



Acton-Boxborough Regional School District

15 Charter Road Acton, MA 01720

978-264-4700

www.abschools.org

Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee Meeting

February 1, 2024 7:00 p.m.

Administration Building Auditorium To view only: <https://www.youtube.com/actontv1>

APPROVED MINUTES

Members Present: Ben Bloomenthal, Tori Campbell, Liz Fowlks, Lakshmi Kaja, Adam Klein, Ginny Kremer, Vikram Parikh, Leela Ramachandran, Yanxin Schmidt, Andrew Schwartz, Rebeccah Wilson

Members Absent: none

Others: Deborah Bookis, Peter Light, Sheri Matthews, Andrew Shen

1. **CALL TO ORDER (7:00)**

The ABRSC was called to order at 7:00 p.m. by Chairperson Adam Klein.

2. **CHAIRPERSON'S WELCOME - Adam Klein**

Members of the public who wished to watch the meeting online were invited to use Acton tv's youtube channel. It was stated that the meeting was being recorded and would be posted on Acton TV's website.

The many members of the public in attendance were welcomed to what the Chairperson called, "Part 1" of information being provided to clarify budget questions from the community with "Part 2" being the Budget Workshop on Saturday, Feb 10th at 8:30AM. Members of the Select Boards and Finance Committees will also attend that meeting. Additional cost centers and a discussion of possible structure changes to make the district budget more sustainable will take place.

The following committee members, whose terms expire this year, announced that they will seek reelection: Ben Bloomenthal, Adam Klein, and Andrew Schwartz. The Chairperson noted that this does not mean that other citizens cannot run against the incumbents.

a. **ABRHS Student Representative Update - Molly Norris '25, Julia Zhou '26, Diksha Mhatre '26, Nikhil Nomula '26, Jadon Yang '26**

The student reps shared perspectives on current events at the High School per policy JIB - Student Involvement In Decision-Making. Comments. Many students are in favor of Budget A because there are less staff, curriculum and activities being cut. 25% of students polled were in favor of an override. Safety of student drivers during bad weather should be considered.

b. **Public Participation**

The Chairperson reminded everyone of the change in procedures. All comments regardless of whether they are on or not on the agenda will be heard during the public

comment section of the meeting. As referred to in the policy, the Committee typically does not respond to public participation during a meeting. Some of the items discussed by the public may not be on the agenda, and it might be considered a violation of Open Meeting Law should the committee deliberate on a topic that is not on the agenda.

In the past for agenda items, the Committee's discussion would occur, followed by the public's comments. The Committee was deliberating a topic before hearing public input. A concerted effort is now being made to have memos available in advance for presentations to the committee. This allows everyone to come prepared with questions and to ask them prior to and be addressed during the presentation. Recognizing the importance of the budget topics, a specific agenda item for public comments following the budget presentation has been added. Members of the committee or community were invited to contact the Chairperson directly with feedback on this process.

Gary Kushner, Boxborough Finance Committee, shared his concern with Boxborough's ability to pay a 15% increase in taxes. Although Boxborough does support the schools, many residents are on fixed incomes and would have trouble with such a large increase. He asked for a two year understanding of where the budget is going.

A student member of the Resource Force asked for the Committee's support of their recent resolution regarding greenhouse gas.

Mike Balulescu, President of the ABEA and Merriam parent, spoke in favor of passing an override and reminded everyone that even the A Budget has cuts in vital staff that affect students. He asked members to think creatively and strategically about how to keep as many of our educators as possible. Several other citizens spoke in favor of an override and preserving staff. One citizen spoke against an override.

- c. Superintendent's Update - *Peter Light*
The AB Resource Center held a very successful Clothing Giveaway with 138 families, representing approximately 200 children, receiving free clothing donated by our citizens.

3. **ONGOING BUSINESS (7:30)**

- a. Health Insurance Update - *Andrew Schwartz (1/25/24)*
 - i. Acton Health Insurance Trust (HIT) [FY24 and Options for FY25](#)
 - ii. Acton Health Insurance Trust (HIT) [YTD Claim Analysis](#)

Focus was on the review provided by Gallagher for potential replacement health insurance providers. The most recent audit reports and December cash flow reports were reviewed. Information is available on the HIT website. The Trust asked for and received \$2m in advance through the schools and Town. There were no qualifications on the statements. The advance shows a commitment to keep the trust solvent. A vote to accept the audit will be at the next meeting. December Cash Flow was similar to October and November. A discussion of alternative methods for providing health insurance and next steps were discussed. We are

looking at bringing the entirety of the population that is covered by the district into a new non-self-insured arrangement. The risk pool currently is too small for the trust to continue as it was. Each of these replacements has positives and negatives:

- Remaining self-funded
- Group Insurance Commission (GIC) - seemingly a good replacement, but does not include BCBS and cannot accept until July
- Massachusetts Interlocal Insurance Association (MIIA) - total replacement of all plans, move would be in July or next January, 2 year commitment. Does not support Harvard Pilgrim
- Self Funded through Blue Cross Blue Shield - competitive, but not a great solution
- Massachusetts Strategic Health Group (MSHG) - not advantageous
- Mayflower Municipal Health Group (MMHG) - not competitive
- West Suburban Health Group (WSHG) - not accepting new membership

The Health Insurance Working Group (HITWG) met January 30 to review and consider the comparisons. Decisions will be made by the HIT, HITWG and The Town. HIT voted to agree to the Memorandum of Agreement regarding the advance to the Trust from the district.

Mr. Light summarized the complex situation the District is in. As it exists now, the HIT is in too small of a risk pool given all the changes in health care and prescription drugs. Managing risk is critical. We need to move to a larger entity. There appears to be two viable paths - a move to MIIA as of July 1st, or to GIC. The entire savings would be 78% for the School District with remaining for the Town of Acton. Retirees must also join but their plans are not up again until January 1st so the District would have to continue a form of HIT to cover them from July 1 - January 1. Both of these options (MIIA and GIC) offer savings of millions of dollars, although not for FY25. The District's attorney will attend the next School Committee meeting to answer questions. Representatives from all of our unions are being included in the discussions.

- b. FY25 Preliminary Budget Presentation #2 - *Peter Light*
- Facilities & Capital - *Mark Hamel and Sheri Matthews*
 - Transportation - *Sheri Matthews*
 - EdTech - *Amy Bisiewicz*
 - Proposed Fees (Kindergarten Tuition, Preschool Tuition, Athletics, Student Activities, Parking (High School) - *Andrew Shen*
 - Comparable Communities Comparisons - *Peter Light*

While there are ideas for savings, realistic timing must be considered. This is true of consideration of changing school start times regarding transportation costs. There was strong support for the work of EdTech in this digital age. A surcharge for access to curriculum cannot be created. Some districts charge for optional insurance. Technology often opens the classroom to some students who are not able to access all of the curriculum. Two members advocated for not increasing athletic fees. A hardship exemption would exist. A comparison was asked for local preschool fees.

Mr. Light reviewed comparisons between Overall Spending, Teachers, Paraprofessionals, Administration & Instructional Leadership, Student Support, and Clerical & Technical Support from the DESE website (FY22). We are at or below state averages in many categories. We are not an outlier. When asked how many cuts impact classrooms, Mr. Light cautioned that this can be hard to determine because while some cuts are not actual classroom staff, they do affect students. He encouraged members to consider what the District's priorities are because that is what a budget is about. Adam Klein stressed that members need to be equally responsive to Boxborough whose assessment would increase 15% if an override passes because agreement is needed by both towns. It is a balance between responsibility to our community's growth and our students.

1. [Presentation Slides](#)
 - 1.1 [FY25 Comparative Summary by Character Code "A" Budget](#)
 - 1.2 [FY25 Comparative Summary of Expenditures by Admin Category "A" Budget](#)
 - 1.3 [FY25 Complete Line Item Budget](#)
 - 1.4 [Strategic Initiatives, Significant Budget Variances, and Suggested Reductions from Prelim Budget](#)

2. Public Participation on Budget Presentation #2 (10 minutes maximum)
Comments from the public included:
 - Greg Jarboe (Acton Fincom) appreciates that the Committee is doing their due diligence and providing so much data.
 - Local realtors say that people move to Acton for the schools.
 - The Committee is spending other people's money. The goal is to get an override passed but Committee members need to understand the cost.
 - Athletic fees should not be increased. All Day Kindergarten fee could be increased. EdTech is not worth all the cost.

- c. Subcommittee and Member Reports
 - i. School Committee Communication Goal Update - *Adam Klein*
Members were asked to sign up for School Committee office hours which will be held in February at Sargent Memorial Library and Acton Town Hall. Andrew is preparing Frequently Asked Questions. Mr. Light and Sheri will present at the Boxborough FinCom Meeting on Feb 6. Members are encouraged to attend if available. Acton Fincom is also meeting on Feb 6. There will be gatherings at the Acton Senior Center for members to attend. Mr. Light and Acton Town Manager John Mangiarati will also do a "Java with John" at the Senior Center. Extensive information is on the AB website.
 - ii. Budget Subcommittee - *Rebecca Wilson, Jan. 29*
Members discussed the ALG meeting and Budget Saturday. They are watching the Governor's budget proposal but it is not looking promising re transportation reimbursement and Chapter 70 funding.
 - iii. Acton Leadership Group - *Rebecca Wilson, Jan. 29*

Members discussed the potential override number and reached consensus on a target number of \$6.6 million (in addition to the usual 3% increase in taxes), though there are still details to iron out. The total is \$9.8 million, with an average tax impact of \$1400 per household. This means the school district would be able to move forward with the A budget plan. Rebecca asked for consensus from the School Committee to support this plan. One member abstained but others were in agreement.

- d. Consent Agenda/Action Items - **VOTE** - *Adam Klein*
 - i. Approval of ABRSC Meeting Minutes of 1/18/24
 - ii. Endorsement of Community Preservation Fund Open Space Reserves (\$51,270) and Community Preservation FY25 budgeted reserve (\$60,860) for Blanchard Playground Project
 - a. School Committee letter to support CPC Warrant

Liz Fowlks moved, Ben Bloomenthal seconded and it was unanimously,
VOTED: to approve the consent agenda.

- e. Statement of Warrants and Recommendation to Approve 2/1/24 - **VOTE** - *Adam Klein*
Liz Fowlks moved, Tori Campbell seconded and it was unanimously,
VOTED: to approve the warrants (See memo language).

Mr. Light noted that the District has applied for an EPA grant for electric school bus funding.

4. **ADJOURN**

Leela Ramachandran moved, Ben Bloomenthal seconded and it was unanimously,
VOTED: to adjourn the ABRSC at 9:55 p.m.

FYI- [Acton](#) and [Boxborough](#) Town Election Calendars

Respectfully submitted,
Beth Petr

List of Documents Used: agenda, agenda item summary pages, (HIT) FY24 and Options for FY25, (HIT) YTD Claim Analysis, FY25 Budget Presentation #2 slides, FY25 Comparative Summary by Character Code "A" Budget/Comparative Summary of Expenditures by Admin Category "A" Budget/Complete Line Item Budget/Strategic Initiatives, Significant Budget Variances, and Suggested Reductions from Prelim Budget, ABRSC Draft minutes of 1/18/24, Community Preservation Fund Open Space Reserves (\$51,270) , Community Preservation FY25 budgeted reserve (\$60,860) for Blanchard Playground Project, School Committee letter to support CPC Warrant, Statement of Warrants 2/1/24, Acton and Boxborough Town Election Calendars

NEXT MEETINGS: Budget Saturday Workshop February 10, 2024 at 8:15 a.m. and February 15, 2024 at 7:00 p.m. in the Administration Building Auditorium