. Morris for his work on this report and realizes that the final recommendation was a very difficult decision to make. She asked if the MSBA would potentially not accept the 2-wing school building design. Mr. Morris explained that the MSBA will accept the plan because the educational program and architectural plan is comprehensive. He encouraged all school committee members to examine the reports. Ms. Hazzard asked if testimonials from other districts which have a re-configured school building be available. Mr. Morris indicated that the Weston, MA, Framington, CT and Bridgeport, CT school districts' feedback could be obtained. Ms. Hazzard then asked which administrator would be eliminated (referenced in the presentation) once the school is built. Mr. Morris stated that the administrative team would be re-configured and many options exist. Ms. Appy stated the presentation was highly informational and reflected the work since 2013. She understands human nature and why many community members are just paying attention now as a decision draws near. She added that it is intolerable that special education elementary students are being underserved in the current Wildwood and Fort River buildings. She encouraged all community members to attend the October 26, 2015 forums.

**F. Accept Gifts**

**8:59 p.m.**

Mr. Hood moved to accept gifts: \$300.00 from Lucia Spiro to support the Crocker Farm Principal's Discretionary Fund. Ms. Hazzard seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

**B.-C. FY 15 Budget Final Report & FY 16 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter Budget Update**

**9:01 p.m.**

***Amherst Public Schools FY 2015 End of Year Budget Report; Amherst Public Schools FY 2016 First Quarter Budget Report***

Mr. Mangano reviewed the FY 15 Budget document and asked for questions. There were none from the committee. He then reviewed the FY16 report and asked for questions. Ms. Hazzard asked if another Kindergarten classroom would be added at Crocker Farm based on enrollment. Mr. Mangano replied that if that occurred another teacher would be hired.

**D. Superintendent's Goals FY 15-FY 16**

**9:03 p.m.**

***Superintendent Evaluation 2015-2016 Self –Assessment Goals Action Steps***

Ms. Appy moved to accept the Superintendent Evaluation 2015-2016 Self –Assessment Goals Action Steps. Ms. Geryk explained that the Regional and Pelham School Committees recently voted and accepted the goals. In response to a committee member's suggestion, the goals were changed to reflect this recommendation (see pages 3, 4, and 7). Ms. Douangmany-Cage asked if goals would be reviewed again and Ms. Geryk stated that this would happen in January 2016. Ms. Hazzard moved to approve the Superintendent Evaluation 2015-2016 Self –Assessment Goals Action Steps and Mr. Hood seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

**5. School Committee Planning**

**9:09 p.m.**

Mr. Hood asked if the calendar would be published on the district website so community members have the opportunity to view upcoming topics. Ms. Geryk indicated it would happen. Ms. Geryk stated that the DIP and SIPs would be presented at the November 3, 2015 meeting and the calendar was updated to reflect this. Mr. Hood thanked everyone again for their work on the building project. Ms. Douangmany-Cage asked if another educational program would be submitted in the case that the current one was not accepted. Mr. Morris indicated that the program would be adjusted accordingly so that it could be submitted by the MSBA deadline and accepted by the MSBA. He explained that this is why the educational program is currently a draft.

**6. Adjournment**

**9:13 p.m.**

Mr. Hood moved to adjourn and Ms. Hazard seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,  
Kimberly Stender