

*Natick Public Schools
SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES
November 15, 2021*

The School Committee held a meeting on Monday, November 15, 2021 at 6:30pm in the School Committee Room and via Virtual Meeting. Chair McDonough called the meeting to order and took roll call at 6:36pm.

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

Others Present:	Dr. Anna Nolin	Superintendent
	Mr. Tim Luff	Assistant Superintendent
	Dr. Peter Gray	Assistant Superintendent
	Rose McDermott	Executive Assistant/Recording Secretary
	Susan Balboni	Interim Director of Teaching, Learning & Innovation
	Jefferson Wood	Teacher Representative

Public Speak

Chair McDonough did not receive any requests for Public Speak.

Announcements

Dr. Nolin announced that this past weekend, at our vaccination clinic, almost 2,000 students were vaccinated by the Yankee Group's mobile statewide clinic and VCare of Framingham which is owned by two parents in our district. They have provided two clinics for us, and we are grateful. We are close to meeting the 80% vaccination requirement to apply for a mask exemption. We are making good progress towards our benchmarks. Dr. Fuxman announced this week was kindness week. SPARK Kindness is hosting an event tomorrow – How to Have Difficult Conversations with Kindness. Ms. Brunell announced that the girls' varsity soccer team won their game last night. Kyra Hacker, Student Representative to the School Committee scored the goal that changed the outcome.

Consent Agenda

1. Approval of School Committee Minutes and Executive Session Minutes of October 18, 2021
2. Warrant Review
3. Approval of PTO/PTA/501(c)(3) Budgets

Ms. Collins moved approval. Dr. McKenzie seconded. It was approved by a vote of 6-0-1.

Discussion and Vote: FY22 Superintendent Goal Focus Areas for Evaluation

Chair McDonough and Dr. Fuxman reviewed the process. The School Committee is provided guidelines by the State. This is one of the most important tasks and it allows connecting of the District priorities to the evaluation of the Superintendent. The School Committee have already approved and agreed to the indicators. They will also evaluate her based on the 5 goals stated in the strategic plan.

Discussion of Long-Range and Capital Planning for Johnson and Memorial

Chair McDonough reviewed how the discussion would work. Dr. Nolin gave a presentation. School Committee members asked questions. The Committee listened to many comments from members of the community. In an effort to have everyone's voice heard this evening, there was a 3-minute time limit per comment. Ms. Brunell recused herself from this discussion. Chair McDonough explained that based on an opinion provided by the State Ethics Commission. The Committee has been supportive and working tirelessly to try and have her be allowed back into the conversations and the vote. They were unable to get additional information on the opinion that would change their recommendation. Chair McDonough informed the community that there is a process by which if they obtain additional information, the Committee could bring forward a reconsideration of the vote that would allow Ms. Brunell to vote. Dr. Nolin gave a presentation which included the School Committee's directive to the Superintendent. Dr. Nolin reviewed the considerations and expectations around us as a Town. She went on to present the historical discussions surrounding Johnson School. A timeline of discussions was shared. Dr. Nolin went on to review a draft layered plan. She provided a timeline for the closure of Johnson School as well as potential challenges to the plan. Dr. Gray provided what we have heard from the community to inform an MSBA Application. Dr. Gray had been involved in three statements of interests to the MSBA surrounding schools that reminded him of Johnson. He reviewed the parameters for the statement of interest. Dr. Nolin thanked the Johnson School staff and community for their engagement. She stated we are putting forward the best project proposal for the total school district that will provide the best possible future for our programs. The School Committee asked many questions and made several comments surrounding incorrect information that is causing concerns in the community. The School Committee listened to many comments from members of the community. In an effort to have everyone's voice heard this evening, there was a 3-minute time limit per comment. The School Committee did not take questions from the community. This was specifically for comments. They spent approximately 60 minutes listening to comments from members of the community. Mr. Jefferson Wood, Teacher Representative and a current teacher at Johnson provided his thoughts on the closure. He understands that the closure is irrevocable and not one that they argue. He is concerned about the time of closing it now.

Vote Decision on Johnson Elementary

Ms. Cathi Collins moved to direct the Superintendent to close Johnson Elementary School no later than June 30, 2025. Mr. Haugland seconded. The School Committee debated the closure. Ms. Sonneborn made a new motion to propose the closing of Johnson contingent upon an acceptance by the MSBA. No one seconded the motion. The motion failed. Ms. Collins reminded everyone of the oath and oaths that School Committee Members take. She reviewed the duties incumbent upon them. She also reviewed the duties of the Superintendent. She continued to make a statement surrounding Town finances. She also stated that teachers have the most significant and impactful effect on a student's success. Not a building and not how a child gets to school each day. She reminded everyone that Natick needs to offer competitive packages, in order to retain quality teachers and we need to do what's best for not Johnson students but all of the 5,322 students in the Natick Public Schools. Dr. Fuxman read a statement which included his process for coming to a decision. He has read every email sent to the School Committee and responded to many of them. He has poured over dozens of reports that went back 20 years. He has lost sleep over this decision and it's not a decision he is taking lightly or has rushed through. As he has stated in past meetings, he based his decision on 4 key criteria – cost effectiveness, the educational, social/emotional impact and equity on and for all students. He reviewed fund savings. This isn't about money; this is about investing in our students and the adults that care for them every day in all our schools. Dr. Fuxman has decided to support the proposal to phase out Johnson for the coming years. He has spent more than 20 years in academia. This has been very difficult, but he believes this plan addresses everyone's needs. Dr. Fuxman has asked the Johnson community to remain engaged. Dr. Fuxman addressed all the teachers in our entire district stating that this Committee values your herculean efforts to educate children every single day. Chair McDonough

acknowledged the importance of this decision. It will be documented in the history books of Natick Public Schools and the Town of Natick. She thanked the hundreds of people that have spoken to the School Committee and written emails. She had the added responsibility of responding to the emails which has allowed her the time and space to think deeply about what each and every person was sharing. These emails have caused her to gather additional information and further information on current enrollment, the ask for a bigger vision of a Natick center school, the MSBA process; what it can and can't look like, the history of Natick Public School buildings, the studies and plans that have been done to arrive at these point and all of these emails and discussion have led her to the decision to support the phased closure of Johnson Elementary. The core issues she considered were enrollment, studies since the mid-90's regarding the recommendations to close the building. Johnson cannot support the size of an elementary school we need in Natick. We cannot build another 200-student school. We cannot place another building on the Johnson site. The impact to students and families in any decision means disruption to families and staff. She believes this transition will be handled with the most thoughtful and careful consideration possible. Chair McDonough believes a phased closure will provide families and staff with the transition time that they will need. This discussion and debate has been here for 25 years. She also reviewed the financial challenges that schools have placed on the Town. Chair McDonough shared the constraints of the downtown area including traffic and lack of viable sites. As a School Committee Member, she has to consider the Superintendent's recommendations. Given the information that Dr. Nolin has laid out, her partnership with Town leadership and her vision for the future, Chair McDonough feels this would be the best path forward for the district. Long term savings will be realized very clearly. There are very real challenges with the Town budget. Chair McDonough has spent 9 years on financial matters in the Town. The Town budget challenges are real and we have to make tough choices. Chair McDonough has spent hundreds of hours working on behalf on Natick Public Schools. She has fought for and continues to fight for things that her own children will never see or need or experience. She can promise every community member that she will not support a decision that would negatively impact class sizes and she will continue to monitor it closely. Chair McDonough stated that this decision has been agonizing because it impacts her fellow Natick Families, friends, children's coaches, teachers and staff but she can say that all of her decisions have always been based on what she believes is best for the district and Town as a whole. Chair McDonough asked for a roll call vote:

Dr. Fuxman – Yes

Mr. Haugland – Yes

Ms. Sonneborn – No

Dr. McKenzie – Yes

Ms. Collins – Yes

Chair McDonough – Yes

The motion passed by those members present 5-1-0.

Vote Decision on Developing Statement of Interest for MSBA

Chair McDonough said this is a process to pull together a statement of interest. With the motion just passed, we would put forward a statement of interest for renovations/rebuild for the Memorial Elementary and begin that process. Ms. Collins moved to direct Natick Public School's Administration to develop a Statement of Interest for a renovation/rebuild for the Memorial Elementary School for ultimate submission to the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA). Mr. Haugland seconded. The School Committee debated, and asked questions surrounding the process. Ms. Sonneborn asked should this be part of the process. Chair McDonough reminded all that we are closing Johnson and are not looking to build a fifth school. Ms. Sonneborn wants to make sure this is the best project to put forward. Dr. Gray found the May 3, 2017, Kennedy Middle School Building Minutes where they had considered other sites in the town of Natick. At that time, they looked at a footprint that would be similar to what Memorial would be. Windy-Lo, Coolidge fields, Snap-On tools and McCue Farm all had poor overall ratings. The West Street

site had a fair overall rating. These were all deemed as not being appropriate to meet the criteria set forth by the MSBA. Which was for a 100 square foot building. Which is slightly bigger than a new Memorial. Chair McDonough restated that the statement of interest is for a new Memorial School. MSBA is looking for locations that have the appropriate land available for potential use. Dr. Nolin stated that we can ask for that analysis as part of the feasibility study. Part would be a proposal to build on the same site that Memorial is on now. At the end of the day, the MSBA wants to build a facility that is appropriate for Natick and would make recommendations based on the feasibility study. Dr. Nolin stated that the MSBA would first have to assess if this is a renovation of the current facility and if not, what site is the best location for a new school to be built. Dr. Nolin discussed with Jamie Errickson, Town Administrator, how can we time this in the best possible way. It would be when the high school costs fall off. Dr. Nolin reminded everyone that historically, it has taken 3 applications to get to the MSBA. Dr. Gray clarified the timeline. We would probably be 5 years away from beginning any project. Dr. Gray asked for clarification. There are two programs through the MSBA – an accelerated repair program and a core program. Memorial would not qualify for an accelerated repair program. Dr. McKenzie amended the motion to include a feasibility plan that would consider a downtown site. Chair McDonough stated that it is not part of a statement of interest. What Dr. McKenzie is asking for should be a part of the feasibility study. Dr. McKenzie also wanted to add to the motion that in the event that a new building is deemed best, we request that a feasibility study would include the consideration of a downtown site. Dr. Gray explained that a statement of interest must be approved by the School Committee only prior to going to the Board of Selectmen. He also stated that the feasibility study would consider any site that would accommodate a school. Dr. McKenzie would like that highlighted. Ms. Collins believes this complicates this unnecessarily. The process is a statement of interest. Chair McDonough stated that the feasibility will explore all options and will cause no harm in saying a downtown location. Chair McDonough asked for a roll call vote in favor of the amended motion:

Dr. Fuxman – Yes

Mr. Haugland – Yes

Ms. Sonneborn – No

Dr. McKenzie – Yes

Ms. Collins – No

Chair McDonough – yes

It passed by a vote of the members present 4-2-0.

Dr. Gray suggested that when we put the cover letter with the statement of interest that we can add that into the cover letter and not necessarily with the statement of interest. Dr. McKenzie was comfortable with that.

At approximately 10:38pm, Ms. Collins moved to adjourn. Ms. Brunell asked if she could do that. Ms. Brunell moved to adjourn this meeting. Dr. McKenzie seconded.

It was approved unanimously by a vote of 7-0-0.

Anna Nolin
Superintendent
Executive Secretary to the School Committee

Rose McDermott
Executive Assistant/Recording Secretary

Attest: _____

Documents Provided in Novus Agenda and materials used at this meeting:
Superintendent's presentation