

**Wellesley Public Schools
School Committee Meeting
February 23, 2021
Remote Online Meeting**

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 pm. Those present included Chair Linda Chow, Vice Chair Melissa Martin, Secretary Catherine Mirick, members Sharon Gray and Jim Roberti; Superintendent David Lussier, Interim Assistant Superintendent Mike LaCava; Assistant Superintendent Cynthia Mahr; and Student Advisory representative Rachel White.

Ms. Chow announced that the meeting is being held remotely and recorded by local media and broadcast live by Wellesley Media.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Lara Crawford, of 15 Rice St., joined to voice support for working on bathrooms at the stadium stating they should be the priority. Regarding lights, she believes other priorities take precedent. She noted that she lives close to the high school and thinks lights would make it more like a town center with all games being proposed.

Heather Conway, of 190 Winding River Rd., has three students at Hunnewell and one at WMS. She stated her kids are having a hard time with hybrid learning, though she appreciates her 3rd grader on IEP being back, as it has made a big difference. She feels the mental health of kids needs to be made a priority and they need to be around peers to developmentally progress.

Kim McCausland, of 36 Carver Rd., has two children at WHS. She joined to follow up on a letter she sent to the Committee to urge WHS seniors be brought back in person full time as a complete class. She stated the educational and social-emotional impacts on older kids' mental health have been as big or bigger than younger learners. Additionally, she noted there have not been many traditional senior year celebrations.

SCHOOL COMMITTEE REPORTS

Ms. Martin stated the Middle School Building Systems project (MSBS) is going to have a neighbors webinar on March 23 for abutters. Information will be sent out to relevant individuals prior to it.

SUPERINTENDENT REPORT

Dr. Lussier began by reminding incoming kindergarten parents that registration for next year is open. He added registration for all grades opens March 1.

He offered the following recognition from Thom Carter, PreK-12 Director of Art:
Congratulations to the 51 Wellesley High School students who received 63 awards in the 2020 Scholastic Art & Writing Awards, including one presented to Junior **Tessa Crowley for BEST In Category for Writing.**

Finally, he noted that Director of Human Resources Gayle McCracken will be leaving to become the HR Director for the Town of Dedham. Ms. McCracken has been with WPS for seven years. Dr. Lussier stated the District could not have asked for a better person in that role in terms of how she works with people and makes them feel valued. He noted she will be missed and he was incredibly grateful to her. He stated the Administration has positive leads for an interim and have posted for permanent to begin 7/1.

CONSENT AGENDA

Minutes - February 2 and February 9, 2021 Open Session

After a brief discussion, Ms. Chow entertained a motion to approve the Consent Agenda, which includes minutes from February 2 and February 9 as amended.

MOVED: Ms. Gray; SECONDED: Ms. Martin; ROLL CALL: Ms. Gray – Yes; Ms. Martin – Yes; Ms. Chow – Yes; Ms. Mirick – Yes; Mr. Roberti - Yes

MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

COVID-19 UPDATES

Dr. Lussier began by noting the District is up to a total of 142 cases for the year per the case tracker. There have been six positive results since returning from break before surveillance testing results have been received. The new proposed dashboard has been approved by the Joint Health & Safety Committee (JHSC). This will shift the metrics of focus from predominantly external measures to ones within the community and District. If any 4 of the 7 areas are failing at the same time, the District will go into full closure.

He discussed the latest CDC guidance that was released before break on February 12. He noted it seemed geared more towards districts currently in full closure and it highlighted measures needed in order to open in some form. The CDC is still recommending 6 feet distancing while discussing the need to get kids back in school, two elements that currently aren't congruent with each other. The guidance did not address vaccines as a prerequisite for school openings. Dr. Lussier stated the District believes vaccinations for staff to be a critical piece.

He then discussed Education Commissioner Riley's statement that he would be seeking authority from the Board of Education to begin phasing in kindergarten through 5th grade full time beginning in April, potentially with secondary levels returning for the remaining month or so of the year. It is still unknown when educators will be eligible to be vaccinated, though he hopes educators will get their first dose in March. He stressed that all progress the District has achieved in bringing students back has been done in collaboration with WEA. Together they have worked continuously on methodical ways to bring kids back.

He added that a pilot program is being launched March 3 to bring Skills students in Upham and TLC students at Hunnewell in on Wednesdays. Additionally, the TLC program ran a vacation camp for three days for about 12 TLC students during vacation week. He wished to recognize those staff members for coming in during vacation week.

Discussion with the Committee included if this plan would involve unions. Dr. Lussier explained if the reopening becomes a mandate from DESE, that would supersede any collective bargaining. He stressed that how this is done is as important as what is done and that it must be done collaboratively with the educators.

Discussion also included distancing requirements. Dr. Lussier stated there will need to be conversations about how to address spacing in lesser controlled times, such as passing in hallways and eating. He is expecting survey work with staff and the community to help gather data shortly. Another piece will be expanding the testing program. He added the Administration has been talking about end of year activities and he is fairly confident there will be a graduation, though it may look a little different.

Ms. Martin asked the Committee if they would be interested in advocating for educators to be prioritized within the next big group in line with the resolution approved on February 2. She noted the State has made adjustments in the past based on feedback. She offered to draft a formal request letter that can be sent to the Department of Public Health, Governor Baker, state senators, and state representatives ahead of the BOE meeting. Dr. Lussier suggested asking that vaccines be made available to local boards or health or school nurses to administer to school staff.

After some discussion, Mr. Roberti made a motion to delegate responsibility to Melissa Martin to write a letter to legislators to urge them to elevate educators in the Commonwealth to the top of Phase 3 and advocate for efficiency in the distribution of the vaccine.

SECONDED: Ms. Gray; ROLL CALL: Ms. Gray – Yes; Ms. Martin – Yes; Ms. Chow – Yes; Ms. Mirick – Yes; Mr. Roberti - Yes

MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

DISCUSSION/VOTE: HUNNEWELL FIELDS PRIORITIES

Town Engineer Dave Hickey, Director of Public Works Dave Cohen, Jay McHale with Natural Resources Council (NRC), WHS Principal Jamie Chisum, and Athletic Director John Brown joined the Committee.

Ms. Chow began by reminding the Committee that the schools' current priorities are bathrooms and team rooms followed by lighting. She noted that at the previous meeting, the press box at the field was not discussed but it has been mentioned before. Mr. Brown stated the old, wooden press box was taken down around 2003. Currently there is an area in the stands with a table where people can sit to run the scoreboard and announce. The area can fit one camera but there is not a lot of room and if there is bad weather, the scoreboard control has to be covered. He noted it is important that at some point that need is addressed.

Ms. Chow noted that \$525,000 had been appropriated for three restroom buildings with a total of 29 stalls and two team rooms in a 20' x 60' building. The funding had come from the Town, CPC (for the bathrooms only), and the Wellesley Field Fund. However, once bids came in for the project, it was realized there were insufficient funds and the project has been in a holding pattern since 2018.

Mr. McHale discussed they are working on a solution based on what Weston is doing that would only require one building to house the required number of bathroom stalls, which could potentially be built with the appropriated \$525,000. However, if additional funding is needed, the balance will need to be raised through private funds. Additionally, the decision as to who will be responsible for maintenance is up for discussion. Regarding the team rooms, he stated they are working with the DPW to find alternatives that might be less expensive, though he estimates the project would be over \$500,000. The team rooms would need to be privately funded, as CPC cannot fund them. Ms. Chow added that Town Council advised the Committee would not need to go back to Town Meeting for permission to use the appropriated funds for the bathrooms alone.

Mr. McHale then discussed the lighting. He stated the NRC created the Playing Fields Task Force (PFTF) Lighting Subcommittee in 2019 and a great deal of work has been done but there are still issues that need to be addressed, including confusion and concern about overutilization, sponsorship of the project - if the School Committee wanted to take it on, and the lighting's environmental impact. A consultant was hired to study new lighting at the track and to analyze

existing lights at Hunnewell; however, the consultant has not been able to begin due to COVID. Mr. McHale noted there would be no funding from the CPC for lighting and that private funds would have to be approved by NRC and the Select Board. operational costs - ancillary costs. no way to guess how much.

In discussion with the Committee, members noted it made sense to move forward with the bathrooms using appropriated funds in order to complete a project highest on the priority list. Regarding team rooms and lights, it was acknowledged that while team rooms might be a higher priority, lights might have an easier path and there was an interest in continuing to pursue both.

Ms. Chow entertained a motion to support moving forward with a plan for bathrooms at the Hunnewell track and field using the funding approved at Annual Town Meeting in 2018.

MOVED: Mr. Roberti; SECONDED: Ms. Mirick; ROLL CALL: Ms. Gray – Yes; Ms. Martin – Yes; Ms. Chow – Yes; Ms. Mirick – Yes; Mr. Roberti - Yes

MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

Ms. Chow entertained a motion for the School Committee to further explore lighting and team rooms as a package on the Hunnewell field, and to engage with the Natural Resources Commission on developing a process for moving forward.

MOVED: Ms. Gray; SECONDED: Mr. Roberti; ROLL CALL: Ms. Gray – Yes; Ms. Martin – Yes; Ms. Chow – Yes; Ms. Mirick – Yes; Mr. Roberti - Yes

MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

Ms. Chow offered her thanks on behalf of the Committee to all their wonderful guests, stating her appreciation of their time and insights. Mr. Brown added his thanks to Mr. Hickey and Mr. Cohen for all the work to prepare the Sprague field for the start of football season.

DISCUSSION: 2ND QUARTERLY FINANCIAL REPORT

Ms. Mahr began by highlighting two key points in the quarterly financial report. The first was noting that 30 RLS professional staff salaries are being charged to the Town's CARES Act funds. They are not in the school's current budget and are not included in projections. Those salary expenses are currently \$1.5 million. Secondly she noted the operating budget overall currently has a surplus of approximately \$266,000. She added there will be many uncertainties between now and June and this is a current snapshot.

She explained there have been areas where the District has seen savings. Examples include the lack of a middle school athletic program and other athletics savings and the year being truncated to 170 days offered savings in hourly salaries and bus routes. Students opting for RLS offered savings in TA and paraprofessional positions not needing to be filled and a decrease in van routes and therefore drivers, though those may need to be filled in the next few months. She stated expenses and offset adjustments included software costs, out of district placements trending over projected, and Circuit Breaker reimbursements being lower at 70% than the 75% budgeted, though it is possible it will increase by 1-2%.

In discussion with the Committee, Ms. Mahr stated she does not foresee the District needing to access the Special Education Stabilization Fund this year nor does she anticipate needing to seek additional appropriation from Town Meeting.

HARDY AND HUNNEWELL UPDATES

Ms. Gray offered an update on the Hunnewell project. She stated the design is moving forward nicely. The discussion with the Permanent Building Committee (PBC) has been regarding the exterior. SMMA is working with the PBC to decide how materials will be applied and what the cost will be. It was decided to include an outdoor classroom on the second floor. She noted they will be ready to present to the School Committee at the March 9 meeting. Regarding permitting, the Project of Significant Impact permit with the Planning Board has gone to the Wetlands Protection Committee, where they recently had their first discussion.

Ms. Martin offered an update on Hardy. She stated the PBC had received 10 responses to their Request for Qualifications for a Construction Manager at Risk (CMAR). The prequalifications subcommittee met February 22 and will meet February 24 to rank respondents and discuss. She also noted the site planning working group met February 23.

PUBLIC COMMENT

The Committee was joined by several guests to honor Ms. Gray at her last meeting as a School Committee member after six years.

Current Hardy, Hunnewell, and Upham principals Grant Smith, Ellen Quick, and Jeff Dees thanked Ms. Gray for her dedication to the School Building Committee, noting it was an honor and privilege to work with her. They were grateful for her leadership and thoughtfulness with a kind heart.

Select Board Chair Marjorie Freiman added her thanks from her and all members of the Select Board Ms. Gray has worked with over the years, noting very rarely do people on boards have to tackle such complex and interconnected topics as the HHU. She highlighted Ms. Gray's diplomacy, vision, patience, active listening, and decision-making.

Former School Committee members Patti Quigley, Michael D'Ortenzio, Jr., Matt Kelley, KC Kato, and Wendy Paul shared their reflections on working with Ms. Gray over her two terms. They thanked her for her commitment to the students of Wellesley and her tireless effort and dedication. They spoke of her integrity and grace through challenging times and they left no doubt that the work she has done will long be remembered by the Town.

Each current Committee member and Dr. Lussier expressed their appreciation for Ms. Gray's dedication and steadfast leadership. They lauded her as a fierce advocate, an inspiration, and a role model, as she never shied away from doing what was right, even if it wasn't always popular. They learned from her to always put the kids first. Dr. Lussier thanked her family for their generosity in sharing her with them. They told her they would miss working with her.

Ms. Gray thanked everyone for their kind words. She said when she decided to run for School Committee it was because she was fascinated by the work, though she was terrified. While she is no longer terrified, she is still fascinated. She stated it has been an honor to be trusted with all the work that has been done and an honor to get to know everyone. She feels fortunate to have been a part of the Committee. She also thanked her kids for supporting her work and her mother for watching all the meetings from Florida. She noted she'll still be around and will definitely be at Hunnewell for the first shovel in the ground.

ADJOURNMENT

At approximately 9:50 pm, Ms. Chow entertained a motion to adjourn the meeting.

MOVED: Ms. Gray; SECONDED: Mr. Roberti; ROLL CALL: Ms. Gray – Yes; Ms. Martin – Yes; Ms. Chow – Yes; Ms. Mirick – Yes; Mr. Roberti - Yes

MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Mirick
Secretary

Documents and Exhibits Used:

FY22 Q2 Budget Report

Background Information for Hunnewell Discussion

Hunnewell Fields Complex Priorities - Part II