

**Ipswich School Committee**  
MS/HS Ensemble Room  
134 High Street, Ipswich  
Thursday, September 8, 2022  
7:00 PM

**MINUTES**

**1. Call to Order**

Ms. Eliot, Vice Chair, called the meeting to order at 7:01 PM.

Present: Ms. Eliot, Ms. Cannon, Ms. Freehan, Ms. Donahue, Ms. Kneedler and Mr. Poirier

Also Present: Cheryl Herrick-Stella, Director of Finance and Operations

Absent: Ms. Stevens and Dr. Brian Blake, Superintendent of Schools

**2. Reading of the District Mission Statement**

Ms. Cannon read the mission statement.

**3. Announcements**

- The next School Committee meeting will be held on Thursday, September 22nd at 7:00 PM in the MS/HS ensemble room.
- The Elementary Building Project Working Group is meeting remotely on Tuesday, September 13th at 7:30 PM.
- A Tri-Board meeting will be held on Thursday, September 15th at 7:00 PM in Meeting Room A at Town Hall.

Ms. Eliot also welcomed the new High School Student Representative, Jimmy Bornstein. He will start at the next meeting.

**4. Special Acknowledgements**

Ms. Kneedler thanked educators and staff for a smooth start to the school year.

**5. High School Student Representative Report**

There was not a report presented at this meeting.

**6. Presentations**

**A. Ipswich Educators' Association Request**

Becky Slawson, president of the Ipswich Educators' Association (IEA), came forward with a request to have one educator present a 5-10 minute lesson snapshot at each School Committee meeting this year. She said that members of the IEA would like an opportunity to present what is happening in the schools from the ground level. Ms. Slawson explained that the IEA planned to give equal opportunity for educators at each school to present at a meeting.

There was some discussion amongst members regarding the length of the presentations and frequency. It was ultimately decided that the School Committee would like these presentations to occur at the beginning of each meeting through December. It will then be revisited to see if it will continue through the rest of the year.

**B. Discussion and Potential Vote of STEAM Innovation Learning Spaces Paine Grant**

Mr. Poirier, School Committee liaison to the Paine Grant Committee, gave a brief overview on the status of the MS/HS Innovative Learning Spaces grant application from spring 2022. The original ask for this grant was \$263,661, however the Paine Grant Committee voted to fund \$165,215 of that request. At their June 16th meeting, the School Committee decided to hold off on approving the grant until they received more information on what the grant amount would cover.

Jonathan Mitchell, high school principal, explained that a portion of the grant would update a current science classroom that is not currently outfitted to be a science classroom. Updates include water access and upgrades to the furniture.

At the middle school, principal Kathy McMahan shared that the upgrades would include replacing the carpet with easier to clean flooring. Lab tables will also be updated to be more flexible. Ms. McMahan said that the middle school model includes a lot of project-based learning and classrooms in the school were not built to accommodate that type of work and collaboration.

Ms. Wagner reviewed the breakdown of costs included in the grant application which included demolition of space, flooring, plumbing, existing furniture removal, flexible furniture upgrades, etc.

Ms. Wagner was asked to talk about the plan for the Level 3 STEAM space recommendation. She shared that while this is a dream space for educators and students, the group recognizes that they cannot move forward with a multi-million dollar project without a committee and community support. She described this level of the project as being in the “pie in the sky” phase now.

Ms. Cannon said her concern was over the health and safety issues raised in the report and asked if there were things that should be included and/or considered during the budget process. Ms. Wagner responded that the grant came as a response to the NEASC report completed five years ago. The only recommendation/mandate from that report centered around compliance in the science classrooms. A consultant was brought in to help address these concerns and brought forward recommendations for level 1, 2 and 3. Ms. Wagner said that when thinking about the appropriated budget, administrators do a great job reaching out to staff to see what they need in the classroom. She felt due diligence was done when thinking about what goes into the appropriated budget.

Mr. Poirier said that if there were the potential for future grants to tackle more classrooms, the group should consider trying to put some of the projects into the capital budget.

Ms. Wagner said that they were planning an additional grant next year in an equivalent amount to this year that would fund tier 2 of the recommendation.

- *Motion to fully fund the MS/HS Innovative Learning Space Paine Grant with \$165,612 from this year's distribution and the remainder of \$98,446 to come from reserve Feoffee funds was made by Mr. Poirier and seconded by Ms. Kneedler. The motion passed unanimously in favor.*

#### **Public Comment**

Following the Paine Grant discussion, Ms. Eliot opened the floor for public comment. There was none.

#### **C. Overnight Field Trip Request: Model UN**

This item was deferred until the next meeting.

#### **D. School Opening Update**

Dr. Blake will present a full report at the next meeting.

Ms. Eliot shared that the opening of schools went well and she was happy to see students back to more normal routines.

#### **E. School Inspection Update (Doyon, Middle, High)**

##### Paul F. Doyon Memorial School

Ms. Kneedler and Ms. Donahue toured the school with principal Sarah Goodale-O'Brien. Before their report, they did mention that there were safety and security discussions that took place during their tour, but those topics would not be discussed in public at this time. Ms. Kneedler went on to talk about the floors, new paint and overall appearance of the building. She said that while the classrooms looked great, there were still concerns over the roof leaking. Ms. Donahue added that the building felt like a happy place. She talked about classroom windows not able to open and a lack of air conditioning. There was a conversation about replacing one window in each classroom with windows that could more easily open.

Ms. Donahue talked about the combined kindergarten/first grade classroom and said that Dr. Blake would be able to provide a better report of how that came about at the next meeting.

Ms. Kneedler mentioned the new walking and running trails around the back of the schools. She also mentioned the issue of space in the building and the HVAC issues that continue to be a problem.

##### Middle/High School

Mr. Poirier and Ms. Donahue toured the building and reported that it was in overall great condition. They were able to see classrooms set up, new lighting down “Main Street” and clear hallways. They went into the cardio room and both agreed that it is significantly underused and underequipped.

Mr. Poirer did want clarification on the \$50,000 capital expense to replace berms. It was unclear to him whether the project had been completed and what work had actually been done.

Mr. Poirier also talked about updates to security and keypads on access points.

#### **F. Elementary Building Project Working Group Update**

Ms. Eliot started by talking about the purpose of the working group and their goal of moving the School Committee forward in submitting a Statement of Interest (SOI) to the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) in spring of 2023. She said the group has now met twice and all information, including agendas, minutes, and recordings, can be found under the “Elementary Building Project Working Group” tab on the district website.

Ms. Freehan, chair of the working group, talked about the group’s work indexing the documents and meeting minutes from the old School Building Committee formed for the last project. These documents have been put into various categories and some have been identified as important for School Committee members to review.

The group, along with Dr. Blake, is working with the facilitator Bill Logue on the next round of listening sessions. Along with community sessions, Bill Logue will work on a survey for staff and listening sessions. Ms. Freehan also talked about the need to share the demographic study completed by NESDEC in the spring of 2022 with the community.

Ms. Eliot added that the group worked on creating a timeline of key decisions made along the way of the last project. This information, along with the spreadsheet of old School Building Committee documents are available on the district website for public viewing. She also shared that the final report from the first round of community listening sessions has been completed and is currently under review by the School Committee. It will be available to the public ahead of the next School Committee meeting.

Ms. Donahue asked about documents from the last building project that were not available on the Town’s website. Ms. Eliot said that as far as the group knew, all public documents were posted. Members of the community were encouraged to come forward with additional information on the former project if they have it.

Ms. Eliot said the working group and School Committee would be working through the data from the first round of listening sessions. She said there were roughly 225 participants between the survey and listening sessions. She recognized that was a very small percentage of the Ipswich population.

There was a discussion about the listening sessions scheduled for staff and whether School Committee members should be present during. It was decided that members could attend, but should be there solely to listen and not participate. If staff would prefer more anonymity, they can complete the survey instead.

Mr. Poirier asked what the questions would center around in the second round of listening sessions. Would they be specifically around configuration, size, locations, etc. or would the sessions be more focused on recommendations from the School Committee?

Ms. Freehan clarified that Bill Logue would be working on questions for the second round of listening sessions. The first round gave people the opportunity to identify values that were important to them and the next round will allow them to find creative ways to incorporate those values.

Mr. Poirier shared feedback that he heard about people steering away from controversial issues in the first round. He said it was important that they begin to get a better understanding of what people will support.

Ms. Eliot said she hoped the listening sessions would present different scenarios that could be potential paths forward, although she did agree it could be too soon. She would like to get preliminary feedback on real possibilities.

Ms. Cannon hoped this second round of listening sessions would not be a regurgitation of the same information. She hoped for people to come up with creative ways to incorporate the values into tangible results.

Ms. Eliot felt there needed to be discussion about defining these values. For example, what does equity mean? She asked the School Committee to review the documents from the old project and pair them with practical solutions. She asked members to think about things that could be agreed upon with or without limitations and what was off the table.

Ms. Kneedler stressed the importance of community participation. There will be many decisions that need to be made over the next couple of years and community consensus with as many people as possible is important to the process.

It was also mentioned that the timeline for the SOI submission in the spring of 2023 is not yet available on the MSBA website.

### **G. Business Office Update and Vote on Student Activity Accounts**

Cheryl Herrick-Stella, Director of Finance and Operations summarized her financial update memo and budget report included in the meeting packet. She said that at this time, all salaries had not been encumbered, but would be by the end of the month. There were no concerns with the status of the current budget.

Ms. Herrick-Stella then shifted to an update on personnel in the district, highlighting the 48 new hires and 25 category changes that have taken place. She shared that there are currently 10 open positions in the district.

Ms. Herrick-Stella reviewed the fund balanced in the gift and revolving accounts, as well as the total in the Stabilization Fund. She noted that as part of the municipal accounting process, the Town's accountant will be adding the override funds into the appropriated budget and then in the spring, the amount will be moved into the Stabilization Fund.

Ms. Herrick-Stella also talked about the Student Activity Accounts. She shared that it is an annual requirement to review student activity accounts and vote to close out old accounts and open new ones for new classes. After some clean up, the business office was able to identify which accounts could be closed or needed to open. Those accounts were presented in a memo to the School Committee.

- *Motion to open and close Student Activity Accounts as outlined in the Budget Report was made by Ms. Cannon and seconded by Ms. Kneedler. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***

### **7. Subcommittee, Working Group and Liaison Reports**

- Elementary Building Project Working Group: The work of this group was discussed earlier.
- Public Safety Building Reuse Committee: Mr. Poirier shared that the committee put out a survey, with 359 respondents, about plans for the future use of the public safety building in town. He shared that a majority of respondents did not want either site sold to a private company. Some wanted the fire station to be included in the school building project discussion. Some people suggested that the fire station could be used for the preschool. He shared that other potential uses could be as an extension of other town facilities, a cultural space or a new home for the Council of Aging. Mr. Poirier shared that the timeline to submit an SOI for the use of these buildings has been pushed back to November.
- Climate Resiliency Committee: Ms. Kneedler shared that the group is looking for a definitive decision on a plan for the HVAC system at the middle/high school. This item will be discussed at the next School Committee meeting.
- Traverso-Weatherall Innovation Grants: Grant applications will be available in the next few days and are due to Central Office on October 14th.

### **8. New Business\***

Ms. Donahue discussed the process of hiring the new Town Manager, Steven Crane. She was the School Committee liaison to the Town Manager Hiring Committee.

### **9. Consent Agenda**

- *Motion to accept the consent agenda as presented was made by Ms. Eliot and seconded by Ms. Kneedler. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***

### **10. Vouchers and Bills**

All were reviewed and signed.

### **11. Adjournment**

➤ *Motion to adjourn was made by Ms. Cannon and seconded by Ms. Kneedler. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***

**Meeting adjourned at 8:40 PM.**