

**Lexington Public Schools  
School Committee Meeting – March 1, 2005  
LHS Library Media Center**

Members present were Tom Griffiths, Helen Cohen, Scott Burson, Tom Diaz, Student Representative Janette Ekanem, and Interim Superintendent William Hurley. Olga Guttag was not present.

Tom Griffiths called the meeting to order at 7:38 p.m.

**Public Comment**

There was no public comment.

**Superintendent's Report**

Facilities Update

Harrington

Mr. Hurley reported that the snowstorm last night delayed the opening of the new Harrington. The ribbon cutting ceremony will be held on Wednesday at 1:30 p.m. Students will attend the old Harrington in the morning. He cannot sufficiently thank all those who made the entrance into the building possible. Maintenance worked all week and right through the weekend. Mr. Hurley extended special thanks to the maintenance and custodial crew for putting an extra effort into the move. He also gave Dana Ham an extra special thanks and to all the people who work with him.

Fiske

Mr. Hurley informed the School Committee that we are under an umbrella for new bidding laws for new construction, which will bring the construction start date out until the beginning of June. For this reason, the transition of Fiske to the old Harrington has been postponed until September. A letter sent from the Superintendent's office has notified the community of this.

Lexington High School

Mr. Hurley said the carbon monoxide readings at the Science building are under control. Dana Ham has implemented a program where the building is checked every morning, mid-day and late afternoon for reading levels. An engineer has been out and said we may be able to get the chimney repaired for less than what he originally quoted.

Janette Ekanem said students are concerned about their health and asked if it was possible for Mr. Jones to make an announcement that there is no danger.

## **Principal Search**

The week of March 14<sup>th</sup> is the target date for conducting interviews for Bowman and Hastings. The search committee will forward its recommendations to Bill Hurley. Paul Ash will join him in the final interviews for principals and any and all administrator position being filled. Mr. Hurley said the interview committee consists of faculty and parents. When the finalists are chosen, they will come to the respective school to meet with parents and faculty. It is hopeful that the principal positions will be filled by end of March or early April.

## **Members' Reports/Members' Concerns**

Scott Burson the School Committee approved the contract to Paul Ash last Friday. It has been signed and forwarded to Dr. Ash for his signature.

Tom Griffiths extended thanks to the Permanent Building Committee. They did a great job on Harrington and deserve a lot of praise. Thanks also to Costanga Construction. They did a wonderful job on the building and he is pleased they were chosen to do the work. Thanks to Santiago Rozas who was the architect on the project. He helped steer us through all the construction obstacles. He extended special thanks to Dana Ham for all the extra effort he put in on the project.

## **Discussion Items**

### **Lexington Education Foundation**

Tom Griffiths introduced Leslie Nicholson, Chair of the Lexington Education Foundation (LEF).

Leslie Nicholson presented the attached presentation.

There was discussion among the School Committee members. The curriculum renewal that Ms. Nicholson mentioned is to ensure proper training to make sure the teaching in Lexington remains first rate. There was question whether the LEF is inviting the School Committee to work with LEF on policy revisions in this area. It was noted that the writing of policies is the School Committee's responsibility. There is a gray area that LEF frequently grapples with in regard to three specific items that they have increasingly asked for: technology, equipment and library books. It is LEF's understanding of current policy to suggest the LEF should not be funding these items, as they are public responsibility. It would be helpful if the School Committee could clarify what is private as it would give more freedom about what LEF fundraising ought to cover. The School Committee agreed to make the policy guidelines a little more clear.

Mr. Hurley said the school department would find LEF short-term space while they look for something more permanent.

Scott Burson expressed his deep gratitude to the LEF. We are close at what is the line with private fundraising and what is public. We have to begin dialogue and realize there are some hard lines to be drawn between the two. Helen Cohen pointed out that the School Committee is in the process of reviewing the fundraising policy with Andre Ravenelle. It would be good to have some conversations that include the PTA, LEF and staff to compare notes on what different fundraising is for and how not to have conflict. Ms. Nicholson said from a fundraising standpoint, it is clear that, if given the opportunity, a large number of donors prefer to give money to their local schools and would rather give money for particular items rather than programs. The ongoing challenge for LEF is how to persuade donors to think at a higher town-wide level. She asked the School Committee to be sensitive to that issue as they review the policy.

Bill Hurley extended thanks to all the LEF members on behalf of all the administrators, teachers and students who benefit from their hard work throughout the year. The LEF provides a real service to public education.

### Town Warrant Issues

Article 7 and 8 involve the Community Preservation Act. Tom Diaz is in favor of these and said we need to look for matching funds and tax revenues. Scott Burson noted these articles permit on an annual basis the going over the 2½ limits by a specified amount but only for special projects. His fear is if Lexington buys into that, it is going to skew public priorities and school needs and other operating needs may get short changed. Although matching funds are nice, there is no guarantee they will always be there or if they will be significant. It is Mr. Burson's recommendation that the School Committee opposes these articles but will have to see what the majority of the Committee decides. Helen Cohen has some concerns and agrees with Scott. She is concerned this would be another obstacle of being sure we can provide what the schools absolutely need. Tom Griffiths feels very strongly that the Committee should take a positive position on this act. He believes we will have some incentive coming from the state. The issue is not competition with school or other town projects but being able to establish funds to be called upon when needed. Helen Cohen agrees with the housing portion but she foresees problems with this in the future. Tom Griffiths tabled this Article for another time.

Tom Diaz said the School Committee would be asked for their opinion on Article 12. Tom Griffiths feels the School Committee should take a position on Article 11 and 12. Article 11 provides appointment of an assistant to the town manager. Tom Diaz cannot support this article. Tom Griffiths agreed. He believes the School Committee needs to have the same power to the Superintendent that the Selectmen have with the Town Manager. Scott Burson and Helen Cohen also agree. A motion was made to oppose Article 11. (Cohen – Burson; 4-0 unanimous)

Article 12 gives town meeting ability to call a special election as a result of an election recall of a town official. Tom Diaz is not in favor of this article. The School Committee has mixed feelings about this article and will ask for the moderator's opinion if the School Committee should take action on this.

Article 4 involves the property on Waltham Street. Scott Burson thinks this will raise issues similar to the issues of development of the hospital property and how it will impact the schools. He feels the size of the project is not such that the School Committee needs to take a negative position on it and thinks it is a creative answer to a very difficult piece of property. Tom Diaz and Helen Cohen support this article as well. Tom Griffiths will support this if two things happen; if it gets planning board support and if the architectural plans change. Mr. Burson feels we should defer this until we find out how the planning boards feels.

Article 15 – Property Tax. Helen Cohen stated this article is vague and is not sure what she would be supporting. Dawn McKenna said the Board does not have a presentation ready on this and the committee is still working on the proposal. The town will be making a presentation on this article on March 14. Tom Diaz feels the School Committee should wait until they get further clarification.

Article 23 authorizes the Selectmen to take a number of actions and use Franklin School. Tom Diaz is in favor of this article. Tom Griffiths said they were out voted when the School Committee was supposed to take a position on Avalon Bay. All arguments against Avalon Bay apply to this article as well. He is not enthusiastic about the School Committee taking a position on this and feels it is out of the School Committee's field of operations. Helen Cohen agrees. Scott Burson does not understand the project well enough to comment or take a position and feels the School Committee should not take a position on this. Dawn McKenna, Selectman, said this really has no net impact on the schools. The issue is because of the nature of the loan program that originally supported this project for community buildings. It is interest growing and accumulated a lot of debt on this project. The community is better off economically to use its Triple A rating for funding. Tom Griffiths said the School Committee would take no action on this article.

Article 26 – Playgrounds. Helen Cohen and Tom Diaz support this Article as written. Dawn McKenna noted this Article is normally strictly regarding playgrounds. This year the town is also replacing backstop at certain fields. A motion was made to support Article 26. (Cohen – Burson; 4-0)

Article 30 – School Capital Projects – security equipment, maintenance and facility equipment and central office study.

A motion was made to support Article 27. (Cohen – Diaz; 4-0) Dawn McKenna said there was a presentation from the Lincoln Park subcommittee in regard to adding bathrooms or bathrooms and storage/concession areas. They are in the process of discussing this. Tom Diaz volunteered to attend these discussions.

Article 33 – traffic control signals at Maple Street and Lowell Street; Maple Street and Massachusetts Avenues. Tom Griffiths noted Item (c) in Article 32 is of critical importance to us. There is \$65,000 allotted for the new control. This is clearly not a

fancy redo of the intersection. It is to get a control so we can put a delay on the cross street. Dawn McKenna said the Selectmen's article is to do the traffic control signals at Maple Street and Lowell Street and at Concord Avenue and Waltham Street. The Board of Selectmen has supported both. Capital Expenditures supports Maple Street and Lowell Street but not Concord Avenue. Tom Griffiths said it is too early for us to weigh on this article. The Harrington school community supports the Maple Street and Massachusetts Avenue light and the Lowell Street and Maple Street control is very important. He feels the School Committee should take a position on Article 33(c) but should not take a position on the \$25,000 for the signal upgrade on Concord Avenue and Waltham Street.

A motion was made to support the portion of Article 32(c) for the \$72,000 designated for the signal at Lowell Street and Maple Street. (Diaz – Cohen; 4-0)

A motion was made to support the \$50,000 update as stated in Article 32(h) pending more information and specific information. (Diaz – Cohen; 4-0) Dawn McKenna noted this is a public safety request for updating dispatch controls. The amount stated is enough money to accomplish this request.

### **Action Items**

A motion was made to accept with gratitude a \$50 donation to the Estabrook school library. (Cohen – Diaz; 4-0)

Janette Ekanem announced that Thursday, March 10<sup>th</sup>, is diversity day at the high school.

A motion was made to adjourn at 10:10 p.m. (Diaz - Burson; 4-0)

Submitted by,

Lisa McGuire

cc: William Hurley  
Tom Griffiths  
Scott Burson  
Olga Gutttag  
Helen Cohen  
Tom Diaz