

THE GLOUCESTER PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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

School Committee Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, September 11, 2019
District Office Conference Room
2 Blackburn Drive, Gloucester, MA
7:00 p.m.

Members Present

Jonathan Pope, Chairman
Kathy Clancy, Vice Chairperson
Tony Gross, Secretary
Melissa Teixeira Prince
Michelle Sweet
Joel Favazza
Mayor Sefatia Romeo Theken

Administration Present

Dr. Richard Safier, Superintendent
Gregg Bach, Asst. Superintendent
Gary Frisch, Director of Finance
and Operations
James Cook, GHS Principal

Recorded by 1623 Studios

- 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** – A moment of silence was held for the 18th anniversary of 9/11.

- III. ORAL COMMUNICATIONS** – **Pam Steele** of 10 Pilot’s Hill read the following statement: “The legacy we are living with is the Fuller going by the boards and the city pursuing new schools. If EGS or Vets are vacated, will they sit idle, decaying in place while condo developers can buy them at basement rates and bail out the city? If the cost of each new school is \$30 million each and the new sewer could be \$220 million to our tax burden, who has the money in an aging population? How about the community plan 2000 that citizens supported? We seem to be ignoring that as well. It refers to the importance of our open space and recreation. Have you read the plan? This body has a lot to answer to and so far, all I ever hear is Dore & Whittier, Dore & Whittier, Dore & Whittier.

Most homes on Cape Ann are owner occupied by year-round residents. The majority of homeowners on Cape Ann are older adults and nearly 53% of homeowners are age 60 and older. We are living longer, in many cases experiencing longer retirements than any previous generation. Growth in the region’s older population is expected to continue, with projections suggesting that older adults will represent more than 40% of the region’s population by 2030. (Gloucester Daily Time)

If you want kids to succeed and compete with China, you have to make sure that by the third grade they’re reading on grade level. We’re not there. That’s the main goal of school, not the size of the room. Until you can prove to me that every kid is on grade level and has got to be able to compete because you know the statistics. They don’t catch up and there’s a high dropout rate. Gloucester’s scores are terrible. We never talk about that. Do you think a new school is going to handle this? I didn’t want to bring up any of this, but I feel like I’ve

been forced to. The scores aren't good. The kids don't go on after high school. Talk about stuff like that and build a program or something. Don't try to spend money that's not going to solve the problem. We're not going to be able to afford it. Fifty million for West Parish, another \$30 million; are you really going to have \$1 million a year to support new schools? It's never talked about. I'm going to ask it every time until I can get somebody to have a dialogue with me."

Mayor Theken invited Ms. Steele to come to her office and she will show her the explanation. She stated that anyone is more than welcome to come to her office. She takes offense when people talk about students not going forward. She stated that our high school students are phenomenal and doing great and becoming your teachers and your mayors and your city councilors and your senators. She has an open door policy and she will give statistics. She indicated that it may not be the size of a classroom, but the buildings are falling apart and we keep fixing things. At some point, you have to say it's time for a new school.

Maryann Boucher of 93 Mt. Pleasant Avenue read her statement from the East Gloucester School Building Committee public hearing since the mayor was not there: "The School Committee states that they are committed to consolidating, eliminating two of the five current elementary schools. If the East Gloucester plan moves forward with consolidation, 440 students will be attending elementary school either on Green Street or Mattos Field. If the Green Street site is chosen, they will attend school amongst a supermarket, Marshall's, Aspen Dental, Ace Hardware, Petco, Olympia Sports, and soon-to-be Starbucks, YMCA, Home Goods, and many more retail shops, not to mention 200 living units, and as I found out on Monday night, there could possibly be an additional hotel or assisted living. We don't know that yet. Our elementary age children will be sitting in class or playing on a small 70x100' play area while commercial trucks and countless cars make their way in and out of the shopping development. Our elementary age children will be attending class next to the highway that is already congested from the A. Piatt Andrew Bridge to the foot of East Main Street. Our School Committee is committed to giving the city's children the best educational program, but is this plan the best and safest for our elementary age children?"

I've attended countless meetings for the past seven years, and while I appreciate the efforts of these committees, I truly believe that the clock is ticking, forcing you to accelerate the process. I would like to know why you are rushing to make the decision. From my research thus far, it's based on making sure that we do receive the MSBA funding and not based on the ultimate goal of placing our elementary age children in the best and safest settings where their educational needs are met as well as their emotional and social needs. We are a city setting the bar to be green, yet this plan places the emphasis on more traffic, more busing, less parking spaces, less play space, and less green space. The research is there. Smaller neighborhood schools benefit our elementary age children. They need much more than fancy new facades with grand entrances and 120 parking spaces. They need wide open spaces, trees to climb, green grass, places to explore. They need to recognize their peers and the staff on a personal level.

The Green Street neighborhood is maxed out with the current development, and now this may be shoehorned in. This will certainly tip the iceberg. They have no land left with the

exception of this green open space. The Veterans' site is the home of the field that was dedicated to a fallen veteran, a war hero, 84 years ago and also leaves no room for more congestion. I urge this committee to take a step back and reevaluate the sites that you have in front of you. These are not the only options. And listen to the West Parish parents who spoke the other night who love their school in their own neighborhood. All of Gloucester's elementary school children deserve the configuration of the five elementary schools that was set forth by our School Committee when this project began at the start of the West Parish construction. And Mr. Pope, at the very end of the meeting the other night, said, 'We are here to find a place for the most number of kids as soon as possible.' I would really say let's find the best place and the safest place that meets the needs of our children."

Mayor Theken apologized for missing the public hearing, stating that she was with Ms. Boucher's cousin. She stated that they have looked at the 1924 deed and have every right to build what we want at the Veterans' site. She noted that Ms. Boucher educated her when she was a city councilor and complained that we needed a new school and sent her an email the other day that the EGS wall is falling down. Mayor Theken stated that we are not rushing into this, and she is not taking out loans. No one is putting any child at risk. The people are going to vote on it in a special election so everyone can decide. She invited Ms. Boucher to come to her office to discuss all the issues regarding open space. She noted that she did not see anyone at the Veterans' Day ceremonies who was complaining about using Mattos Field and saying we don't care about war heroes. Mayor Theken stated that it is offensive for anyone to say that the city does not care about veterans.

Chairman Pope pointed out that Gloucester has the 78th lowest tax rate in Massachusetts out of 356 communities. He stated that the West Parish School cost \$39 million and the city received \$14 million in reimbursement, so the cost to the city was \$25 million. He stated that it is the School Building Committee's intention to have another informational meeting to address all of the questions and noted that there is a link on the GPS website to ask questions about the project and receive answers. Finally, he stated that the SBC cannot express opinions as to why something should be done; it can only comment on facts.

IV. COMMENTS FROM THE CHAIRPERSON – None.

V. RECOGNITIONS – Kathy Clancy recognized all GPS staff for a very smooth opening of school. Mayor Theken thanked the students who came to the 9/11 ceremony today and those who are volunteering to work at the city-wide Halloween party. She pointed out that the city administration works closely with the school administration to get things done.

VI. GHS STUDENT ADVISORY COUNCIL – Emily Meyran introduced herself and updated the committee on freshmen elections, the sophomore Yankee Candle fundraiser, and upcoming senior fundraisers (bowling and Gloucesteropoly game).

VII. CONSENT AGENDA

A. Approval of Minutes

1. Personnel Subcommittee and Executive Session of June 10, 2019
2. School Committee and Executive Session of June 12, 2019

B. Approval of Warrants

C. Approval of Transfers

D. Referrals

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

VOTED: 7 in favor, 0 opposed to approve the Consent Agenda as noted.

VIII. DELIBERATIONS ON EDUCATIONAL ISSUES/SUPERINTENDENT’S REPORT

- A. GEF Annual Report** – Executive Director Tina Raimo reported on some of the programs the Gloucester Education Foundation has supported over the past year, noting that since 2006 the GEF has raised almost \$8 million for the schools. Some of those programs include the elementary theater program, the summer STEAM Camp at Beeman, a new sound system for the Veterans’ Memorial auditorium, O’Maley Academy after school classes, the Aquaponics Lab at O’Maley, a mindfulness program and new printmaking studio at O’Maley, a new Robotics system at the high school, a climate change program and presentation, \$150,000 from Warren Waugh to the automotive shop, after school music programs, the city-wide arts festival, Countdown to Kindergarten, and the Mad Hot Ball.

Ms. Raimo indicated that looking ahead this year, GEF will be funding other programs including a new science initiative at O’Maley, allowing students to learn electrical engineering, an after school pilot program in coding, a storm drain project, and a ukulele class at GHS.

Finally, Ms. Raimo expressed her gratitude for the incredible generosity of the community and the collaboration with the district. The committee members thanked Ms. Raimo and the GEF for everything they do for the district.

(At this time, the agenda was taken out of order.)

X. ACTION

- A. Acceptance of GEF Grant** – Chairman Pope reviewed the purpose of the grant.

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

VOTED: 7 in favor, 0 opposed to accept a grant from the Gloucester Education Foundation in the amount of \$10,500.00 for the purchase of seven Soundfields amplification systems for the Gloucester Preschool.

VIII. DELIBERATIONS ON EDUCATIONAL ISSUES/SUPERINTENDENT’S REPORT (Cont’d)

B. Turnaround Update – Mr. Cook presented a slide show on the GHS turnaround plan, including the vision of a graduate, high needs student growth percentiles, the data that informed and shaped the plan, attendance (including teacher attendance), ninth grade transition, higher order thinking (create, evaluate and analyze), lesson design, team norms and structures, and benchmark data. Ms. Teixeira Prince requested that Mr. Cook share his presentation with the committee members via email and report back in a few months on the progress made and to see if there any staffing needs that could help with the plan.

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

1. Opening of School
2. Influx of Late Registrations
3. Student Activity Account Guidelines
4. Minimum Grade 10 ELA and Math Scaled Scores for Interim CD Requirements
5. Calendar – This Week

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

VOTED: 7 in favor, 0 opposed to appoint Dr. Richard Safier to the Northshore Education Consortium Board of Directors.

Dr. Safier reported that there is a meeting scheduled for tomorrow morning with Father Jim Achadinha to discuss the availability of St. Ann’s School as swing space. Mr. Favazza expressed concern that St. Ann’s was last used as a school more than two years ago and recommended finding out if it needs to be brought up to code before it is used again. Dr. Safier noted that the estimated cost of doing that is built into the cost of the project.

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

VOTED: 7 in favor, 0 opposed to accept the Superintendent’s Report.

IX. SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS – None.

XI. DISCUSSION/OTHER COMMUNICATION/OLD AND NEW BUSINESS

A. MSBA Project Update – Chairman Pope reported that there is a short timeline to meet the deadline of making the next submittal to the MSBA on October 23rd. He stated that the goal is to have the School Committee review at the October 9th meeting the option chosen by the East Gloucester School Building Committee. In

response to a question from Mr. Favazza, Chairman Pope indicated that traffic studies will happen before October 9th and questions about availability of swing space will be answered by that time. Chairman Pope also indicated that the SBC will be having an informational meeting for the public at the end of September, which will include the cost of a debt exclusion. Ms. Teixeira Prince requested that the cost of capital improvements and renovations be posted on the website to show the community that these options have been considered.

- B. **Preschool Location**** – Chairman Pope reported that negotiations are ongoing to purchase the Blackburn building.
- C. **Presentations**** – Kathy Clancy suggested that presentations be included in School Committee packets that are posted on the website.
- D. **High School Study Halls**** – Mr. Favazza referred this matter to the Program Subcommittee. Mr. Cook stated that the lack of study halls is due to a staffing issue.
- E. **O’Maley Turnaround Plan**** – Ms. Teixeira Prince referred this matter to the Program Subcommittee.

XII. **EXECUTIVE SESSION** – On a motion by Ms. Teixeira Prince, seconded by Kathy Clancy, it was unanimously

VOTED: By Roll Call Vote

Mr. Favazza – yes
Mr. Gross – yes
Chairman Pope – yes
Ms. Teixeira Prince – yes
Ms. Sweet – yes
Mayor Theken – yes
Kathy Clancy – yes

To enter into Executive Session at 8:55 p.m. for the purpose of discussing negotiations with the GTA and will enter back into regular session only to adjourn.

XIII. **ADJOURNMENT** – On a motion by Ms. Sweet, seconded by Mr. Gross, it was unanimously

VOTED: 7 in favor, 0 opposed to adjourn the School Committee Meeting of September 11, 2019 at 9:25 p.m.

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

Maria Puglisi, Recording Secretary