

THE GLOUCESTER PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Our mission is for all students to be successful, engaged, lifelong learners.

School Committee Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, January 13, 2016

Plum Cove Elementary School Auditorium

7:00 p.m.

Members Present

Jonathan Pope, Chairman
Kathy Clancy, Vice Chairperson
Joel Favazza, Secretary
Melissa Teixeira
Tony Gross
Michelle Sweet

Administration Present

Dr. Richard Safier, Superintendent
Dr. Arthur Unobskey, Asst. Superintendent
Tom Lafleur, Director of Finance and
Operations
Tammy Morgan, Plum Cove Principal

Also Present

City Councilor Val Gilman

-
- I. CALL TO ORDER** – Chairman Pope called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. and stated the mission of the Gloucester Public Schools.
- II. SALUTE TO THE FLAG**
- III. ORAL COMMUNICATIONS** – None.
- IV. COMMENTS FROM THE CHAIRPERSON** – Chairman Pope thanked the audience for coming to the meeting and stated that the committee is going to all of the elementary schools to hear what people think about their schools in order to develop ideas on what to do in the future. The committee has already been to Veterans and Beeman and will be going to East Gloucester next month and West Parish in March. In April, the committee will hold a city-wide meeting with the DPW and the facilities manager as well as Dore & Whittier to start talking about options. Chairman Pope noted that there was an assessment done by Dore & Whittier over a year ago of all of the buildings, which is posted on the district’s website.
- V. RECOGNITIONS** – Dr. Safier reported that there will be a meeting of the Special Education Parent Advisory Council tomorrow at 6:00 p.m. at the Sawyer Free Library. The subject will be the discipline of the students with disabilities.

Chairman Pope welcomed new member Joel Favazza to the School Committee, who was elected Secretary of the committee on Inauguration Day, and stated that Kathy Clancy is the new Vice Chairperson of the committee.

Chairman Pope also recognized City Councilor Val Gilman and stated that it is good to see the City Council taking some interest in what the School Committee is doing.

VI. GHS STUDENT ADVISORY COUNCIL – None present.

VII. CONSENT AGENDA

A. Approval of Minutes

1. Building & Finance Subcommittee of December 9, 2015
2. School Committee and Executive Session of December 16, 2015
3. Personnel Subcommittee and Executive Session of December 15, 2015

B. Approval of Warrants – Cover Sheets

C. Approval of Transfers

D. Referrals

1. Program Subcommittee – Review Attendance Policies due to changes in regulations
2. Personnel Subcommittee – Review Athletic Director’s position
3. Personnel Subcommittee – Review guidelines for individual contracts

E. Acceptance of Gift – Lueders Environmental to the Gloucester Public Schools in the amount of \$50.00.

F. Out-of-Country Field Trip Request – GHS Foreign Language Department to Spain and Portugal during April vacation (April 12 to April 22, 2017)

With respect to Item F, Chairman Pope explained that the Foreign Language Department is requesting approval of the field trip this far in advance to give parents and students sufficient time to raise money for the trip.

On a motion by Ms. Teixeira, seconded by Ms. Sweet, it was

VOTED: 5 in favor, 1 abstain (Mr. Favazza) to approve the Consent Agenda as noted above.

VIII. DELIBERATIONS ON EDUCATIONAL ISSUES/SUPERINTENDENT’S REPORT

A. Presentation on Elementary School Facilities – Dr. Safier presented a slide show containing information on each of the buildings, which he stated is to be used to open up some conversation from the public about wants and needs. The presentation included a description of each of the elementary school buildings, including the new West Parish School, MSBA enrollment projections, capacity versus enrollment, demographics, and conceptual options. Dr. Safier noted that there is a differential of 151 students between MSBA’s projections and actual enrollment. He also noted that an additional classroom has been added at the preschool to accommodate the influx of students.

In terms of new construction of elementary schools, Chairman Pope pointed out all of the current school sites on a map of the city and noted that the Plum Cove site is the largest by far. He also pointed out a substantial piece of land in East Gloucester known as Swinson's Field as a possible location of a new school.

Dr. Safier's presentation included color-coded maps showing where students at each school reside, as well as students who choice out to other districts. He pointed out that students at each school are scattered across the city, making our schools community schools as opposed to neighborhood schools.

Chairman Pope reviewed the MSBA process and stated that there is an element of urgency because there is a major backlog of school districts requesting money from the MSBA. He noted that the district will be submitting a Statement of Interest shortly for a new roof at the high school.

- B. Public Input on Elementary School Facilities – Jessica Bean** asked about the expiration date of the modulars and whether there is a plan for replacing them. Dr. Safier stated that the life of the modulars is between 10 to 20 years and that the School Committee is in the process of developing a plan that will address replacing the modulars with additions or building new schools.

With respect to the possibility of reducing the number of elementary schools, Chairman Pope stated that Dore & Whittier used the MSBA enrollment projection in preparing their report, which was off by 151 students, and that the School Committee will be undertaking an enrollment study to get a more accurate number. He noted that both the East Gloucester and Veterans' sites are not adequate to build a new school on in light of MSBA requirements.

Chairman Pope stated that one of the options is to keep fixing the current elementary schools. He noted that a new boiler was just installed at Beeman, but for the most part these systems are failing in the elementary schools.

Mr. Favazza pointed out that it is very unlikely that current elementary students are going to be directly impacted by the plan that is ultimately developed, given the length of time it will take to get through the MSBA process. He stated that the committee is looking for feedback to help it plan for the future.

An unidentified woman stated that everyone she spoke with prefers to have a small neighborhood school and expressed concern with bussing other kids to Plum Cove. Ms. Teixeira clarified that the committee does not yet have a plan and is looking for input on how it should proceed.

Mr. Gross stated that he believes elementary school children need to be in a nurturing school community, which does not happen as well in a large school. He noted that it may

not be realistic to build four more new schools and suggested that people make the City Council aware that the community does not want large elementary schools.

Amanda Cook, Plum Cove PTO President, mentioned the strength of the staff and parents at Gloucester schools. She stated that larger schools would change the learning communities in Gloucester and noted that there are smaller communities available. She requested that the committee consider the financial implication of people choosing out to a smaller learning community. She stated that Plum Cove just needs a little more room to service the needs of all of the students without changing the small learning community.

Jill Cahill stated that she loves the Plum Cove community and that her son needs a small school environment. She lives by the hospital and indicated that her son is on the bus for less than 20 minutes. She agreed that more space is needed to service students with special needs.

Abigail Cook, a former Plum Cove student, stated that it is a really awesome school and because it is a small school, she had a special relationship with all of her teachers.

Susan Destino, a Plum Cove teacher, requested that the committee consider leasing Plum Cove as opposed to closing it. She believes that if Plum Cove is closed, families in that part of Gloucester will probably choose out to Rockport. She also stated that bus rides to Plum Cove are not as long as some might think. Mr. Gross noted that the longest bus ride to Plum Cove from downtown is 22 minutes, and Ms. Morgan stated that the buses actually arrive at school earlier than scheduled.

Laurie Mott, a Plum Cove teacher, stated that the children are excited to see deer on the playground. The school is on a beautiful site with a beach down the street and woods and quarries out back and the kids have lots of opportunities to learn about nature.

Valerie Nelson, a member of the board of the Lanesville Community Center, spoke about the value that Plum Cove has in the community. While she was a tenant in the building before it became a school again, she recognized how special the site was, being on a hill surrounded by woods. It is an exemplary school and there is probably not a better elementary school in the city with the kind of loyalty and high quality education that is at Plum Cove. She noted that all of the city buildings are in disrepair and that the city is not going to be able to afford having new schools and fire and police stations. She believes that the city has to come to terms with the lack of resources. If it comes down to a choice of having another spectacular school at Beeman or somewhere else and giving up the special Plum Cove School, that is a trade-off that many would disagree with. Any options that keep Plum Cove open by repairing it are more preferable than some super-expensive West Parish model that gets built in a couple of places. Can we really afford these big school projects, and are there ways to keep a place like Plum Cove open? This community and these parents don't care so much about a spectacular new expensive school. They care about the setting and the quality of education and the community and what it means to Lanesville. She is in favor of keeping the schools open at modest repair

levels rather than these dreams that somehow we can afford the Cadillac version of buildings.

Kathy Clancy responded that the West Parish School has been built with an eye towards minimizing expense and that there is nothing “Cadillac” about it. The interior selections are not fancy and there is nothing extravagant about that school. That is how schools are being built now. West Parish is what the MSBA says a new school is. It’s nothing more than that. She stated that the committee has tried very hard to be as fiscally prudent as it possibly can. One of the things that necessitated West Parish moving forward in the city pipeline in terms of priorities is that the heat stopped working. She noted that there are tradeoffs between having a school that has no heat but a strong community and between not having adequate space for gym and six lunch periods and a school that will only have two lunch periods. She is hoping to hear from people at what point big is too big, and if the heat stops working or the roof starts falling at Plum Cove, do you still want a two-classroom school? From a safety perspective, the committee needs to make sure the school is safe and dry. The committee is trying to provide the best educational program, and the building in which it is happening is secondary. However, at some point, some buildings are not going to be functional, and that is why the committee is trying to come up with a plan.

Mr. Favazza noted that there are approximately 200 students at Plum Cove and that Rockport has 400 students. If half of Plum Cove went to Rockport, there would be 500 students there. He asked what is happening in Rockport that is not happening here. If people are not afraid of 400 students at Rockport because they have X, Y and Z, are they not afraid of 400 students in Gloucester if we also have X, Y and Z?

Amanda Cook stated that if you look at the difference between the income levels in Gloucester and Rockport, you will see what scares a lot of people. Mr. Favazza asked if she was scared of poor kids, and she stated that she thinks that fear of the unknown and the economic diversity of the different neighborhoods is a big answer to that question. One of the best things about distributing the downtown kids to try to reduce the isolation of low income populations is that every school has improved. People look at different populations differently. So, the population in Rockport, being from Rockport and those choosing to Rockport, is at a certain economic level, and that is something that people consider when they choice out.

An unidentified woman stated that she was one of those who choiced to Rockport for her two older children. She stated that every community has a different feel, and Plum Cove has such a different feel. If her two younger kids had to go to Veterans or Beeman, she would probably choice out to Rockport due to the atmosphere. There is a big difference at Plum Cove. So many kids walk home from school. Mr. Favazza asked if Plum Cove were a bigger school but had a student population similar to the demographic in Rockport, would she not be as concerned about the size of the school, and she said yes. He then asked why she would send her children to Rockport with 400 kids instead of a slightly larger Plum Cove, and she stated that it is a different feel and a different demographic and the teachers are so special. If Plum Cove closes, she would be one of

the parents, along with a lot of people in the room, that would choice out, and not just to Rockport but maybe Manchester.

Amanda Cook stated that she does not believe the woman was talking primarily about the socioeconomic differences. She thinks she was talking about the stability of the leadership team, which is something the other elementary schools have not had. (East Gloucester, West Parish and Veterans have changed principals in the time that her kids have been in school.) Their leadership team has made Plum Cove more stable.

Ms. McNeil asked if there has been any talk about balancing the revenue from the sale of the Fuller site to either renovate or replace schools. Chairman Pope explained that the city owns the property and it is up to them what to do with the money.

A noon supervisor at Plum Cove pointed out that Plum Cove is now a Level 1 school and that Ms. Morgan and the teachers know all of the students. She also mentioned the deer in the playground. She stated that the kids get so much attention from everybody. She expressed concern about class size if the district goes down to three or four elementary schools. She thinks that putting money into the school that now exists invests in our kids a lot more than the structure. Mr. Favazza, through Ms. Teixeira, noted that West Parish is also a Level 1 school and is a bigger school.

Mr. Favazza summarized that the location of the school is ideal because it has a lot of natural resources to it, an isolated site in Lanesville, and the staff are doing an excellent job. He asked if Plum Cove becomes a 350-student school at the same site, does that fix some of the other issues. The woman replied that it would depend on how many classrooms per grade.

Grace Fuller, a Plum Cove teacher, expressed concern for the staff that is her family. They have each other's backs and that is what makes Plum Cove special. She connects with her students through graduation. Ms. Morgan has created a culture that makes it a family.

An unidentified man asked why the district is considering less elementary schools instead of more. Dr. Safier stated that the MSBA is not going to support any funding for a school that is not justified by overcrowding. Therefore, if we were to build another school, the 58% funding by the MSBA would not be available.

Chairman Pope stated that approximately ten years ago, the School Committee developed the Plan for Effective Learning Communities, which strongly indicated that two or three classrooms per grade are the ideal size. Ultimately, the committee is going to make a recommendation to the city administration, which will have to approve it. He noted that the committee fully supported Ms. Morgan's request for construction to accommodate special needs students but it was turned down by the city.

An unidentified woman stated that if we could facilitate something on the Plum Cove site with the same staff quality and staff-to-student ratio, she believes they should take more kids if they can fit them, as long as we can keep the same level of community.

Another woman stated that if we can bring the Plum Cove experience to more families in Gloucester, do it. Some kids thrive in small environments while others thrive in larger environments. She asked that the committee not take the fact that they like their small community as being afraid of diversity. That's not who she is; she believes in diversity. It is not a socioeconomic issue. They would love to share their experience with everybody.

Sherry Lewis stated she would like to see a music room and art room in all of the elementary schools.

The woman who spoke about choosing out to Rockport asked what the biggest motivator was for the committee in coming up with a plan. Ms. Teixeira stated that it is equity for all students to have the same access to educational opportunities no matter what school they are in. Mr. Gross indicated that the current buildings are not adequate to give the kids the tools they need (i.e. electrical outlets, climate control, etc.). Kathy Clancy stated that at some point, the facilities department is going to say it doesn't make sense to repair old systems because they cannot get parts for them.

Dr. Safier stated that it is entirely possible that renovations to the buildings because of the condition of the buildings could end up costing more than it would cost to build new additions or a new school. Mr. Gross noted that if buildings are going to be renovated, they will have to be brought up to current code, which is a huge expense.

Ms. Morgan asked for the deadline date when the committee has to make their recommendation to the city or the MSBA. Chairman Pope stated that it is not a deadline decision and reviewed the process.

An unidentified woman asked if there is going to be another meeting at some point at which costs of the different options will be discussed. Chairman Pope stated that there will be a public meeting at which cost will be discussed but that at this point, the committee decided that they should be discussing the best educational plan without consideration of the cost. In other words, the committee will put out a plan that it believes is the best educational plan for the city. Kathy Clancy stated that the committee will not get support for the next project unless it can say it is the best educational plan for the students. She encouraged people to stand up and say why it is important for our kids.

Richard Jabba asked if there would be opportunities for additional input, and Chairman Pope stated that he can put something in writing and send it to the committee. In addition, the committee will be meeting at East Gloucester next month and West Parish in March. After that, there will be a city-wide meeting at which the DPW and Dore & Whittier will be present to discuss the costs of maintaining the current buildings, etc.

Valerie Nelson stated that she predicts that the best educational plan is going to cost a lot of money and, therefore, it is unlikely that the best educational plan will prevail. She stated that if the committee has not laid out something more reasonable that reflects things that have been brought up, like the fact that the value of education is not just in the building, the committee has not set forth a complete plan. If the committee just does what is best and hands it over to the city, there is not control over what comes out at the other end, and it is not likely to be very pretty. An override is likely to get voted down, and the City Council could decide that Plum Cove should be knocked off. She encouraged the committee to come up with different scenarios that make the best use of the money that is available and talk to parents about tradeoffs they are willing to make and things they are willing to contribute so the committee has a realistic plan for a more modest budgetary solution. Mr. Gross stated that our children deserve the best. Ms. Nelson asked, “What if we can’t afford it?” Mr. Gross reiterated that our children deserve the best and that the committee’s plan needs to be what is best for our kids. Ms. Nelson asked what happens if we can’t get the money for it. Mr. Gross stated that the district is moving forward and is now a Level 2 district and we are giving the kids the best regardless of the buildings. They are two separate issues. The facility is not the community.

There was a discussion about the community advocating for the schools to the City Council, especially since there are several new city councilors now.

City Councilor Val Gilman stated the importance of getting the community involved with the schools so that they become an important part of the community, which will increase the likelihood of support for new schools or renovations.

(A 15-minute break was taken at this time.)

C. Superintendent’s Report – Dr. Safier updated the committee on the following matters:

1. Update on the Next-Generation Assessment
2. Focus Academy Course
3. Guiding Principles for the FY17 Budget – There was a discussion about keyboarding instruction in light of the fact that by 2019, the standardized assessments will be taken online. Ms. Teixeira expressed concern that the lack of ability in keyboarding affected PARCC scores at O’Maley. Dr. Safier noted that the online test also requires the ability to navigate between screens.
4. Guiding Principles – There was a discussion about ELL services and how long students use those services.

On a motion by Mr. Gross, seconded by Ms. Sweet, it was unanimously

VOTED: 6 in favor 0 opposed, to accept the Superintendent’s Report.

IX. SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS – None.

X. ACTION

A. Acceptance of Grants

1. Massachusetts DESE Grant – \$5,217.00 21st Century Community Learning Centers – Continuation Grant

On a motion by Ms. Teixeira, seconded by Ms. Sweet, it was unanimously

VOTED: 6 in favor 0 opposed, to accept a 21st Century Community Learning Centers – Continuation Grant from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education in the amount of \$5,217.00.

On a motion by Ms. Teixeira, seconded by Ms. Sweet, it was unanimously

VOTED: 0 in favor 6 opposed, to reconsider the above-referenced grant.

2. Gloucester Education Foundation Grant – \$1,000.00 to the GHS Docksidiers

On a motion by Ms. Teixeira, seconded by Kathy Clancy, it was unanimously

VOTED: 6 in favor 0 opposed, to accept a grant from the Gloucester Education Foundation in the amount of \$1,000.00 to the GHS Docksidiers.

On a motion by Ms. Teixeira, seconded by Kathy Clancy, it was unanimously

VOTED: 0 in favor 6 opposed, to reconsider the above-referenced grant.

3. Gloucester Education Foundation Grant – \$1,000.00 to the East Gloucester School for its production of *The Tempest* and \$2,000.00 to Gloucester High School for programming for World Languages Week

On a motion by Kathy Clancy, seconded by Ms. Sweet, it was unanimously

VOTED: 6 in favor 0 opposed, to accept the above-referenced grants from the Gloucester Education Foundation in the amount of \$1,000.00 to the East Gloucester School and \$2,000.00 to Gloucester High School.

On a motion by Kathy Clancy, seconded by Ms. Sweet, it was unanimously

VOTED: 0 in favor 6 opposed, to reconsider the above-referenced grants.

4. Exxon Mobil Educational Alliance Program Grant to GHS in the amount of \$500.00

After discussion, on a motion by Kathy Clancy, seconded by Ms. Sweet, it was unanimously

VOTED: 6 in favor 0 opposed, to accept the Exxon Mobil Educational Alliance Program Grant in the amount of \$500.00 to GHS.

B. Approval of Statement of Interest for Accelerated Roof Repair – Massachusetts School Building Authority

Chairman Pope made the following motion, seconded by Kathy Clancy:

Resolved: Having convened in an open meeting on January 13, 2016, prior to the closing date, the School Committee of Gloucester, Massachusetts, in accordance with its charter, by-laws and ordinances, has voted 6 in favor, 0 opposed to authorize the superintendent to submit to the Massachusetts School Building Authority the Statement of Interest Form dated February 10, 2016, for the Gloucester High School, 32 Leslie O. Johnson Road, Gloucester, Massachusetts, which describes and explains the following deficiencies and the priority category(s) for which an application may be submitted to the Massachusetts School Building Authority in the future:

Accelerated roof repair. The roof has failed and needs to be replaced.

The Gloucester School Committee hereby further specifically acknowledges that by submitting this Statement of Interest Form, the Massachusetts School Building Authority in no way guarantees the acceptance or the approval of an application, the awarding of a grant or any other funding commitment from the Massachusetts School Building Authority, or commits the city/school district to filing an application for funding with the Massachusetts School Building Authority.

C. Acceptance of the Summative Evaluation of Superintendent Richard Safier by the School Committee – On a motion by Ms. Teixeira, seconded by Ms. Sweet, it was

VOTED: 5 in favor, 1 abstain (Mr. Favazza) to accept the Summative Evaluation of Superintendent Richard Safier.

XI. DISCUSSION/OTHER COMMUNICATION/OLD AND NEW BUSINESS

- A. MSBA Project Update** – Dr. Safier reported that work is ongoing on the project and there is a building committee meeting tomorrow at 4:00 p.m. Chairman Pope stated that there will be a walk-through of the site during the February meeting.
- B. Liaison to Special Education Parent Advisory Council** – Mr. Gross volunteered for this position.

XII. ADJOURNMENT – On a motion by Ms. Sweet, seconded by Ms. Teixeira, it was unanimously

VOTED: 6 in favor 0 opposed, to adjourn the School Committee Meeting of January 13, 2016 at 9:46 p.m.

All reference documents and reports are filed in the Superintendent's office.

*Maria Puglisi
Recording Secretary*