

SELECT BOARD/SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES
JUNE 30, 2022 AT 6:00PM
TOWN HALL, SELECT BOARD CONFERENCE ROOM

CALL TO ORDER/OPENING

Select Board Chair Allen Phillips called the meeting to order at 6:01pm. Chair Allen Phillips, Second Vice Chair Dianna Provencher, Selectman Herb Duggan Jr., Selectman John Bujak, Town Administrator David Genereux and Assistant Town Administrator Kristen Rubin were in attendance. Vice Chair Rick Antanavica was absent.

School Committee Chair Donna McCance called the meeting to order at 6:01pm. Chair Donna McCance, Vice Chair Scott Weikel, Secretary Dylan Lambert, Nate Hagglund, Jonathan Boisjolie, Superintendent Brett Kustigian, and Interim Finance Director William Frangiamore.

Mr. Phillips stated that the Board reorganized at their goaling workshop meeting on June 22, 2022. Allen Phillips is Chair, Rick Antanavica is Vice Chair and Dianna Provencher is Second Vice Chair.

Mr. Phillips stated the purpose of this meeting is to have a workshop to discuss concerns about middle school. This will be a solutions-based meeting and the Select Board and School Committee might not take questions from the public. Mr. Phillips noted the Select Board and School Committee just did a walkthrough of the Middle School, including the gym, classrooms and systems to get a better understanding of building issues.

Mr. Phillips asked Mr. Genereux to provide an update on the redevelopment of the former Becker campus. Mr. Genereux stated that the Becker campus faces challenges due to the requirement to reclassify buildings from business to education. This change requires the installation of sprinkler systems, alarm systems, converting bathrooms to meet ADA standards and putting in lifts at Borger and Swan Library. All work is pending the availability of architects and engineers, both of which have been difficult to come by. Currently, an engineer is working to design the fire alarm/suppression system for Borger and the specs are expected in a few weeks. The Town is hoping to have an architect under contract within a few weeks as well. Once every modification is designed, they will need to be put out to bid then the work will need to be scheduled. As of now, the only building considered useable and up to code is the campus center although the elevators have failed inspection because there is not currently a phone system for the emergency call app. The campus center is not large enough to contain the high school, however, without having Borger online as well.

Mr. Phillips pointed out that the original plan was to open the campus as a decentralized high school in two years. Due to the conditions at the Middle School, the Town tried to move up the timeline but there is a hold up on materials and contractors and it is important to get the renovations done properly in accordance with all State regulations to ensure the safety of the students and faculty.

Ms. McCance introduced new school superintendent Dr. Brett Kustigian. Dr. Kustigian noted he grew up in Leicester and it is great to be back home. He stated there are some bumps in the road in the short term, but the new Becker high school campus will be envied by everyone in central mass once complete. Tomorrow is his first official day, and he will send out an announcement with his contact information. He encouraged the public to contact him with their thoughts and ideas. Dr. Kustigian added that the safety of our children and staff is number one and will not be compromised. He will be providing periodic updates and will hold town hall style meetings for faculty and parents to try and be as open and transparent as possible.

Select Board and School Committee members expressed concerns regarding the conditions at the Middle School including ants, stagnant water, lengthy extension cords crossing rooms, lack of ventilation, odors, cases of

headaches and dizziness reported at a much higher rate than at the other schools in town, issue that have persisted for decades, mold, the importance of not putting children in an unsafe environment but also listening to what the experts have to say regarding building conditions, a tree growing up in the library, leaks in the building when it rains, the cost to replace the duct work alone just to make the air quality safe in a failing building and wasting funds by repairing a bad building. The SEC report which showed no asbestos within the duct work at the Middle School was discussed along with a mold and indoor air quality assessment done by WEA, LLC through the Mass Teachers Association. The report by WEA states that the SEC report is not based in adequate scientific health-based evidence to assess indoor air quality for human health and should be discounted. Further, WEA states that the assertion that the school may be occupied as normal poses as continuous public health, risk to educators and students at the school, and potentially to the community along with creating potential legal liability for the Leicester School Committee.

There was consensus that a new location must be found for the Middle School children prior to the start of school in the fall. Potential locations discussed including the Library (which may not be allowed due to stipulations in the State grant that was used to renovate and expand the library), Memorial School (which would require \$250K in mold remediation). Double session sat the high school, area churches and the Town Hall. Mr. Genereux noted that there are former classrooms at Town Hall, but they have been converted to offices, there is no cafeteria, and there is not enough time to relocate Town Hall functions before school begins in August. The possibility of using modulars were discussed.

Mr. Genereux noted that the temporary Elementary School move to Becker last year was an emergency situation. No one said anything about the code issues because the inspectional departments and the State were not aware of them at the time. When discussing a permanent move, the State Fire Marshall gets involved. No occupancy is allowed in any of those buildings for any reason right now. The Town received a benefit they should not have gotten last year.

The need for a Becker project coordinator was discussed along with supply chain issues and funding constraints which are requiring the project to be piecemealed and done by volunteers. This item will be discussed further on a future Select Board agenda.

The School Committee discussed having the new Superintendent review the configuration for grades 7-12 as his first order of business, working on the assumption that the kids are not going back to the Middle School this fall.

The groups agreed to reconvene on July 13, 2022, at 6:00pm in Meeting Room 3 at Town Hall to discuss this matter further.

Kim Ferdella representing the teachers' union stated the town is on a great path and teachers, parents and nurses feel a sense of relief now that kids won't be returning to the Middle School. Ms. Ferdella asked that a formal vote to this effect be taken on a future posted agenda.

Motion 063022-1: A motion to adjourn was made by Dylan Lambert and seconded by Nate Hagglund at 7:35pm. Motion carried 5:0:0.

Motion 063022-2: A motion to adjourn was made by Dianna Provencher and seconded by John Bujak at 7:35pm. Motion carried 4:0:0.