

*Natick Public Schools  
SCHOOL COMMITTEE RETREAT MEETING MINUTES  
October 19, 2021*

The School Committee held a virtual meeting on Tuesday, October 19, 2021 at 5:30 p.m.. Chair McDonough called the meeting to order and took roll call at 5:34 p.m.. All members stated that they were participating remotely.

Members Present: Julie McDonough, Donna McKenzie,  
Henry Haugland, Cathi Collins, Catherine Brunell, Shai Fuxman

Members Missing: Hayley Sonneborn

Others Present:	Dr. Anna Nolin	Superintendent
	Tim Luff	Assistant Superintendent
	Dr. Peter Gray	Assistant Superintendent
	Rose McDermott	Executive Assistant/Recording Secretary

### **Public Speak**

Chair McDonough stated that no public speak comments were received by the Chair.

### **Consent Agenda**

1. Approval of School Committee Minutes of September 13, 2021 – Ms. Brunell asked to pull the minutes again because Mr. Haugland and Dr. Fuxman hadn't approved the changes she had requested. Dr. Fuxman wants the minutes to stay as is. Mr. Haugland will review again and get back to Ms. McDermott. We will have to vote them at the November 1st meeting.

### **Discuss Johnson and Memorial Space and Capital Planning, Discuss Community Forums and Possible Decision-Making Timelines**

Chair McDonough expressed that she would like to focus on Johnson and Memorial. The high School will come with the recommendation of Mr. Harrigan because of academic changes.

There are two community forums next week. The content is the first thing. Dr. Nolin has a brief presentation that would be shared with the community. Chair McDonough asked Dr. Nolin to share what she has drafted so far. Dr. Nolin shared the presentation. She shared the draft layered plan that she and the town administrator have drafted. Dr. Nolin reviewed different ways we could share the information. A Committee member referenced the policy manual thinking there's a specific way to have a hearing. These are not hearings. These are meetings. Chair McDonough recommended the less we talk and the more we listen would be the best course of action. This is not the School Committee's time; this is the Community's time to speak. A Committee member reference that there's a lot of misinformation out there. We want to share as much information as we have. There are a lot of documents - a twenty-five-page document with links to other documents. We need to hear from the community so that we can make the right decision. If we are going to close the building, what's the plan? The ware the transition plans? What are the concerns and questions so that when we get to the decision, we can answer all of the questions that the Community has. The administration was applauded for sending out the email announcing the survey. However, a Committee member would prefer there to be an option to sign in or have the sign in turned off. They believe we should announce it so people understand. Dr. Nolin said it's in there, it also went out in last

week's engage and again today. We can't see who signs in. That's backend to Thoughtexchange and we have no access to it. Dr. Nolin believes this is so that people don't fill out multiple surveys.

Chair McDonough would like the Committee to figure out how we can structure the forums. Several Committee members made the following suggestions: answer the Community's questions during these meetings, figure out how to gather the feedback that we need so that we can come to a decision that is reflective of the community and gathering input from the community is very important. We won't make everyone happen we just have to make the right decision. What happens if we don't make this decision now? It would be helpful to know the consequences in detail. This decision is a decision of the Committee, not of the community. We want thoughtful questions and answers but it's not one side against the other. The impact needs to be included in our budget this year. Chair McDonough said there will be more information added to the document. A member was unclear about how long the possible closing of Johnson has been going on and that it's unfair to the community that didn't have children in the school district in 2012. Chair McDonough wants to provide backdrop information so that everyone in the community understands how long this has been going on. This has been going on for over 25 years. This is not an election or a vote from the community. The forum will give us more information to make a decision. It's important that we not question opinions or perspectives. A Committee member said we must be respectful of our professional staff. We have an amazing Superintendent with an amazing team, and they are professionals. We don't have the credentials that they have. Ms. Balboni's comments yesterday resonated with this Committee member. Comments are creating a sense of us being questionable of our professionals. We are putting that out and it's not right.

Dr. Nolin state that the way we have been structuring the report is by what you are asking for. The entire point is to give you what you want. She didn't write most of those and her job is to bring forward the information that we have received. She's in constant meetings with Town Administrators. Dr. Nolin's interest is serving the committee on hard decisions. She and Dr. Gray are getting the information and giving it to the School Committee as soon she has it. She emails it out. This is about getting perspectives from the community. Dr. Nolin went to the Town development's office to look at the community as a whole and what can we offer the community as a future - dreams we have as a community for Natick. She may bring materials forward that may help the Committee. The Committee at some point is going to have to stop and make decisions, limit yourself. Does the committee want to talk about the questions we want to ask, or do we want to just listen? The School Committee members went on to discuss the questions and the framework around what we are trying to do. Also, determining where does the community feel that they need more information. We need to talk about cost effectiveness, educational impact, social/emotional impact, and equity. Which of these are most important to you and is there any other criteria? How does space contribute to or detract from an inclusive open education? The lack thereof or its possibilities to kids and their academic success. Dr. Nolin believes that in terms of running public forums, she asked the Committee if there are barriers that they feel haven't adequately been discussed? Are there alternatives that we should know about. Dr. Nolin needs to explain other barriers and/or are their barriers that we aren't aware of? Cathi said it's not a barrier in the decision process. Agrees with Donna about the box.

Chair McDonough felt we have a good number of questions, and we can continue to think about others we may like to add. Sharing the data, then getting to the questions we want to ask. We need to give families the opportunity to say what they need to say. Dr. Nolin listed the outreach that has been made to the community as well as what is going out:

- District emails out to families
- Asking Principals to send them out to families
- PTO's to send emails out

- Reached out to the Selectboard and they have a meeting on Wednesday. We can share the information with them.
- Make an announcement at Town Meeting
- Let the senior citizens in town know about this
- Make sure the Finance Committee has the information.
- Chair McDonough will draft a paragraph to share on Facebook and the big Natick forums; Town meeting facebook forum, Natick talks, government chat, moms and dads.
- Press release for Natick Patch
- Help to get PCC started again.

Dr. Nolin described what the timeline looks like to her. The end of October we begin to develop our budget. Mr. Errickson and Mr. Townsend have been clear, they are divesting two buildings, Auburn Street and the Cole Center. They are looking for us to do the same. We will need to make decisions about staffing which directly lined up with buildings. We will be negotiating with all 6 unions. Dr. Nolin asked if the School Committee wants to submit an application to the MSBA now? Many times, it takes three attempts in applications. This decision needs to be made soon, it's agony for some people. We can make the high school decision at our November meeting. We may need to make more changes at East School, and we need to give facilities and the community the best opportunity. We cannot push this decision out past mid-November. The discussions on the budget will need to start promptly in January. This needs to be done promptly.

A member disagreed on the timeline, felt it was too aggressive. Believes this is due diligence for the low hanging fruit and doesn't see a rush that it must be put into the fy23 budget. Another member stated we need to decide what we need to decide. We don't have the luxury of time and are part of the town budget. It's a lot of work to submit those applications. The statement of interest must be submitted to the MSBA by April. In some cases, this has been a long, long discussion. Other members agreed with the timelines. We do need to look at the whole budget this year and ever year. The decisions on these buildings are part of that process. It's not either or, it's both. A few parents say there's every so often a debate about closing Johnson School. It's emotional and it's important to let people know. It's time to decide and not kick the can down the road again. One of the most urgent issues is how we prepare this year's budget and cost containment. We will have to find ways on how to throttle back as many operating expenses as we can. Chair McDonough is keeping track of all these concerns and is taking note.

At approximately 7:23 p.m., Ms. Collins motioned to adjourn. Ms. Brunell seconded. Chair McDonough called for a roll call vote:

Mr. Haugland – Yes

Ms. McKenzie – Yes

Ms. Collins – Yes

Ms. Brunell – Yes

Mr. Fuxman - Yes

Chair McDonough - Yes

It was unanimously approved by a vote of those present, 6-0-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Rose McDermott

Executive Assistant/Recording Secretary