

# Newton PTO Council Minutes

1/15/2013

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## Attendees:

### Executive Board

- Co-President - Frieda Dweck
- Co-President - Theresa Fitzpatrick
- Health & Safety - Laura Holt
- METCO - Bree Lucas
- Political Action/Education - Marcia Tabenken
- Elementary Repr. - May Chiu
- Secondary Repr. - Sue Flicop
- SPED-PAC Liaison - Jo-Louise Allen
- Website Manager - Caroline Wilson

### PTO Presidents by School

- Angier - Anabel Cable
- Angier - Lainie Wagner
- Burr - Ted Vahey
- Burr - Jason Wong
- Cabot - Jen Abbott
- Countryside - Gena Hooper
- Franklin - Carolyn Craven
- Mason-Rice - Eydie Balsam
- Mason-Rice - Sunwoo Kahng
- Memorial Spaulding - Doreen Rachal
- Memorial Spaulding - Monica Yancey
- Peirce - Melissa Boucher
- Peirce - Heather Maffie
- Peirce - Cynthia Willen
- Preschool - Alison Lobron

- Ward - Alison Best
- Newton South - Betsy Blagdon

### Other Attendees:

- Williams - Robyn Phillips
- Franklin - Julie Pinto
- Franklin - Marysol Masse-Makimura
- Mayor Setti Warren
- Bob Rooney, City of Newton  
Chief Operating Officer
- Claire Sokoloff – School  
Committee Chair
- Diana Fisher-Gomber, - School  
Committee
- David Fleishman –  
Superintendent of Newton Public  
Schools
- Maureen Lemieux – City of  
Newton CFO
- Dave Turocy - City of Newton ,  
Commissioner of Public Works
- Howard Mintz - Newton Police,  
Acting Chief
- Bruce Proia - Newton Fire  
Department Chief
- Joe Mobley - City of Newton IT  
Department
- Ana Gonzalez - City of Newton  
Director of Community  
Engagement

## Next Meeting:

Wednesday, February 6<sup>th</sup>, 2013

### Override Presentation

**Mayor Warren** thanked to PTO leadership for giving him the opportunity to come before group. Overall, the city has done a tremendous amount of work over past three years. School enrollment is going up and there is more traffic on streets—all signs of a healthy community. The city has put together a 20-year CIP (capital improvement plan) for work to buildings, roads, and sidewalks and is thinking in 5-year increments. It has worked with the unions as well. But the needs of the city are pressing and if we want a quality education system, we need to make an investment in capital and personnel.

**Maureen Lemieux:** Past studies all said that by this year, the city would have a huge annual deficit. The Mayor and his staff have worked to make the city's \$300 million budget sustainable by using 5 strategies:

- **Collective bargaining:** The city settled all union contracts (both municipal and school) at a 2.5% rate of growth for salaries and health benefits combined. This saved the city \$178 million in salaries and health benefits.
- **Zero-based budgeting:** The city renegotiated contracts for electricity and gas, and questions everything that city spends. This has saved over \$15 million over past three years.
- **Performance based management:** The city measures everything and knows what is happening with crime, traffic, etc.
- **Economic development:** The city has facilitated economic development where it makes sense and has worked with developers and the state. The current development will net the city \$1.3 million a year in additional taxes over previous value of the property.
- **Citywide infrastructure assessment:** The Public Works and the Buildings departments have done a full assessment, have a 20-year capital plan and have a 5 year realistic plan for projects. The results show that both Angier and Cabot are in deplorable condition and that the busiest fire station in Newton, which is also the hub of the department, is too small.

**Superintendent:** Enrollment continues to climb, and is the highest level in 30 years. The elementary school students are starting to move to the middle and high schools, requiring more teachers and staff if class size is to stay approximately the same. Next year all the 5<sup>th</sup> graders at Cabot will go to Day instead of splitting the group between Day and Bigelow. If the override doesn't pass, though, some students will need to go to Bigelow to even out the team sizes. Several elementary schools also need modulars to give them "breathing room:" Burr, Horace Mann, Bowen and Mason-Rice.

### Elements of Q1, the operating override for \$8.4 million:

- \$3.5 million for enrollment increases (8 classroom and special teachers at elementary; 8 team teachers at MS as well as specialists; 12 teachers at the high school level, all disciplines; also ELL and SPED staffing; tech for new teachers and classrooms; transportation)
- \$1 million for the first year to address short-term space needs
- \$1 million for streets and sidewalks paving program NOTE: We were spending \$1.6 million per year, but should really be spending 4.4 million. So far the Mayor has increased funding to \$2.2 million, which will reach \$3.2 million with this override.
- \$500,000 for police to address traffic issues and add four officers NOTE: Staffing is at the lowest number of sworn officers in the history of city
- \$2.4 million for Zervas and Fire Station 3 NOTE: Zervas will not be funded by the MSBA because it does not make the list of the worst buildings. However, it is a real opportunity to add capacity in the middle of the city. Fire station 3 and headquarters will be renovated or replaced, with the wire division moving to Dedham Street (Fire Station 10).

**Q2 is debt exclusion for Angier.**

**Q3 is debt exclusion for Cabot.**

**How much will this cost?** The city has an override calculator on its website that calculates the cost for residents based on their address. The overall cost is 50cents per \$1K of valuation; the median value home is 686K and therefore the median cost is \$343 per year

**Other:** The city also enacted some tax relief for seniors and veterans.

### Questions:

Comment: the operating override raises taxes in perpetuity; debt exclusion stops after 30 years, not just the life of the construction project.

Comment: clarification about modulars and staffing: \$1 million is debt service for modulars--they are a part of the operating override as is staffing for the new classrooms.

Has anyone thought strategically about how to use the PTOs and PTO Council to engage parents and get the override passed? How about help us create a concise communication packet that we can use in organizing. Answer: The campaign has several liaisons at each school. PTO co-chairs should be hearing from them if they haven't yet. Outreach from liaisons would be through emails and phone calls. Some PTOs have decided to vote to endorse the override--probably they will be more active. The organization supporting the override is called Building Newton's Future [BuildingNewtonsFuture.org](http://BuildingNewtonsFuture.org). The group has an advisory committee and field structure to help get word out. They will be doing phone banking, mailers, going door-

to-door, GOTV but can still use help in getting more liaisons—they are almost every school but not 100%.

What does it mean to endorse the override? What about by-laws? Different PTOs have different by-laws; some can put out more info or links where to learn more. The School Committee and the Superintendent are coming to schools. As a 501C3, a PTO can't endorse a political candidates but can take a position on an issue. PTO Council has taken position on sidewalk snow shoveling, proposal to reduce sales tax in the past. The PTOC website has good info and a link to more.

Is that the way the money will be spent or is it a general idea? This is the most specific override ever to be put to Newton voters. The city has a 5-year plan and is sticking to it. This is an enrollment driven override--not adding programs, solely to address enrollment over the next 5 year and that was not addressed over past several years.

If one of the debt exclusion overrides is not approved, will the way the money be spent changed? If both do pass, the city won't start to tax until the BOA (Board of Aldermen) authorizes spending on these projects. The city will only tax what is needed; if the price comes in lower, the tax amount will be lower. If one or both don't pass, we will need to sit and rethink. The good news is that Zervas is in the operating override, so we can create capacity there. It would probably take a long time-- years before we could get to the school that did not pass, possibly losing MSBA funding. MSBA funding is determined by a tally of points, and could be about 40% of the cost of the construction without out demolition, which the MSBA covers only up to 8%. Right now, Newton expects to get a good reimbursement.

Is there information about future town hall meetings that we can share? The Mayor is holding one per ward—2 are complete, so there are six to go. The office will be announcing the dates in next week or two—and are also going to specific groups (i.e. PTOC, Newton Dems, etc.) SC is also coming and are willing to come back if needed.

Do you have a feeling for how the community feels? People know that Newton needs to make an investment--see the issues and understand that a lot has been done over finances, increased efficiency. Still have a lot of questions and how it would affect them over time, but general sentiment is that people get that we need to do this. Really that people are worried about the impact on their finances. Know that 30-40% will always be against any increase in their taxes. There is no organized opposition, but that could lead to complacency. It is important for everyone to go out there and work as hard as they can to commit to voting yes.

Put in context of other overrides: are we expecting another override in 5 years or??? Really look at this in 5 year increments, look at conditions in next five years, see how much can accomplish more than this package. Then take another look.

Aside from reassurances and promises, are there any legal means to ensure that the money is used as described? For debt exclusion overrides, yes--that money is not fungible. For operating overrides, nothing is legally binding. But, if look at track record over 3 years, have a 5 year plan/projections that they use and stick to--very transparent about everything done so far and have a good track record. Override vote on March 12 and on March 18<sup>th</sup>, the Superintendent has to have a recommended budget to SC--without override money, have such huge class sizes would have revolt if spent money differently.

Hoping to tell Franklin parents that if vote for override, won't need as much money for technology. But hearing that everything like that is staying the same--money just going to enrollment. True? Would tell Franklin parents that they are going to Day next year and could end up with huge classes if override doesn't pass. Also a couple of grades at Franklin that are pretty large and could end up with more teachers--no promises, though, depends on actual enrollment.

A way to quantify that? Problem is that they don't have actual enrollment issues. Additions might not lower class size, but should come close to keeping them at what they are now.

Explain the demographics in Newton--how many homeowners are voters? How important is it for the rental population to vote? About 27% or so of homes that have school-age children; 15-18K community members who are aged 65 or older--high senior population; have young professionals. Every parent should come out for this election, even if they are renters. Go after everyone in the community--need 16K to vote yes.

What will happen to the \$1 m for modulars in years 2 – 5, and who picks up the tab for the debt service after the first year? The \$1 m will be added to pay off debt service in the first year. That extra million will go to the schools in year 2+. School department will need the money by year 2, need more than 4.5 million if all enrollment projections play out or if changes in revenue stream don't pan out...The money for police and streets can be in play, but need to make the case.

Comment: respect for community and communications--discussed town hall meetings--so important. In publicizing those, if can outline as much info as possible would be helpful. Underwood--had SC and the Superintendent there--was so informative. Encouraging people to host coffees and SC members have offered to attend.

Main question is why to vote for Q2 and 3 if don't go to those schools? Most will buy the operating override. Take Mason-Rice as an example. If have an Angier and Cabot in great condition, as well as Zervas, this helps all schools. Will have more places to send children--MR has had overcrowding challenges. If don't have to put maintenance money into Angier and Cabot (and they come with technology) then more resources

for other schools. Have a long-range facilities plan--with exception of Tier 1 schools, the others all need a lot of work--not until we do those three schools could we get further down the list--a 20 year plan and have to do the first ones.

Are the graphs available? Everything shown is online—all the forecasts.

**Final comments from Mayor Warren:** With all the work that we've done, this is a very critical time for city of Newton. If serious about protecting quality of life, public safety, education--will see an erosion of every aspect. Have to do this for Newton now in order to keep this community on an upward trajectory. Need people to contact friends, parents, etc. There are people who just feel that we shouldn't raise taxes--solid block of voters who will, so need to get enough of those who will vote for the future of Newton.

## Comments from Dr. Fleishman

### School safety and security

911 was a game changer in school safety; what can we do to make schools safer but keep them open? Newton has a different philosophy and value than in NY--we value open schools. The administration is looking at buzzers and monitors. Right now, schools will be open at beginning of the day now but not at the end. Who will do this? Building secretaries, which might mean inconveniences for parents if need to wait.

The security consultant who put in cameras at high schools is looking at what is required for a buzzer system. Some doors are so old can't support buzzer system--need new doors; get scope of project and work on funding. Hope to have a time frame in the next couple of weeks.

Costs--not known yet. They will make sure that the money doesn't come out of educational services.

**ALICE (Alert-Lockdown-Inform-Counter-Evacuate):** students are trained to distract shooters by throwing things at them; our schools are not inclined, have heard concerns about training; some districts have done unannounced lockdown drills--haven't done here because can scare children.

Liability and responsibility: challenge to control a buzzer system. Newtown had an excellent new security system;

### Questions:

During override election--what do we do safety wise about population going through schools? What about going forward? Police officers are at every polling place.

Comment: Other safety issues during elections: traffic, problems at pick-up and drop-

off

Background checks for employees? National fingerprint database--last Friday bill passed by legislature and signed by governor--all new employees go through an FBI check--a "national CORI." Before they get a license, this is done. Current staff members will undergo check over the next few years. Starting with new employees.

Trying to coordinate with non-school activities like aftercare? Are working with them to work through some of those issues.

## **Vote on whether or not PTO Council should support the overrides**

This is not about individual PTOs, but focused on PTO Council. If this is approved, PTOC will write a letter to the TAB.

**Vote for PTO Council to support overrides (1 per school, secret ballot, counted after meeting): 17 yes 0 no 1 abstained**

### **Comments**

The Angier PTO Executive Committee voted in support of the overrides.

Some school councils are voting, but only parent members...teachers are not supposed to be part of the official vote.

Last time, parents got home late and figured that the vote had passed and that they didn't need to run out at the last minute—outreach to these groups is important.

Building Newton's Future is gathering endorsements from non-school groups.

Info about absentee voting will be forthcoming through the PTO Council listserve.

## **Other PTO Council Items**

**Laura Holt:** introduced herself, serves on Citywide Safety Team, The Newton Partnership, and the Health and Wellness comm.

**Debby Belt:** organizing event "Demystifying Teen Relationships" on Monday, February 11 at 7 pm at Newton South –Seashole Auditorium. Debby told a personal story of how domestic violence affected a member of her family. This event will explain signs of domestic violence, how to be a responsible bystander, and gives kids the tools to stand up to the problem. Part 1 is for parents and Debby encourages PTOs to get the word out to parents; program for students at NSHS on Feb 13 where they can come and take workshops. If it goes well, can do at NNHS.

**3rd Just Think Teen Expo on January 29<sup>th</sup>:** a lot of people from different agencies that

support teens--at North during the day, and teens and parents in the evening. Electronic information coming soon, flyers passed out.

**Comments:**

It can be challenging to get parents to come out at night.

[www.everydaysexism.org](http://www.everydaysexism.org) —website in UK collects posts from women who have experienced instances of sexism. This has astonished parents to find how many schoolchildren are encountering sexism during their day.