

**Wellesley Public Schools
School Committee Meeting
March 24, 2020
Remote Online Meeting**

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 PM. Those present included Chair Melissa Martin, Vice Chair Linda Chow, Secretary Matt Kelley, members Sharon Gray and Jim Roberti; Superintendent David Lussier, Assistant Superintendents Joan Dabrowski and Cindy Mahr; Director of Student Services Sarah Orlov, Director of Human Resources Gayle McCracken, and Director of Technology Kathleen Dooley.

Ms. Martin announced that the meeting is being held remotely and recorded by local media and YouTube. The Committee is moving to remote meetings due to the executive order signed by Governor Baker on March 12th, which allows for remote meetings for public bodies. As such, the Committee will be following the guidance developed for remote meetings with one key component being that all votes must be roll call votes. In addition, Ms. Martin also noted that the School Committee is making history with its first remotely held meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENT No one wished to speak.

SCHOOL COMMITTEE REPORT

Ms. Gray reported she recently attended the **Upham PTO meeting** at the request of the Upham community to address questions relative to the Hardy/Upham project. She, along with Ms. Chow, also attended a **Hunnewell PTO meeting** where there was discussion concerning the Committee's general work, as well as this year's budget process and the building projects.

Ms. Chow provided updates on **Playing Fields Task Force issues** including that work has been progressing on the repair of the **Sprague turf fields 2 and 3** and is almost complete. An inspection meeting should be taking place soon, and it was noted there are some punch list items that should be completed within 2 or 3 weeks. Ms. Chow also received calls from neighbors of Sprague Field who noticed that the **green metal container** has been relocated. They wished to express their gratitude to Dr. Lussier and Town Engineer Dave Hickey for their efforts in getting the container moved to a more appropriate location.

At Ms. Martin's suggestion, School Committee agreed that since **Annual Town Meeting** has been postponed, and considering how quickly the COVID-19 situation is evolving, weekly Tuesday evening meetings will be scheduled for the near future to address any issues that may arise. If a meeting is not needed, it will be cancelled.

CONSENT AGENDA

A revised draft of the March 10, 2020 Open Session minutes was emailed to the Committee just prior to the start of the meeting. Ms. Gray moved to approve the minutes of the March 10, 2020 as presented.

MOVED: Ms. Gray; **SECONDED:** Mr. Roberti; **ROLL CALL:** Ms. Gray – Yes, Mr. Roberti – Yes, Ms. Chow – Abstain, Mr. Kelley – Yes, Ms. Martin – Yes.

MOTION CARRIED: Yes – 4, No – 0, Abstain – 1.

SCHOOL CLOSURE/REMOTE LEARNING

Dr. Lussier gave an overview of the many changes that have occurred in the past two weeks starting with the early release of students on March 6th at the Upham and Middle Schools where there might have been an exposure risk from students in a household that had a presumptive positive testing result of the COVID-19 virus. On March 13th, Wellesley was one of the first districts in the state to close for multiple weeks. Shortly thereafter, on March 15th, the Governor closed all schools for a 3-week period.

Town leaders met to determine the best way to communicate about and contain this virus as best as possible at a local level. Dr. Lussier and his senior team also engaged with the Facilities Management Department on new protocols for the cleaning of all school buildings, similar to what had been done at the Upham and Middle Schools.

In addition, questions arose regarding compensation relative to faculty and staff, with the plan to keep employees financially whole, regardless of whether a staff member is paid on a salary or hourly schedule. Engagement with the employee unions, both the WTA for faculty and administrators, and WEPSA for secretarial and support staff, occurred to determine how this can be accomplished. A Memorandum of Agreement was developed that addresses compensation as well as implementation of remote learning.

Simultaneously, Dr. Lussier was working with colleagues around the state and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to determine what learning should look like during this 3-week closure. Guidance was clear from the DESE that unless WPS could meet all the obligations around equitable access for students, in particular those identified under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), districts could not replicate 'school' in a virtual environment. Based on this guidance, staff started considering enrichment opportunities that, while not required, could still provide students with an opportunity to stay connected to their teachers in a learning environment tied to their prior learning, while keeping in mind equity barriers that would impede one's access to this learning. As a result, the remote learning platform that was developed was based on one that provides opportunities for learning around content already addressed. While developing this platform, there were many unknowns including how this might impact staff and their families, their ability to support this learning, and the impact on the school community overall.

Dr. Dabrowski and Ms. Orlov provided a review of the current remote learning platforms developed based on guidance from the federal and state government, and with the assistance of all principals, department heads and directors. The website provides guidance and resources for enrichment and relies heavily on existing technology available to students through the 1:1 program. Students in Grades 6 through 12 are utilizing current platforms such as Google Classroom, Google Hangouts and Canvas where teachers provide daily messages and learning assignments that students can access through their devices. At the elementary and preschool levels, the District website provides information that allows parents to obtain ideas and suggestions for resources across all disciplines. Each department head built a series of activities that parents can access. As part of the social/emotional connections at the preK-5 level, parents and students can access the website which includes a personal message from their teacher on a daily basis. In addition, they can navigate through the many enrichment offerings in math, reading, and writing, all of which align with the District's

curriculum, are anchored in the Massachusetts standards, and reflect what students know and can do, in the spirit of enrichment.

The staff at PAWS has been working to develop ways that teachers can reach out to parents and also provide some age appropriate activities for preschool children.

Ms. Orlov provided an overview of the work being done by special educators and service providers to stay connected to families through suggestions for activities that can be modified for access, and reaching out to students who are able to access technology through Google Classrooms and Google Talk. Online resources for curriculum as well as for physical, occupational and speech therapy are also being provided.

Dr. Lussier indicated that on Friday, March 20th, in a conference call with DESE, Commissioner Riley challenged the group to begin thinking about what remote learning would look like across the Commonwealth using the assumption of a much longer closure. The current approach as framed is for a short closure time, but there is now a growing consensus that schools may be closed for a more extensive time than originally imagined. It is necessary to now think about remote learning as something far more robust where new learning is created and more formal supports are made available for those students who need it.

Dr. Lussier reported that over the weekend, the US Department of Education released new guidance that provides more flexibility than previously defined, and districts are now awaiting more feedback from DESE on this new guidance. He noted that even with the added flexibility, there are significant issues regarding equity that must be considered including considerations for students with disabilities as well as students with limited technology availability. Although the mandate is different, the District's responsibility has not changed to meet the needs of all students.

In the short term, Dr. Lussier stated that individual teacher creativity will continue to be supported in the work as currently defined. The longer-term approach will require a more robust site with advancement as the goal, which also brings up questions of accountability and how it translates to grades, credits, GPAs, etc. He hopes that the state will help address some of these issues. In the meantime, administrators and staff are fully engaged in planning, but it is a process that will take time to develop and make work properly.

Committee members thanked Dr. Lussier, his team and faculty for the incredible amount of work accomplished in a short period of time in support of students. Questions were raised as to whether there is any ability to use Zoom or other online gathering sites where children can see their classmates and teachers; what does the enrichment work look like for the youngest learners; what challenges are teachers encountering in reaching out to younger students in a meaningful way, while managing their own home life situations; the status of the availability of iPads and connectivity for students to access online resources; with reference to remote learning and doing assessments, whether there will be an impact on the MOA with the WTA; when is it estimated that a plan will be in place; how will challenges for students with IEPs be addressed; and how does Wellesley's work compare to that being done in other districts?

Dr. Lussier indicated that these questions are being addressed through current work with faculty and staff, and some issues will take longer than others to solve. It was noted that there are parents who can do work with their children, but there are others who through necessity cannot, and remote learning is a challenge. In addition, not everyone has the same expectations from remote learning, with some viewing this closure as a time to engage at a different level with their children and prefer flexibility.

Ms. Dooley discussed the process being used to ensure all students have access to technology, whether it be actual equipment or hot spots to access the internet.

With reference to comparisons to other districts in the state, Dr. Lussier indicated that the approach taken by the Wellesley is extremely consistent with the approach of most districts around the Commonwealth. However, within each community there are characteristics specific to that district and sometimes the words chosen to frame the same work result in different perceptions. To date, he believes the approach has been much more consistent than different, however, going forward, he plans to move forward with a program for remote learning for Wellesley students which may be different than work developed in other communities.

Ms. Mahr discussed operational issues being affected by the school closing including the impact on Food Services and Business Office responsibilities. She indicated that Whitsons Food Services has been providing breakfast and lunch for students in need who apply for it through an order form that was quickly developed by Whitsons. A total of approximately 100 meals per day, at a cost of \$1600 per day, are being provided to students in need. She noted however, that since there is no revenue coming in to support this, and Wellesley does not meet the state guidelines to continue funding of the meal program (having 50 percent or more of student population on free and reduced lunches), she needs to determine how this will be funded in the long run if school closure continues for an extended period. She is discussing this issue with colleagues in other districts and at the state DESE office to determine how these costs can be handled.

Ms. Mahr also discussed that there are essential services that need to be continued without interruption such as payroll, accounts payable, purchasing and accounts receivable. Most of this work is being done remotely, however, there are times that individuals must be in the office, and this is time is spread out among employees to minimize the amount of time spent in Central Office.

Questions were raised concerning the budget impact of providing meals and other critical needs, and whether funds from items not generating costs could be used for this payment, and the impact of the closure on Whitsons employees.

UPDATE ON STUDENT OPPORTUNITY ACT PLANNING

After a brief discussion, Ms. Gray moved to approve the WPS Student Opportunity Act Plan for School Years 2021-2023 as presented.

MOVED: Ms. Gray; **SECONDED:** Mr. Kelley; **ROLL CALL:** Ms. Gray – Yes, Mr. Kelley – Yes, Ms. Chow – Yes, Mr. Roberti – Yes, Ms. Martin – Yes.

MOTION CARRIED: Yes – 5; No – 0

ANNUAL TOWN MEETING PREPARATION

Ms. Martin reported that Annual Town Meeting has been postponed and is now scheduled to start on April 27, 2020. This date is also subject to change. The current working plan is that Town Meeting would be targeted to occur in one night, with presentations being prerecorded and questions provided in advance.

Mr. Kelley asked if this delay will have budgetary implications for responses to the COVID-19 crisis. Dr. Lussier indicated that while there might be savings on some level, the Town is incurring additional costs. The interim strategy is to code these costs with a special COVID-19 code and hopefully recover some of these costs through emergency management funds that will be released based on the President's declaration of a national emergency. It is not entirely clear how these funds will be recovered, however, at the very least, all departments are documenting the additional incurred costs.

HHU UPDATE**Hunnewell Project**

Ms. Martin thanked Committee members for indicating they are able to attend the joint School Committee/PBC meeting on March 26th to receive the Hunnewell schematic design report.

Ms. Gray indicated the joint meeting will provide the first opportunity in a while to receive an update on how the Hunnewell project is evolving. She acknowledged that due to the COVID-19 crisis, planning and scheduling work and meetings has been challenging for both projects. The architectural firms and project managers are all still working remotely so planning/work continues, however things can change at any time.

The PBC/School Committee joint meeting on March 26th will provide an opportunity for SMMA to present an overall update of the Hunnewell project, including educational planning and programming, interior and exterior work, square footage, and a cost update.

In addition, SMMA will discuss the application submission to the Planning Board for review of a Project of Significant Impact (PSI). This will also be reviewed at the School Committee's meeting on March 31st. This work is separate from the schematic design, with the focus on utilities capacity, waste management, and emergency vehicle access. This is one of many permitting processes that will be undertaken with this project.

Ms. Gray informed the Committee that there has been discussion concerning the relocation of the Ruth S. Walter Garden. The garden is currently located in front of the Hunnewell School, but must be moved elsewhere on the school site due to some technical exploration that must be done relatively quickly in the vicinity of the current garden.

Hardy/Upham Project

Ms. Chow removed herself from the table at 7:55 pm.

Ms. Gray reported that the SBC is not yet in a position to determine the appropriate site of the new school under the MSBA project. There has been much discussion concerning how SBC will be adapting to the new reality involving COVID-19, and the continued work on this project.

Ms. Gray indicated the SBC is planning to meet on April 2 and April 16th. There is a general consensus to convene the SBC and spend these two meetings receiving and discussing the data and analysis requested, with the project team explaining it in a public forum as well as posting the information online for the community to review.

The data/analysis includes information on the request from the community to investigate what an Upham building would look like near or on the current footprint, recognizing that there is not a ready solution for swing space; a request for additional traffic analysis; cost information for an 18 classroom/365 student option; cost information for a base repair option for Upham, which is part of the MSBA process, but not considered an option; and costing out an addition/renovation option at Hardy. The option of building a new school at the front of the Hardy site is no longer being considered.

Ms. Gray indicated the SBC hopes to keep the project moving forward while following the process as proscribed. The SBC is also committed to having a third public forum to discuss all the information presented and there was also a promise to engage with Town Meeting before presenting a solution to the MSBA. It is not clear at this time how and when these updates will take place.

Ms. Gray also informed the Committee that the MSBA is working with communities and towns regarding deadline flexibilities, although no specific information has been provided.

Mr. Roberti cautioned the Committee that the election has not occurred and the referendum question has not yet been decided. He wants to ensure that the public stay informed and engaged, and feels holding a public forum on Zoom may be difficult to manage. He suggested that SBC ensure that it provides opportunity for public engagement at its meetings and that the public is able to view the SBC meetings to receive the information being presented. If this is not possible, then perhaps the process may need to slow down as it pertains to the MSBA timeline. Ms. Gray indicated the SBC is anxious to receive the information in the next few meetings and make it available to the public as soon as possible.

Ms. Chow returned to the table at 8:05 pm.

PUBLIC COMMENT

No one wished to speak.

ADJOURNMENT

At approximately 8:06 pm, Mr. Kelley moved to adjourn the meeting.

MOVED: Mr. Kelley; **SECONDED:** Ms. Gray; **ROLL CALL:** Mr. Kelley – Yes; Ms. Gray – Yes; Ms. Chow – Yes; Mr. Roberti – Yes; Ms. Martin – Yes.

MOTION CARRIED: Yes – 5; No – 0

Respectfully submitted,

Matt Kelley
Secretary

Documents and Exhibits Used:

SC Meeting Agenda/Posting - 3/24/20

Draft Minutes: 3/10/20