

LEXINGTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING
Tuesday, April 24, 2007
Cary Memorial Hall
1605 Massachusetts Avenue

Present: Superintendent Paul Ash, School Committee Chair Tom Diaz, School Committee members Helen Cohen, Margaret Coppe, Tom Griffiths, and Ravi Sakhuja. Minutes taken by Leora Tec.

I. Call to Order: Ellen Stone Room

II. Executive Session: Ellen Stone Room

III. Return to Public Session and Welcome (Tom Diaz) Cary Hall Auditorium

This part of the meeting was convened at 8:38 (upon return from executive session)

Tom Diaz: The Selectmen can decide the structure of the override, although they usually take the School Committee recommendation. We will meet with the Board of Selectmen at 5:30 here. After Town Meeting votes the budget then the Board of Selectmen finally votes the structure. We hope that is April 30 or May 1.

IV. Superintendent's Report:

Paul Ash: I received an email from the DOE that we will get extraordinary relief for SPED costs in the amount of \$103,980 in the first week in May. We did not anticipate this. I want to appreciate Mary Sullivan Kelly and finance secretary Priya Swaminathan. This is a very complicated process. We were told it was unlikely that we would get the funding. The money goes to the school department. I would like to put this on the agenda for tomorrow. We could reduce the FY07 supplemental request, hold funds in a segregated account for potential additional costs between now and June 30 or for unanticipated costs in FY08.

V. Members' Reports / Members' Concerns:

Ravi Sakhuja: The PBC report does not reflect the relationship the PBC has had vis-à-vis our buildings. There are very large deficiencies. The heating systems are still not working at Fiske but the warranty will run out. Children are graduating without having access to labs. The report does not reflect that. We had discussions 2 or 3 months ago about Clarke. The issues have to be resolved. This report was just a piece of paper, it's not a true reflection of the seriousness of the situation.

Tom Griffiths: The PBC serves a valuable function. It has several professionals on it. We would be at the mercy of Lord knows whom if we did not have the PBC. The PBC is one of the hardest working groups in town. There is a problem of building turnover. Bill Hartigan has begun to raise consciousness that we need to do commissioning; we have not done it with Fiske or Harrington. One problem is stakeholder input. The PBC said that in their presentation. We have a good committee in the PBC and a good process for building and commissioning buildings in this town.

Ravi Sakhuja: Our first loyalty is to serve the children of Lexington. We need to have a different process. We have had very serious issues. We can't just say everything is hunky dory.

Tom Griffiths: It is crucial that we recognize the value that the PBC brings to the process I am not papering over any problems.

VI. Discussion Item:

1. Override Structure (60 minutes)

Tom Diaz: Do we want a \$3.98 million single question or some other division? Dr. Ash?

Paul Ash: This is a political question. I respect your judgment. How would one divide it in a principled way if we were to divide it? I have no special recommendation to do that in a coherent philosophical manner.

Ravi Sakhuja: Take a few minutes to look this over (passed out papers). I have outlined some things that will save us money and lower the override by a considerable amount. These are things we can handle without affecting our current educational system.

Margaret Coppe: Mr. Sakhuja's document states that he consulted with all his colleagues prior to making it public. I have not seen this nor heard of this before now.

Tom Diaz: The subject now is how we would divide up \$3.98 million. I see Dr. Ash's point about the difficulty of dividing up the programs. It was easier last year. Better to have one question.

Helen Cohen: My initial feeling is the budget is well-balanced and it would be difficult to split into parts.

Margaret Coppe: I have always favored bundled overrides. The problem I would have with splitting this up is people would vote for the smaller one. I would favor one question.

Tom Griffiths: My initial feeling is a single question for many of the same reasons.

Ravi Sakhuja: The issue is not how many questions. I think the issues I have here don't hurt education. We need to do a better job managing our schools.

Tom Diaz: No one is being cavalier. These ideas have been brought up before and discussed.

More discussion on the utility budget.

Debora Hoard (Co-president PTSA at LHS, co-chair of Campaign for Lexington): I am in favor of a single question for the schools. We need to count on the elected officials and staff. We can't hold our children's education hostage to adult disagreements. People don't want to have to choose between different components. We want to know that the amount reflects the true needs of the schools.

Dawn McKenna: Everyone here shares the same goals and knows the schools have been hurt by last year's loss of an override. 1/3 will say yes, 1/3 will say no; but what about the third in the middle? There is a lot of perception out there that the money has not been well-managed. People may not feel you are being up-front with them. Last year people thought that same service things were not same service. Same is true here. People won't see this as maintaining the status quo. Multiple questions will give a more in-depth look at what is at risk. Why not explain about class size and have that as a separate question?

Tom Diaz: You are advocating several questions...

Dawn McKenna: 3-5 questions.

Tom Diaz: Last year a contributor to defeat was lack of confidence in the school's fiscal management but what does that have to do with the override structure?

Dawn McKenna: One question looks like you are throwing everything in. If broken down with explanation then it looks like you are trying to give people info.

Deb Rourke (Head of the PTA presidents, LEF BOARD, Fundraising Chair for Campaign for Lexington): I am in favor of a single override question. A single school question sends a message that every dollar is needed; we need every dollar and quite a bit more. People don't want to pit one program against another. The process to form the budget is painstaking. I wish so many hours did not have to be dedicated to this.

Patrick Mehr: I have watched the process very closely. It's a mistake to gamble on one question. The reality is I am a far left liberal. You have listened only to people who have advocated for the schools. There are thousands of people who either don't care or don't trust the schools. They will think the schools overspent 1.6 million dollars. I think it is arrogant to have one question that is 30% larger than what was refused last year. This is risky. If you were humble and took Ravi's suggestions and

had \$2.8 million it would be good. If 4 million, I would vote NO as a far left liberal. You don't know how to manage it yet.

Tom Diaz: Last year you advocated the defeat of questions 1 and 2. Isn't that divisive?

Patrick Mehr: I don't understand. Two questions passed. Several years ago people said we want one question and it failed. If there were 3 questions I would vote yes on 2 and it doesn't matter which 2 frankly. I would prefer to reduce the overall size because all 3 could fail if there were 3 questions.

Helen Cohen: The School Committee does not only listen to advocates for the schools. The schools need a lot more than what we are asking for. We have gotten to pretty bare bones of what our schools need. It's hard to hear over and over again that we haven't paid attention. We are overspending partly because we lost money that we needed to have. A lot of it is catch up.

Paul Ash: I recommended a 6 million increase in January: 4.8 for same service 1.2 for supplemental. I came to the conclusion that we could not include the supplemental requests. 2.1 million dollars was cut out, only a teeny fraction was put back in. We need all of that. Regarding wasting money, we are coming up with SPED programs to reduce costs, capital budgets to reduce costs. The reason I don't support reducing the energy budget is because I don't think we should take savings before we are sure we can save the money. It is not prudent. The budget funds what we need to continue, what we need to function at a high level but does not restore excellent programs that we have lost.

Ilene Benghiat.: I support a single question. In 2004 one question passed. Last year two questions didn't pass. We are still hurting from last year's cuts. We are ready to pass something to help the schools. We have had plenty of opportunity to speak to the SC. I respect you for listening to us. I believe the \$3.98 million figure is a minimum of what the schools need. There is no magic number. A simple one question is the way to go for the voters.

Ravi Sakhuja: Look at all eight ideas. None of them reduces face time with the teachers. All the additions that Dr. Ash recommended...I am actually proposing an enhanced budget. We have more literacy specialist than other comparable towns. Having four extra classrooms is not the only answer. I have brought in special contractors to look at our schools. If we don't send a signal to the people we are negotiating with...I have looked at the number of aides in other districts...regarding librarians let's have part-time people.

Tom Diaz: About aides: we cannot take a position in public that would foreclose negotiation with the union.

Motion to recommend to the Selectmen that the override be put on the ballot as one question (Cohen, Griffiths). The motion passed 4-1 (Sakhuja).

Helen Cohen: If you do care for the schools and the kids getting the kind of education, think really long and hard about how you present things during the override campaign. You can play a big role in this campaign, I would ask you to play a positive role.

VII. Motion to go into executive session for the purpose of collective bargaining not to return to public session (Griffiths, Coppe). Cohen-aye; Coppe-aye; Diaz-aye; Griffiths-aye; and Sakhuja-aye.