

**Regular Meeting of the Amherst School Committee  
September 21, 2015  
Library, Amherst Regional High School**

**IN ATTENDANCE:**

Katherine Appy, Chair  
Rick Hood  
Kathleen Traphagen  
Vira Douangmany-Cage (arr. 6:43 p.m.)

Maria Geryk, Superintendent  
Mike Morris, Assistant Superintendent  
Sean Mangano, Finance Director  
Nick Yaffe, Wildwood Elem Principal  
Tom Murphy, JLA Project Manager  
Jim LaPosta, JCJ Principal Designer  
Community members & press  
Kimberly Stender, Recorder

**ABSENT:**

Phoebe Hazzard

**1. Welcome & Call to Order**

**6:05 p.m.**

Ms. Appy called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m. and read a brief statement regarding the sudden passing of Town Manager John Musante which was followed by a moment of silence. Ms. Geryk offered words of praise for her colleague, Mr. Musante, and condolences to his family. Ms. Appy asked that the agenda be revised to reflect only pertinent matters in light of Mr. Musante's passing. She suggested that the Wildwood Building Project Update (A) and Set Dates for Regionalization planning Forum in Amherst (D) remain while all other items be discussed at the October 20, 2015 Amherst School Committee meeting. She asked that members email Ms. Geryk directly with thoughts regarding School Committee Priorities to Inform the Superintendent's Goal-Setting Process (C). Ms. Appy moved to amend the agenda and Mr. Hood seconded. The motion passed unanimously. Ms. Traphagen asked for a moment later in the meeting to make a comment regarding goals. Ms. Appy agreed to allow a brief statement.

**2. Announcements and Public Comment**

**6:10 p.m.**

There were no announcements. Vince O'Connor commented on the photos from the September 4, 2015 edition of the *Amherst Bulletin* in which newly hired ARPS staff did not seem representative the current student demographics. He found this to be very disturbing because the school committee and superintendent created goals to recruit, hire and retain staff of color.

**3. Superintendent's Update**

**6:13 p.m.**

There were no updates.

**4. New and Continuing Business**

**6:13 p.m.**

**A. Wildwood Building Project Update**

**DOCUMENTS: Projected Milestone Schedule: Feasibility Study/Project Schedule; FAQ for the Wildwood School Building Project; Implications of Unified Configuration**

Mr. Murphy explained the *Project Schedule* document to the group and requested that members vote to accept the education program and plan so that it can be included in the Project Design proposal (PDP) to the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA). He then explained the *Project Milestones* document and informed the group that a presentation will occur later in the evening. Jim LaPosta explained the two parallel processes. He first emphasized that the goal of the visioning group is to inform the creation of the educational plan in regards to the work of David Stephen and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning. He pointed out that the grade configuration of the new school is very important as this will determine location and design of the building. He then explained that the group must understand Wildwood as a building in terms of engineering, design and renovation considerations to create a financial baseline for the MSBA. Ms. Traphagen asked if "fixes" and renovations mean constructing walls to the ceiling at Wildwood and Fort River. Mr. LaPosta replied that this did not mean constructing walls to "fix" the acoustic distractions at either school. JLA will create multiple options to accommodate appropriate educational space and the baseline study will provide financial implications for MSBA to consider. Mr. Morris reviewed the *Implications of Unified Configuration* document. When the presentation focused on enrollment trends, Ms. Traphagen asked if choice

students would be asked to leave the system. Mr. Morris replied that they would not be asked to leave. Mr. Hood asked Mr. Morris to explain to the community what *unified* means. Mr. Morris replied that in this case the term *unified* means *town-wide* and *not pertaining to a certain neighborhood or section of town*. For example, every 1<sup>st</sup> grader enrolled in the Amherst Elementary School district would attend the same school. When Mr. Morris concluded the presentation Mr. Hood re-capped the three options: 1). renovate the existing Wildwood School; 2). build a new Wildwood School with location to be determined; 3). create PreK-Grade 1 at Crocker Farm School. Ms. Appy added that a larger school will create a fourth option – two separate schools sharing one common space (ex. upper and lower elementary school). Mr. Morris stated that a scenario such as this could create opportunities for smaller learning communities. Ms. Traphagen asked how many students would be in the Crocker Farm PreK-Grade 1 scenario. Mr. Morris replied approximately 300. Ms. Traphagen asked if courtyards and common spaces would separate the upper and lower schools. Mr. LaPosta replied that this design seemed to work well in other communities. Gyms, libraries, cafeterias, music rooms and courtyards serve as areas to designate upper/lower schools. Photos of these types of schools and spaces would be provided at the upcoming public forums. Ms. Traphagen asked how the school committee could understand opinions and insights of staff as this process impacts them too. Mr. Morris indicated that an email was sent to all staff asking for anonymous feedback. Ms. Traphagen stated she has heard erroneous information from staff and community members. She asked how misinformation is being handled. Mr. Morris said this is a great concern and asked Ms. Traphagen to help devise a method to remedy this situation. She agreed to help. Ms. Douangmany-Cage asked if the school committee could communicate with Jean Faye and the APEA regarding staff surveys. Ms. Geryk thought this could happen. Ms. Appy was glad staff is being included in the conversation and Mr. Morris added that a FAQ sheet was distributed to help curb misinformation. Mr. Hood suggested that many people focus on the “cons” of a process until they see photos or design renderings. Mr. LaPosta thought that the public forums would provide a great opportunity for the public to gather information and provide feedback. He then explained the framework of the public forums (scheduled for September 29 and October 26). These sessions will be filmed by Amherst Media. Mr. O’Connor suggested a timeline be devised that reflects an opportunity for the public to absorb the information and offer opinions at the forum. He also asked that information be provide to community members prior to the public forums. Mr. LaPosta agreed with Mr. O’Connor and stated that the intention of the forums is to be both a listening session as well as an opportunity to hear community voices. Wilma Ortiz (community member) spoke to the enormity of the project and asked if all components (challenges and opportunities) would be broken down for all community members to understand and contemplate. Mr. Morris responded to all her concerns and explained that this presentation was abridged due to time constraints and that he provided an in depth presentation at all elementary staff meetings and distributed the FAQ sheets. Ms. Douangmany-Cage asked if this project, although generously funded by the State, would require more money from Town Meeting. Mr. Murphy responded that if necessary Town Meeting would have to consider this request in Fall 2016. A community member asked if the district has disseminated information to parents, staff and community members about 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning and High Tech High in San Diego. Ms. Geryk responded that indeed the district has through emails, newsletters, Facebook and Twitter. She invited all to attend the free screening of the film *Most Likely to Succeed* on Wednesday, October 14 at 6:30 p.m. A Q &A session with the film’s producer will immediately follow the screening. Ms. Appy thanked Mr. LaPosta and Mr. Murphy and encouraged all school committee members to attend the public forums.

**B. School Committee Priorities to Inform Superintendent’s Goal-Setting Process 7:35 p.m.**

Ms. Traphagen provided a list of ideas the superintendent should consider while setting goals. She would like to see a research study completed as to why families choose to remain in the elementary schools. She would like the superintendent to consider an equitable accelerated academic program for elementary students. She is very much aware that most recommendations to an accelerated program are parent-driven with a teacher providing suggestions and strategy. She is also aware that the district provides a tremendous amount of support to academically-struggling students and would like to see excelling students aligned with an accelerated program. She suggests a working group to further

discuss this idea. Ms. Traphagen would like the superintendent to consider a world language immersion program in the elementary schools. She would like to see more professional development programs geared towards equity and cultural identity. She would like to see an ambitious plan to recruit, hire and retain qualified staff of color. Ms. Traphagen would like the school committee to see and understand how Educators Handbook and PBIS are moving disparities in the intended direction through multi-cultural viewpoints and an examination of curriculum. To this point, Ms. Appy suggested that the School Equity Task Force help move this idea forward in addition to creating strategies to recruit and hire staff of color.

**C. Set Dates for Regionalization Forum in Amherst**

**7:44 p.m.**

Ms. Appy suggested that the forum be held on Tuesday, October 6, 2015 in either the ARHS Library or ARMS Auditorium so Amherst Media can film the event. Ms. Geryk asked Ms. Stender to check district calendars and confirm availability of date and location. The district will also arrange for childcare and transportation for those that need it.

**D. Accept Gifts**

**7:45p.m.**

Ms. Traphagen moved to accept gifts: \$7,475.00 from Amherst Education Foundation to support Crocker Farm Preschool Playground; \$525.00 from Target to support Fort River Principal's Account; In-Kind donation from the Amherst Rotary Club to support Project Dictionary in all Amherst Elementary Schools; \$427.49 from Stop & Shop to support the Crocker Farm Principal's Account; \$325.00 from Target to support the Crocker Farm Principal's Account; \$35.00 from Giles/McCreary to support Fort River Art program; \$125.00 from Lingo to support the Fort River Art program; \$95.00 from Singer to support the Fort River Art program; \$30.00 from Marlin/Filep to support the Fort River Art program; \$30.00 from Meade to support the Fort River Art program; \$35.00 from Smith-Doerr to support the Fort River Art program; In-Kind donation from Petco in the form of a 10gallon Aquacolor aquarium for Wildwood School. Mr. Hood seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

**E. Approve Minutes**

**7:47 p.m.**

Mr. Hood moved to approve the minutes of August 27, 2015. Ms. Traphagen seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

**5. School Committee Planning**

**7:48 p.m..**

Ms. Appy suggested that items that were not discussed would be added to the next Amherst School Committee meeting on October 20, 2015.

**6. Adjournment**

**7:51 p.m.**

Mr. Hood moved to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Traphagen seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,  
Kimberly Stender