

## **Ipswich School Committee**

MS/HS Ensemble Room  
134 High Street, Ipswich  
Thursday, October 6, 2022  
7:00 PM

### **MINUTES**

#### **1. Call to Order at 7:01 PM**

Mr. Stevens called the meeting to order at 7:01 PM.

Present: Mr. Stevens, Ms. Eliot, Ms. Kneedler, Ms. Cannon, Mr. Poirier, Ms. Freehan and Ms. Donahue  
Also Present: Cheryl Herrick-Stella, Director of Finance and Operations; Jimmy Bornstein, High School Student Representative

Absent: Dr. Brian Blake, Superintendent of Schools

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

Mr. Bornstein read the mission statement.

#### **3. Announcements**

- The next School Committee meeting will be held on Thursday, October 20th at 7:00 PM.
- Schools and district offices will be closed on Monday, October 10th in observance of Indigenous Peoples' Day.
- Schools will be closed for all students on Tuesday, October 11th for the district's Professional Development Day.
- The next round of Community Listening Sessions on the future of the elementary school buildings will be held on Wednesday, October 12th from 4:00-5:30 PM and 7:00-8:30 PM. Meetings will take place at Ipswich Town Hall, Meeting Room A. A remote option will take place on Wednesday, October 19th at 7:00 PM. Details on how to register will be announced in the upcoming week.
- The following subcommittees and/or working groups will be meeting:
  - Communications Subcommittee- Tuesday, October 18th at 6:00 PM
  - Policy Subcommittee- Tuesday, October 18th at 7:00 PM

#### **4. Special Acknowledgements**

Mr. Stevens thanked educators and staff for a great start to the school year.

#### **5. Citizen' Comments**

There were no public comments.

Mr. Stevens outlined the ground rules for citizens' comments. He asked that there be no engaging in debate at this time. The School Committee is happy to hear comments from the public; however, the public should know that any questions or concerns raised during this time may not be addressed immediately during the meeting.

#### **6. High School Student Representative Report**

Mr. Bornstein reviewed events and activities taking place at the high school. His report included:

- Spirit week
- Homecoming
- Football and other fall sports

Mr. Bornstein then shared the results from two student surveys. His first survey, which asked about general information about the transition into the new school year, showed that the majority of students felt good about the start of the year and were supported by teachers. About 30% of students surveyed did not feel good about the start of the school year.

The second survey was around communication/student safety. Students felt they should also have been notified, along with parents, about the potential threat to the school. Mr. Bornstein said that rumors quickly started and student anxiety escalated without any direct contact from the district to students.

## **7. Presentations**

### **A. IEA Lesson Snapshot Presentation: Open Windows, Open Minds**

Kerry Zagarella, kindergarten teacher at Winthrop School, gave a brief snapshot presentation on the community-wide professional development opportunity called *Open Windows, Open Minds*. This professional development, funded by the Carolyn Davis Endowment Fund, uses the book, *Open Windows, Open Minds* by Afrika Afeni to look at how a predominantly white community can approach topics of social justice, equity, and diversity.

### **B. Overnight Field Trip Approval: Middle School Ecology Trip**

Kathy McMahon, middle school principal, outlined the details on the 6th grade Ecology Trip planned for three nights during the week following April vacation. This is an annual trip for 6th grade students. Students who do not attend the trip will participate in day trips/excursions in the area that mirror what students who are away will be doing. Ms. McMahon said the administration will work with families to ensure that any student who wishes to attend can do so and are not limited by the cost of the trip.

- *Motion to approve the Middle School Ecology Trip was made by Ms. Kneedler and seconded by Ms. Cannon. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***

### **C. Overnight Field Trip Approval: Middle School Washington, D.C. Trip**

Kathy McMahon, middle school principal, outlined the details of the 8th grade trip to Washington, D.C. Students will travel to Washington, D.C. the first week of June and spend two nights in Washington and finish with a night in Philadelphia. This trip will include a visit to the Arlington National Cemetery, the Capital, several monuments, and Smithsonian museums. The company handles all finances associated with the trip, but the Middle School will be able to offer scholarships to families to ensure that any student who would like to attend may do so.

- *Motion to support the Middle School Washington, D.C. overnight field trip was made by Ms. Cannon and seconded by Ms. Kneedler. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***

### **D. Doyon Playground Update/Potential Request for Funds and Vote**

This agenda item was not discussed.

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

Mr. Stevens began the update by sharing that it had come to his attention that the framing questions from the first set of second round listening sessions were shared to a small group in the community. He felt the decision to share those questions was not right and could have potentially skewed the discussion at those listening sessions in a negative way. Mr. Stevens said that moving forward, the committee and Dr. Blake needed to be capable of having difficult and more challenging conversations in an effort to move this project forward. He acknowledged that committee members may not always agree, but the group needs to use their meetings to have productive discussions.

Ms. Cannon shared her frustration with the framing questions being shared. She said the School Committee voted to hire the Logue Group and follow the facilitator's plan. The School Committee is using taxpayer funds to do this work. She felt that sabotaging the plan that was decided on by the School Committee and facilitated by experts in the field would be a waste of taxpayer funds. She stressed the importance of everyone being mindful of their role as a School Committee member and their responsibility to the community. She said the School Committee has a bigger responsibility than one's own personal agenda. To undermine the process is not fair to the School Committee or the community.

Mr. Poirier agreed with Ms. Cannon. He felt the Logue Group had been hired to facilitate these listening sessions and provide information to the School Committee based on those sessions. He said he was disappointed with the rhetoric at the Elementary Building Project Working Group meetings. He felt that people with a difference of opinion were being pinned as conspiracy theorists trying to undermine the process. He asked that all participants be mindful of their words and tone.

He felt some members were being asked to put their personal feelings aside, but noted that he has not been asked directly what his personal feelings are. Those conversations have not taken place at the School Committee level as of yet.

Mr. Stevens stressed that no decisions on the building project have been made. The Elementary Building Project Working Group has been tasked with organizing the information from the last project, brainstorming ideas on how to communicate with the community, and digesting the listening session information. The larger discussions need to happen with the full School Committee. Mr. Stevens said the School Committee is trying to be transparent about the process. He said there were things the committee will disagree on and it is okay to question each other. This is the very beginning of the process.

Some members expressed frustration about feeling as if they were being called out for potentially supporting two schools or needing to be “educated” about the process. There was discussion about being “educated” versus letting people know about new information. One member felt it was difficult to talk freely in these meetings knowing that some people would pull information from the conversation and use it in the worst way.

Ms. Donahue talked about the expectation for this project, asking if the intent was to follow the same path as before or determine a project that can expand the number of people who support it. She thought the purpose was to look for a compromise. She also felt that some members look at a difference of opinion as somehow sabotaging the project.

Ms. Cannon asked what the purpose would be to send the framing questions to a select group of people. She felt like it was purposely sabotaging the process. She said the School Committee is trying to take a path forward with a project and while it may not be the path everyone wants, it was the School Committee’s decision to do it like this. She acknowledged that these conversations are hard, but it becomes harder when the process is met with criticism from School Committee members and the community.

Mr. Poirer said he was not aware of community criticism and does not know what these select groups are talking about. His concerns were with the tenor of the conversation in the working group.

Ms. Donahue talked about the process used to determine the questions for the second round of listening sessions. She was under the impression that the School Committee would review the information gathered from the first round of questions and then work to develop the second set of questions. She was disappointed that there were no questions presented to review at the last meeting and ahead of the second round of listening sessions. Ms. Donahue said it did not feel right to not see the questions ahead of time. She tried to question the process at the last meeting. Ms. Donahue also thought it was important that these listening sessions were just that- a chance to listen to the community and not educate them.

Ms. Donahue felt it was inappropriate for someone on the Elementary Building Project Working Group to mention that some members of the School Committee needed to “do their homework” and should be “schooled” on the process. She said the comments felt specific to some members.

Mr. Poirier added that he felt all members needed to understand the process. There were no Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) experts on the School Committee.

Ms. Cannon felt that people were taking some conversations out of context. She said the School Committee is working to educate themselves on the process and the public. She stressed that the Logue Group was always running and facilitating the listening sessions. She trusts that the Logue Group knows what they are doing. Not sharing the listening sessions questions ahead of time was not due to a lack of transparency, but was how the facilitator found the listening sessions to be most effective.

Ms. Donahue said she felt the listening sessions were somewhat biased. She shared examples, stating that the one facilitator was redirecting participants from using the term “small school” to “small feel”. In the second round of listening sessions, the question was again about getting a “small feel” and did not mention the “small school”. Ms. Donahue also felt a lot of what was mentioned in the first round of listening sessions was not represented in the final report.

Ms. Cannon said that if there was truth to what Ms. Donahue was saying, then it should be addressed with the facilitator. She also asked if this was a true bias of the facilitator or if Ms. Donahue was biased because when giving examples, she was highlighting the things that seemed more important to her.

Ms. Kneedler, as the only active School Committee member that took part in the last building project, shared her historical perspective. She said the School Committee's decision to work with an outside facilitator for this process came from their meetings with Amherst, a town that moved forward with a successful SOI after a failed vote. The Logue Group was used successfully by Amherst and Ipswich had hoped for similar results.

Ms. Kneedler then talked about the listening sessions and how much of the takeaways people are feeling come from their own perception. She personally thought the facilitators used an interesting approach to frame some questions and felt they led to thought-provoking discussions.

Ms. Eliot said she understood why the "small school" comments were redirected. The listening sessions were not about producing solutions, but were meant to discuss feelings. Why do you like the small school? The exercise was to think about the values. The intent was not to twist words, but to get to the values that people felt were important.

Ms. Donahue added that she felt a small school was a value as opposed to a small feel. She acknowledged that it could be her perception.

Ms. Kneedler said she wants the School Committee to be able to trust one another and assume the best intent. She acknowledged that while each member may have a different point of view, they all want what is best for the children of Ipswich. The work of the School Committee is hard enough and will only be harder if the group does not assume positive intent.

Mr. Poirier felt that comments coming from the Elementary Building Project Working Group were creating divisiveness amongst the committee.

Ms. Eliot, as a member of the working group, said she would continue to work on keeping personal feelings out of the conversations and stay on track with the mission of the group.

Mr. Poirier said that he has never been asked publicly about his thoughts on site location and size. The School Committee, as a whole, has not had those conversations.

Ms. Cannon added that no one in the group has been asked about site location and size. The group agreed to the listening sessions and the use of a facilitator. The detailed conversations would come after the listening sessions.

Ms. Stevens clarified that the working group was not going to make any final decisions about the project. He also acknowledged that every member of the group has their own opinions and none of them have been discussed. It is important that the group does not immediately assume the worst of one another.

There was a brief discussion about notifying the public that they should attend the second round of listening sessions. Community members may think that they would not need to attend the second round if they already attended the first round. It was suggested that this information go out in Dr. Blake's weekly emails.

Ms. Freehan then talked about the Elementary Building Project Working Group's most recent work. The working group had a long discussion about what the School Committee would need consensus on ahead of a Statement of Interest (SOI) submission to the MSBA. It was decided that the consensus would be needed about the configuration and site or sites of the buildings. Dr. Blake had agreed to speak with the MSBA to get a better understanding of the process for submitting an SOI and all the options available to Ipswich.

The working group also discussed a communication plan around the project. She shared that per the Logue Group, there will not be a survey released with the second round of listening sessions. An informational flier will be created and distributed at the Special Town Meeting. The flier will first be circulated amongst the School Committee for input.

There was a discussion regarding the lack of a survey to accompany the second round of listening sessions. Mr. Stevens clarified that although the Logue Group did not recommend a survey for this round, the School Committee could also structure their own survey if necessary at a later date. Ms. Eliot added that a survey would have been difficult for this round. The style of the framing questions have led to more narrative responses.

Ms. Cannon expressed concern about the timeline of the SOI submission. She felt that with or without a survey, the listening sessions represented a very small percentage of the Ipswich community.

Mr. Stevens added that the School Committee will need to decide the next steps for the process which could include a non-binding referendum as a Special Town Meeting.

Concerns were again raised about the small percentage of feedback from the listening sessions and whether the information would be discounted because it came from a small group. Mr. Stevens said that all feedback would be taken into consideration. The group would still need to be realistic that the feedback from the listening sessions was only representative of a small percentage of the town.

#### **F. School Committee Policy Update/Vote: Section C**

Ms. Kneedler presented the following policies, which had been reviewed and updated by the Policy Subcommittee:

- CA: Administration Goals
- CB: School Superintendent
- CBD: Superintendent's Contract
- CBI: Evaluation of the Superintendent
- CCB: Administrative Organization Plan
- CE: Administrative Councils, Cabinets, and Committees
- CH: Policy Implementation
- CHA: Development of Procedures

➤ *Motion to approve the policies from Section C as presented was made by Ms. Donahue and seconded by Ms. Cannon. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***

#### **8. Superintendent's Administrative Report**

There was no report presented at this meeting.

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

1. **Athletics:** The Athletic Director reviewed each sports season and what goes on. The group was notified that the department was still in need of an athletic custodian. There were some coaching position vacancies for this school year. The next meeting is scheduled for November 30th.
2. **Communications:** Ms. Kneedler reviewed the schedule for this year's newsletters. Each newsletter will feature a piece on the elementary building project. Dr. Blake is going to write a piece about school safety for the upcoming newsletter.
3. **Mutual Concerns:** Ms. Eliot shared that the group discussed the current shortage of substitute staff, the elementary building project process, management of PAC/technical support, and the annual pay schedule for staff with the Ipswich Educators' Association.
4. **Policy:** The work of this subcommittee was discussed during an earlier agenda item.
5. **Climate Resiliency Committee:** Ms. Kneedler shared that the group met to review reports done regarding the potential HVAC upgrades to the middle/high school. The group has submitted clarifying questions to the company that submitted the report. Ms. Kneedler also mentioned that there are new federal incentives that could potentially drive down costs associated with replacing the HVAC system.
6. **Public Safety Building Reuse Working Group:** Mr. Poirier reminded the committee that the date to submit a Statement of Interest (SOI) for the potential use of the public safety buildings is November 15th. He asked that the School Committee discuss a potential SOI submission at the next meeting.

#### **10. New Business\***

Mr. Poirier suggested the School Committee discuss the safety/security measure in place throughout the district at an upcoming meeting.

#### **11. Vouchers and Bills**

All were reviewed and signed.

#### **12. Consent Agenda**

- *Motion to approve the consent agenda as presented was made by Ms. Donahue and seconded by Ms. Cannon. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***

#### **13. Adjournment**

- *Motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Ms. Cannon and seconded by Ms. Donahue. **The motion passed unanimously in favor.***

**Meeting adjourned at 8:27 PM.**