



Town of Littleton School Committee

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JEN GOLD, Vice Chair
STACY DESMARAIS, Member

JUSTIN MCCARTHY, Chair

BRAD AUSTIN, Clerk
BINAL PATEL, Member

SCHOOL COMMITTEE

MINUTES

March 2, 2023

7:00PM

PRESENT: Justin McCarthy
Brad Austin
Stacy Desmarais
Jen Gold

ALSO PRESENT: Kelly Clenchy
Steve Mark
Dorothy Mulone

NOT PRESENT: Binal Patel, & Bettina Corrow

CALL TO ORDER

Justin McCarthy called the meeting to order at 7:00p.m.

On a motion by Brad Austin and seconded by Stacy Desmarais it was voted to approve the Feb. 9, 2023, agenda as presented. (AYE: Unanimous).

INTERESTED CITIZENS

None

RECOGNITION

1. Student Representative(s) Report: Student Representative, John Feltus, gave an update of the events happening at each school.
2. Superintendent Clenchy congratulated the boys ice hockey team as well as the indoor track team for their accomplishments this winter season. He also congratulated the In-door track coach Kaldenberg for being awarded the 2023 MCSTA Coach of the year.

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Our mission is to foster a community of learners who strive for excellence and prepare each student to be a successful, contributing citizen in a global society.

3. Superintendent Clenchy also mentioned that tonight was the Junior class auction at the High school.

PRESENTATIONS

1. **Recognition of Religious Holidays:** Students of the LHS DEI Club, Aarya Washasunder, Giselle Kierman, and Rachael Friedman presented about religious holidays

Mission Statement

To ensure that Littleton does not take a step back in terms of inclusivity, school committee members should vote to resume the affirmation of religious observances through district-wide holidays.

LITTLETON DEMOGRAPHICS AND STATISTICS

As mentioned in our Diwali presentation from last year, recent years have led to an exorbitant growth in this town's Asian population. An easy comparison can be made by showing Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education statistics of the 2012-2013 Littleton Public Schools year and the 2022-2023 year by race/ethnicity enrollment. The enrollment of Asian students has grown from 4% to 14.7% in the past decade, a 367.5% increase. This totals to about 242 Asian students across LPS schools.

MENTAL HEALTH AND STRESS

- One of the biggest concerns for many students, especially at the high school, is mental health and being able to properly manage the stress of extracurriculars and academics.
- For students who celebrate religious holidays, even with excused absences, which are not properly enforced most of the time, it's difficult to catch up on work. Students can also feel conflicted between choosing to participate in their faith as opposed to furthering their learning. Having religious holidays eliminates this worry for these students.
- Not only that, but at the January 27th LHS meeting, our peers pointed out that non-religious students use these holidays as a time to regroup, catch up on work, or just as a day to relax.

CHILDCARE OPTIONS

While it may be a concern that there is lack of childcare options, this worry is unneeded.

- The school calendar comes out about half a year in advance (as in, before the new school year), so parents/guardians get plenty of time to secure a plan for their children if they are unable to be at home that day
- Tigers Den is open most days, including during religious holidays
- LHS puts up job/volunteering opportunities out for students, and many of them are able to babysit for parents who are out working
- Littleton has a very tight-knit community, and online parent-run group chats can be an easy way to see if a child can spend the day with a friend and their family while you have to be at work

Stacey Desmarais – Thank you for your presentation. It is so important to have the student perspective on this topic.

Brad Austin – Thank you for taking the time to present. It is so important to hear from our students.

Justin McCarthy – I echo what my fellow members said. Nothing better than having students present at our school committee meetings. We will discuss this further tonight.

NEW BUSINESS

1. **Draft 2023-2024 School Calendar: Initial review.** Further discussion and a vote is scheduled for the March 9, 2023, School Committee meeting. Superintendent Clenchy went through the calendar and its professional development days and holidays listed.

Brad Austin – This draft version is created based on the current contract?

Kelly Clenchy – Yes, this has been drafted based on the current contract.

Justin McCarthy – Is there a specific reason why we choose to have a half day before Memorial Day weekend but not any other Friday?

Kelly Clenchy – We experimented with this a few years ago and it seems to be working well. We tried this school year to add a few more Fridays to the calendar and we did not see a huge difference in attendance with our students but an decrease with our staff. We have gone back to Wednesday for our half days to create consistency in our calendar.

Justin McCarthy – We have heard from so many regarding both the holidays and our 12 half days, which are currently in the contract, can be a challenge for our families. I do believe there is some language in the current contract that would allow us potentially to change the amount of half days for the following school year by notifying the Teacher's union. It could be our recommendation to have fewer half days. There is definitely an opportunity to try and address this issue for the next school year. Because we are looking to publish the 2023-2024 school calendar before we have finalized negotiation for the new contract.

Kelly Clenchy – One thing to remember is that we need to give the union notice and we are obligated to negotiate this.

Justin McCarthy – The month of November is very busy and especially with five half days and only 18 school days. I am hoping we can make some changes in the long term. My other question is the middle school has three conference days in the fall semester but only two in the spring. Is that specified in the contract?

Kelly Clenchy – The contract specifies 3 and 2. We have discussed the number of half days with our union, and it is something we would like to review. But as a Superintendent I do feel it is important to offer PD days to our staff. It is part of the reason why we have become a high performing school district. It does not happen without a strategic plan and an opportunity to work with staff to enhance their tools to meet student needs. But there might be room to reduce the number of half days.

Justin McCarthy – My last concern is our last day ends up being the last week of June. Families have signed their child up for summer camp and they are now paying for a full camp day at the end of June, while their child is still in school. If we took the holidays away and had the students start on Sept. 2nd, since the teachers cannot start until Sept. 1st, we might be able to avoid ending the school year the last week of June.

Brad Austin – If you are not part of negotiation, it is hard to know what we can or cannot decide, but we do hear from a lot of families that we start late in September and end really late in June. Maybe having teachers start on Friday Sept. 1st and students on Tuesday Sept. 5 would make sense.

Justin McCarthy – Last year it was my idea to switch a couple of half days from Wednesday to Fridays instead. I know that the Superintendent raised one concern about attendance, but I still believe we have room to move three half days from Wednesday to Friday, when it coincides with a vacation week coming up.

Kelly Clenchy – We do sit down with LEA before we present the calendar to the school committee.

Brad Austin – Is there a way to distribute the days in November to another time, so that month isn't so interrupted?

Kelly Clenchy – I have to be cautious about how much I say. We have expressed interest in decreasing the number of Wednesdays. We need to frontload some of our professional development, so our teachers are prepared to teach the curriculum we expect them to teach. There are so many things to consider. I would like to see fewer half days in November, yes but we have already had this conversation. We are trying to take care of the needs of the district and give our students an excellent education and at the same time trying to support the needs of our families.

Brad Austin – So Diwali falls on a Sunday next school year, so it would only affect two religious holidays next year.

Kelly Clenchy – We are hoping we can vote on the calendar at our next meeting.

Justin McCarthy – I would suggest that the calendar subcommittee meet before the next school committee meeting to discuss the topics/revisions discussed tonight and either present this version of the calendar at the next meeting or make revisions based on tonight's discussion and present a revised calendar.

Kelly Clenchy – I am not sure I completely understand what you would like us to do? We could move some of the November half days to a Friday.

Brad Austin – I would like to see fewer half days in November, so if we can do anything with that, that would be great.

Justin McCarthy – If we could have more than 13 full school days in November, I would fully support that.

- 2. Transportation Bid Discussion** - Business Manager, Steve Mark, and Superintendent Clenchy presented an overview of potential costs over a three-year period. The School Committee continued to discuss the school start time proposal as it relates to the cost projection included in the transportation bid. Potential discussion and vote is scheduled for the March 9, 2023 School Committee meeting. The FY2024 Budget drivers overview including the base contract for Dee Bus was included in the packet.

Brad Austin – Just to clarify, we are having a \$260,000 increase on top of the \$70,000 increase in the contract. So, we are looking at 3 quarters of a million over 5 years.

Justin McCarthy – This does not seem to make sense. There would be less usage of buses with less mileage on each bus but again, we do not have any control over this. What did we budget on the appropriated budget for an increase for next year?

Steve Mark – We asked for an additional \$118,000 and then we asked for \$280,000 for the original number of buses.

Justin McCarthy – We are going to try and cover \$100,000 ourselves with an increase in bus and athletic fees.

Steve Mark briefly went through the school choice fund model and explained the increase and usage of funds.

Jen Gold – Is there any option to re-negotiate this contract with Dee Bus? I know they are our only bidder.

Steve Mark – As of right now we have until March 24 to sign this contract. In my past experience, if we try to re-negotiate this contract or look for another bidder, that will only result in a higher bid.

Stacey Desmarais – You are adding 6 additional school choice students to make these numbers work?

Steve Mark – That is correct.

Kelly Clenchy – In order for us to continue to maintain the school choice funds, we need to continue to be a district that families want to send their child to. But there is no guarantee that we will continue to have this number of school choice students in our district. Every school choice student that enters our district has a legal right to graduate from our district.

Justin McCarthy – The assumption is that we will need the \$450,000 from school choice every year and we will need to keep the level of school choice students in our district to keep that number.

Brad Austin – So it comes down to 1.8 students over 6 classes.

Kelly Clenchy – School Choice money should be used to enhance education opportunities for all students. When I look at transportation, we do not typically transport school choice students.

Brad Austin – I look at this differently. Changing school start time will enhance educational opportunities for all students. Transportation is a different thing. It is a big number, but I think it is worth it.

Kelly Clenchy – Have we explored all the options?

Jen Gold – I think we have.

Justin McCarthy – We are not going to make a decision tonight. This will be discussed further at our next meeting.

Public Comments:

Chase Gerbig – I am really shocked that I listened to a discussion for an hour and only in the very end did you speak to the benefit for the students. I want to remind you of the student benefits that will be spread across all of our students with a shift in their start time. You need to look at the overall benefit of this. I think using the school choice funds will benefit all students. I think if you speak with the students and parents again you will find overwhelming support for this.

Steve Mark – I just want to clarify one point. We have never used school choice funds to pay for kindergarten fees.

Kelly Clenchy – What we are proposing is, if this is the best way to use school choice funds?

3. **Financial Update** - Business Manager, Steve Mark, provided a financial update. The overview was not included in the packet at the time of the meeting but will be posted later.

4. **Town of Littleton 3-year financial forecast** - Town Administrator, Mr. Anthony Ansaldi presented a 3-year financial forecast for the Town of Littleton.

Current Economic Conditions - From PR News Wire October 13, 2022

More than half of U.S. CEOs say they are considering reducing their workforces within the next six months to prepare for a recession.

Nearly 60% of business leaders said that they plan to “pause or reconsider” their company’s projects.

Around 90% of CEOs believe a recession is coming Half of them are already planning for layoffs’

Tristan, Brove, Yahoo

More than 33% of CEOs said the biggest global challenge facing their company by year-end will be political and governmental instability.

Littleton Current Economic Conditions

Motor Vehicle Excise trending downward for FY22, based on current trends by \$45,576.02 or 2.22% below FY21.

Littleton Current Economic Conditions

Building Permits are down 19% or reduction of (\$6,747,000 in residential value)

Q1 = \$6,964,490 * 4 Quarters = \$27,857,960 on par with 2020

Littleton Financial Policies

- ☐ Maintain Undesignated Fund Balance at 5% of the total operating budget.
- ☐ Capital Projects appropriate up to 2.5% of the operating budget.
- ☐ A minimum of 5% of the operating budget must be maintained in the Stabilization fund.
- ☐ Revenues are conservative estimates.
- ☐ Capital expenses are more than \$5,000 (facility, equipment, vehicle or asset)

☐ A minimum appropriation to the Capital Stabilization fund will be made in the amount of at least 1% of the total general fund capital.

Projected Revenue & Expense

Forecast FY22 - FY25

Total Conservative Estimated Revenue \$65,058,097

Total Estimated Expenditures \$66,059,555

Revenue Assumptions

Property Tax: 2.5% Levy limit increase + \$500k conservative new growth annually

State Aid: Approximately 1% annual increases (conservative estimate)

Local Receipts: Reduced due to downward trend in motor vehicle excise and building permits estimating a conservative increase in the out-years.

Other revenues: A combination of transfers from other funds (bond premiums) and ambulance revenues.

Free Cash: Used as a funding source for cash capital and stabilization funding.

Expense Assumptions

Town Operating Budget: 4% increase to cover contracts, salaries, & incorporate inflation.

School Operating Budget & Assessments: 5% estimated annual increase; assessments are enrollment driven (placeholder)

Other Charges: 4% increases

Debt Service: Current debt service schedule, not including upcoming issues.

Employee Benefits: Increase of 8% annually with biggest driver as health insurance.

Analysis & Next Steps

☐ FY24 projection is 3% greater than the previous year based on our current assumptions and inflation.

☐ We will further refine the projection when we review budget changes and priorities.

☐ We will work with departments to reduce operating costs.

☐ These projections are very preliminary and will be refined for the budget due at the end of December.

☐ We will work with departments on their capital needs.

Capital Planning

☐ Estimated FY24 Operating Budget \$57,812,192 * 2.5% = \$1,445,305 we can appropriate for capital.

In Conclusion

☐ Operating expenses & Balancing Capital– Cash capital and debt financing are between the 5% – 10% funding targets per financial policy. Capital assets should remain proportional with operational budget changes. Balancing these two will be important in mitigating against deficit projections in the out years.

☐ Opportunity Costs -

The estimated senior center debt, newly borrowed library debt, and current authorized sewer debt will take up most of the debt capacity until closer to FY30 when more outstanding debt falls off. Additionally, debt service will take up around 6% of the operating expense budget.

☐ Assumptions & Costs may change - Interest rates, project costs/timelines.

☐ The amount requested per year is too high to fund all the projects. The Select Board, Finance Committee and School Committee will need to review the department budget and capital projects in detail.

☐ Preliminary operating and capital budgets to be presented in December.

Stacy Desmarais – What can we do to prepare if we do see a big influx in the town?

Anthony Ansaldi – We will continue to monitor, and we have projected out so I am hopeful that our projected projects will continue as planned.

Brad Austin - I think we all assume that there will be a new Shaker Lane School building.

Kelly Clenchy – We are not self-funding the Shaker Lane School. We will receive funding from the state.

5. Littleton Youth Baseball/Softball Sponsorship Discussion and Vote: A request for signage on the baseball/softball fields.

LYBS (Littleton Youth Baseball and Softball) is requesting your re-approval for LYBS placing sponsorship banners at the baseball and softball fields listed below. These banners are placed seasonally and removed for the late fall and winter months. Approval for this arrangement was originally granted by the School Committee in January 2020 and we have been asked by Mike Lynn to obtain re-approval.

Placement: banners would be placed along the fences at the following school fields:

Shaker Lane Field

Ken White Field

Couper Field

Jet Field

Shattuck Field (library field)

Dates: Mid-April through Early-November

Background:

- In January 2020, LYBS asked for and received approval from the School Committee for the placement of seasonal sponsorship banners along the fences at our Littleton ball fields.
- Previous to that, we were required to individually put up and take down the banners for each game on each field throughout the season. Parents and coaches arrived early and stayed late to each game for this task. It was a very time-consuming process and took away from the time our coaches spent working with the players.
- After approval in 2020 we moved to a more workable solution, yet still temporary, where we were permitted to zip tie the banners to the fences and keep them up for the season, removing them in the fall & winter months.
- This new process worked smoothly for our organization and took additional workload off of our coaches.
- In 2022 Mike Lynn expressed concern about the banners, specifically in regard to the location for Jet Field. In 2022 the banners were placed along the outfield fence rather than the previous years' location which was behind the bleachers and home team bench where they were not as visible.

Sponsors are a crucial part of LYBS funding and help us in supplying uniforms, umpires, field fees and equipment for the many Littleton families who participate in youth baseball and softball. The sponsorships help LYBS reduce the cost to our player families, making participation more equitable and accessible to all. It also helps in funding families where we waive fees due to hardship. We request your approval for LYBS to continue working with our sponsorship banners in this seasonal way to help support our program and to continue to help make baseball and softball accessible to all Littleton families.

On a motion by Brad Austin and seconded by Stacy Desmarais it was voted to approve the request for signage on the baseball/softball fields as presented. (AYE: Unanimous).

6. FinCom School Committee Representative Term Expiration Notification: Per Policy AFC, Superintendent Kelly Clenchy has notified current Fincom member Tyler Gray that he may reapply for an additional term if interested. Term expiration date: May 8, 2023.

OLD BUSINESS

- 1. Discussion regarding the potential removal of Religious Holidays from the School Calendar** - Further discussion and vote is scheduled for the March 9, 2023 School Committee meeting.
- 2. MSBA Enrollment Letter and Certification:** MSBA request to Certify Enrollment for Shaker Lane Building project. Superintendent Clenchy gave a brief overview of the letter, which was included in the packet.

School Year	K-5	6-8	9-12	Total
2013-2014	704	375	439	1,518
2014-2015	718	366	445	1,529
2015-2016	747	355	448	1,550
2016-2017	763	351	467	1,581
2017-2018	770	362	463	1,595
2018-2019	771	364	450	1,585
2019-2020	768	390	439	1,597
2020-2021	691	393	432	1,516
2021-2022	741	398	447	1,586
2022-2023	766	385	476	1,627

The total grade K-5 enrollment in the Town of Littleton as reported by the district for the 2022-2023 school year was 766 students, which reflects an increase of 22 students (2.9%) from the grade K-5 enrollment reported in 2018, which was the maximum grade K-5 enrollment reported in the preceding ten years. Additionally, the current year's grade K-5 enrollment reflects a decrease of approximately 5 students (-0.7%) from the average grade K-5 enrollment reported during the preceding ten-year period. The MSBA understands that the district is proposing a design enrollment to accommodate approximately 507 students in grades PreK-2 at the Shaker Lane Elementary School. The enrollment in grades PreK-2 reported to DESE for the 2022-2023 school year was 436 students.

With respect to future enrollments, the MSBA's base enrollment projection indicates the district's grade K-5 enrollment will continue to experience an increasing trend through the 2032-2033 school year as illustrated in the Enrollment Projection package. In accordance with the MSBA's Enrollment Methodology, the baseline enrollment is calculated using the ten-year average of projected enrollments. As such, the average grade K-2 base enrollment projection for the Shaker Lane Elementary School through the 2032-2033 school year is 400 students.

On a motion by Brad Austin and seconded by Stacy Desmarais it was voted to approve Justin McCarthy to sign off on the MSBA letter of enrollment certification, as presented and make Justin McCarthy the dual authorized representative to the board. (AYE: Unanimous).

INTERESTED CITIZENS

None

SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS

- 1. PMBC:** We are open for bids on the high school roof.
- 2. Budget Subcommittee:** We will be meeting with the LEA soon.
- 3. SEPAC:** Meeting took place this past Tuesday.
- 4. Policy:** Justin McCarthy suggested that the policies on religious holidays should be revisited.

ADJOURNMENT

On a motion by Brad Austin and seconded by Stacy Desmarais it was voted to adjourn at 9:30PM. Roll Call Vote: Justin McCarthy, AYE; Brad Austin, AYE; Jen Gold, AYE; and Stacy Desmarais, AYE.

NEXT MEETING DATE

March 9, 2023

7:00PM

March 16, 2023 7:10 PM PUBLIC HEARING BUDGET

DOCUMENTS AS PART OF MEETING

Recognition of religious holidays

Draft 2023-2024 LPS Calendar

Transportation bid

Town Financial forecast

Littleton Youth baseball/softball sponsorship

FinCom Term Expiration

MSBA Enrolment