

MINUTES
WEST WARWICK SCHOOL COMMITTEE
SPECIAL JOINT MEETING WITH
WEST WARWICK TOWN COUNCIL
JUNE 12, 2014
WEST WARWICK HIGH SCHOOL
WEBSTER KNIGHT DRIVE
7:00 P.M.

This meeting was called to order by Marianne Kelly, Town Clerk.

Members Present: Sean M. Murphy, Chairperson
Christopher R. Messier, Clerk
Stephen H. Lawton

Members Absent: Elizabeth B. Brunero, Vice-Chairperson
Joseph Florio, Jr.

Administrators Present: Karen A. Tarasevich, Superintendent of Schools
James Monti, Director of Educational Reform,
Compliance, and Technology
Kenneth Townsend, Director of Property Services and
Transportation

Recording Secretary: Michelle M. Colozzo

1. Open Session **Open Session**

Ms. Marianne Kelly, Town Clerk, opened the meeting at 7:00 P.M.

2. Roll Call **Roll Call**

The following School Committee members were present: Mr. Murphy, Mr. Messier, and Mr. Lawton. Mrs. Brunero and Mr. Florio were absent.

The following Town Council members were present: Mr. Gosselin, Mr. Giroux, Mr. Padula, Mr. Tucker, and Mr. Kenahan.

Special Joint Meeting with West Warwick Town Council Minutes

June 12, 2014

Page 2 of 11

3. **Resolution to support the exclusion of the Town of West Warwick as a proposed sending district to the Kent County Prep Mayoral Academy Charter School (sponsored by Councilman Kenahan)**

Resolution to support the exclusion of the Town of West Warwick as a proposed sending district to the Kent County Prep Mayoral Academy Charter School (Sponsored by Councilman Kenahan)

Fred Presley said he spoke with Mike Magee from the Mayoral Academy and he is here this evening.

Mr. Mike Magee addressed the Town Council and School Committee.

Mr. Magee thanked the Town Council and School Committee for giving him the opportunity to speak. He said he spoke to Mr. Presley earlier today and he wanted to give an update; he said Jessica Waters, the founding leader, is also here. He said they would like to postpone the special hearings on the Kent County proposal and also notified people today that they are planning to amend the proposal that would include statewide enrollment that would not name West Warwick as one of the enrolling communities and would minimize the impact of the school on any one community.

Mr. Magee said he has been talking to municipal leaders in these three communities for quite some time. He said he has become aware that West Warwick has a very unique fiscal situation, and he wants to be sensitive to that and he does appreciate that. He said that in these Rhode Island communities, a little less than 1% of students attend charter schools. In Providence, Pawtucket, and Cumberland, 8-10% of students attend charter schools. He said he understands West Warwick is very concerned about the fiscal impact of a charter school at this time. Mr. Magee said they are looking for great educators to expand public school opportunities, and Jessica Waters is an outstanding administrator who has developed a very innovative school plan.

Mr. Padula said he has a problem because he heard about this through a constituent first and then through the newspaper—we were never notified that our name was going to be put on the Mayoral Academy—the

Special Joint Meeting with West Warwick Town Council Minutes
June 12, 2014
Page 3 of 11

Mayor of Warwick, Mayor McKee, and Coventry knew about that, but West Warwick was named without any input—we were left in the dark.

Mr. Gosselin said Mr. Magee had said he spoke to the leadership in all three towns. Mr. Presley said they met with us and in subsequent meetings, folks from the School Department, to let us know they were thinking about it. Mrs. Tarasevich said we did meet in Mr. Presley's office, for information. Mr. Magee said if we handled it wrong, we certainly do apologize.

Mr. Padula said we only had a couple of days to do this—we want to be able to discuss the pros and cons.

Mr. Gosselin said he knows a year ago, the Council President and the Town Manager in Coventry did call him about Maisie Quinn School. Mr. Magee said despite the fact that we are amending the application, we would still be happy to talk to you. Mr. Murphy asked could West Warwick students attend?

Mr. Magee said any student in Rhode Island could technically enroll in the school. He said we are very sensitive to the situation—we would be happy to continue conversations so that you are comfortable with it.

Mr. Tucker asked how will it minimize the financial impact on any community—how much do you think it will affect us? Mr. Magee said it will depend on the enrollment. The fiscal impact of a charter school is currently just like students going to a private school or leaving the state. To minimize the fiscal impact, you have to minimize the number of students attending.

Our goal will be to make sure the plan doesn't impact you in a way that you are not comfortable with. There are a number of statewide charter schools in Rhode Island that West Warwick students are currently eligible to attend. For whatever reason, attendance by West Warwick students is very low. There are ways to limit attendance from one community to another.

Mr. Gosselin said he thinks the biggest concern is the five year plan that we have been working on for a couple of years—it's been approved on the town side and the school side. This seems to be a hiccup in our plan.

Special Joint Meeting with West Warwick Town Council Minutes

June 12, 2014

Page 4 of 11

Mr. Magee said Mr. Presley gave him a call and spoke about why it's a unique situation in West Warwick.

Mrs. Tarasevich said the five-year plan was approved and the budget; and even with the approved budget, we still have a lot of needs that we need to fund so any impact on the budget would be significant.

Mr. Magee said we will not put something in place that will cause a great deal of concern.

Mrs. Tarasevich said with the revised plan and revised application and enrollment process, and the numbers of students, back to Mr. Padula's original point, what would be the plan to involve the leaders? Mr. Magee said he would be happy to start that conversation; it's very important to discuss, but we would want to do it in a way that doesn't have an impact that's unacceptable.

Mr. Murphy asked where's the oversight of this school in West Warwick? Mr. Magee said charter schools are effectively state schools—a charter is basically a license to open a new public school—that's the way it works in most states. Now you have millions of kids in charter schools across the country. In terms of oversight, the state board of education oversees charter schools and charter schools have to be certified under the same system of ranking, subject to the same types of interventions if they are not doing well. Mayoral academies do have an educational leader and by statute, they have to have the mayor or town administrator and other representatives who have to be members of the enrolling communities. The charter schools can have anyone, but mayoral academies have to have local people. Mr. Messier asked if you are going to open it up to a statewide level, does that mean you will need a local member of every community? Mr. Magee said we would look to the community that has the most enrolled students and have representation from that community.

Ms. Jessica Waters addressed the Town Council and School Committee. She spoke about the obstacles she had faced in her childhood and young adulthood and how she had earned her GED and then went on to CCRI and Rhode Island College and got a degree in

Special Joint Meeting with West Warwick Town Council Minutes
June 12, 2014
Page 5 of 11

Science. Ms. Waters said she was hired by Beacon Charter High School and in 2012 received the Peter McWalters Educational Excellence Award; and then she had an opportunity to travel around as the Rhode Island Teacher of the Year. After the Rhode Island Teacher of the Year experience, she said she wanted to have a bigger impact on students in Rhode Island; and at the same time, she was starting to think how students were changing which all led to extensive research on personalized learning structures with differentiated learning—how can you meet the needs of all students. Ms. Waters said her vision is this Mayoral Academy and leveraging technology to meet kids where they are but still maintain the collaboration between students in projects and still maintain one on one. They will focus on four areas:

1. Students will graduate ready to succeed in college or career path.
2. Develop mentoring or connection building relationships.
3. Character education – social and emotional learning – doing things more holistically – talking to students about perseverance – obstacles she had to overcome.
4. Provide personalized instruction.

Ms. Waters said she can promise two things.

1. She will give her all for students to be successful.
2. She will do everything to cooperate with district schools—work with school leaders to realize success for all kids.

George Landrie of 15 Gilcrest Drive addressed the School Committee and Town Council. Mr. Landrie asked how much per student would you be taking out of the public schools to fund charter schools?

Mr. Magee said it would be under the same funding system the Rhode Island state funding policy and formula—essentially funding the schools where the students attend currently. That system is not fully phased in, and it's a little bit complicated. Currently

Special Joint Meeting with West Warwick Town Council Minutes

June 12, 2014

Page 6 of 11

students in West Warwick have less funds going with them than they would receive in a district school by a small amount. Whatever West Warwick average per pupil revenue is, slightly less than that would go to the charter school. When it is fully phased in, the money they receive for the public school, the charter school or technical school would receive that.

Mr. Murphy asked do you start with your budget first or do you start with students first? Mr. Magee said in terms of founding a new public school, there are a lot of wrinkles. We are a support organization, and we try to look at educators who have a plan. In terms of budgets, the school when fully enrolled can be sustained just on public dollars. Doing that means you have enough economy of scale to hire the people you need—too small a budget and that school may have difficulty hiring folks to make sure it does well.

Mr. Gosselin asked is it profit or non-profit?

Mr. Magee said it's non-profit because the school has to report every single dollar through UCOA. There are some different rules around budgeting—they are required by the state to keep a surplus. He thinks because they are not backed by a municipality, the state wants them to have resources. Other than that, it functions like any other public school.

Mr. Murphy asked who owns the property?

Mr. Magee said we don't know where this school will be housed particularly since we are going back to amend the application. He said we hope to open four mayoral academies and charter schools in Rhode Island can lease private facilities. Mr. Magee said there are many examples of public schools leasing when they had enrollment problems—we are leasing and renovating the former Perry Middle School in Providence in collaboration with the city. We are always in favor of trying to work with districts and municipalities in leasing public space—it is often very difficult to find space.

Mr. Magee said one reason we started the R.I.

Mayoral Academies is to help charter schools. He noted that they don't start out all grade levels at once.

Special Joint Meeting with West Warwick Town Council Minutes

June 12, 2014

Page 7 of 11

Mr. Giroux asked a question about funding, and Mr. Magee said we have the ability to partner with people to raise the kind of money we need to finance school construction—people who are willing to grant us funds are convinced the schools will be really great options for kids. Mr. Giroux asked how do you handle special needs? Mr. Magee said attendance is open and we do currently service special needs students. Typically, we have a high percentage of low income minority students. At Blackstone, we presently serve students who are wheelchair-bound and students at Bradley at high cost. He believes their Special Education population is about 12-13% and does include high cost special education. The school pays for its own food services, transportation, and high cost special needs. Mr. Murphy asked how would they pay for that? Mr. Magee said they cover it with per pupil revenues, and Mr. Murphy said so the community is paying. Mr. Magee said the money follows the students.

Mrs. Tarasevich said she would like to commend Ms. Waters on her success; it's nice to see Ms. Waters came a long way from where she started—congratulations on that. Mrs. Tarasevich said our mission as educators is to help all students; and she is proud that we offer all of the same things here, to the point where our staff is being increasingly sought out to train people in what we do because we are successful—personalized instruction, professional development, addressing all the social and emotional needs, likewise the emphasis on technology and what we have achieved in our one-to-one technology for the district. Mrs. Tarasevich said her big concern is any money that follows students will not go to support that program and will significantly impact our programs that we need those funds for.

Mr. Landrie spoke about and commended the fine high quality education and services his children receive in West Warwick. He said the city services around here—fire, police, and school teachers—are

Special Joint Meeting with West Warwick Town Council Minutes

June 12, 2014

Page 8 of 11

excellent, with one of the finest arts and music programs in the state of Rhode Island and all of New England. Mr. Landrie said if his children were to go to a charter school, the school department would lose a lot of money. The mayoral academy funding by public school money will not increase technology—we will lose advisory and professional programs, lose employees, and lose the quality of education you now have. This town just voted for an increase in funds because of the fine quality education that these teachers and these administrators are giving us.

Mr. Landrie said in Warwick where he is a teacher, they are talking about closing schools. The Mayoral Academy wants to put 504 students in Coventry in Grades 6-7-8; you take your minimum off Nathan Aldrich or Samuel Gorton. He hopes this is not part of a plan to close quality public schools in Coventry, West Warwick, or Warwick; he has spent 33 years of his life in Warwick.

Mr. Landrie said to Ms. Waters, I applaud you so much. He spoke about the difficult circumstances he had faced in his childhood and young adulthood. Mr. Landrie said he attended school at Conimicut, Hoxie, Gorton, Pilgrim, and put himself through college. He said he worked his way through college, so it can be done right here in West Warwick for any kid that is up against it—you offer this to every child in West Warwick keeping the schools just the way they are.

Mr. Gosselin said Coventry is having the same issues with the schools—he doesn't know what their plans are—both Coventry and Warwick are thinking of closing schools, and West Warwick did close Quinn to meet their budget. He said we don't have 3-4-5 high schools or middle schools—we have one high school and one middle school; we don't have the luxury of three high schools. He said he graduated from Coventry, but he had many family members come through West Warwick.

Special Joint Meeting with West Warwick Town Council Minutes
June 12, 2014
Page 9 of 11

Nick Denice of 50 St. Germaine Court, said he is a proud West Warwick High School graduate. He said he was part of the 2004 men's soccer team, and he is so proud of our teams in West Warwick; and we have a world class music program, going down to Disney or winning championships. He said as Chairman of the Pension Board, he knows the School Committee, the Town Council, and the Town Manager all worked extremely hard on the fiscal plan. Mr. Denice said the question he has for the two individuals who are here is you are proposing to take revenues out of the school system, what are the things we are going to cut—employees and retirees will have contract rights—do we underfund the pension—do we not hire police or fire—do we cut sports or music programs that are so wonderful and pull this town together? He said to come to a public body and lack information is very concerning to him. Are we going to cut public safety or underfund the pension? If we are taking revenue out of the district, where do you think the money should come from?

Mr. Magee said his purpose in coming here tonight was to be crystal clear about amending the application so West Warwick won't have a significant impact. He said we are very sensitive to the feedback we have gotten from you. Mr. Messier said you are amending the plan so it won't have any direct impact on West Warwick; but if you are opening it to the whole state and at any time our students can go, that will impact our budget. Mr. Magee said they are going to try to design something in line with the state and federal law in such a way that it wouldn't impact West Warwick's budget. Mr. Messier said the only way to do that is to put in excluding West Warwick as a sending district.

Mr. Williamson said the legislature drafted by Senator Satchell and Representative Serpa proposes that West Warwick be exempt from being a sending town. He said he thinks the town can appreciate the comments made by Mr. Magee and Ms. Waters, but this should have been done prior to the submission to RIDE. There needs to be communication in this type of endeavor because of where we are with finances.

Special Joint Meeting with West Warwick Town Council Minutes

June 12, 2014

Page 10 of 11

Mr. Williamson said he spent 18 years in the General Assembly; in West Warwick, we need a guarantee that there won't be any significant impact. Third parties are looking at our town and giving ratings.

Mr. Magee said we are going to start the process of talking to RIDE—the goal is not to have an impact on West Warwick. Mr. Williamson said the numbers don't work well with our five-year plan. Mr. Magee said we appreciate the time—we will be speaking to RIDE and we are happy to stay in close communication with you. Mrs. Tarasevich said most cities and towns have the same funding problems as we have experienced this year, and the collaborative conversation is the only way to work it out.

4. Public Comment

Public Comment

Mr. George Landrie said he is very passionate about public education; he is a teacher at Tollgate, and it really disturbs him that there will be a charter school. He said Teach for America, which is a program for people who have a Bachelor's Degree and go through a high intensive training and then are put in a classroom, has been an abysmal failure across the country. It makes him very disheartened to hear that a charter school will go into Kent County—it will siphon off millions of dollars needed to support the public schools. He said the public schools are doing a good job and to keep up the good work.

Mr. Sean Doyle commended the teachers who he represents for stepping up big time to fund the pension.

Mr. Jim Monti of 40 Gilcrest Drive said regarding NECAP scores, when we actually look at students who started in third grade with us, NECAP reading scores of proficient or proficient with distinction start at 59-60 and when they leave it's 82-83—there is tremendous growth in reading scores. Looking at cohorts of kids who started with us, kids that started in 1st grade or Kindergarten, their scores are 89%--they start to look a little like East Greenwich. Mr. Monti

Special Joint Meeting with West Warwick Town Council Minutes

June 12, 2014

Page 11 of 11

said we are very proud of the work that the teachers, administrators, and parents do in the education of kids. We don't see a decline of students—we see quite an improvement. He said he spoke to an administrator in the Town of Cumberland today. They actually fund two school districts—the public school and the Mayoral Academy--\$4 million a year goes out the door—no one anticipated this. No one was really unhappy; the people in Cumberland say they were really happy. At this point in time, they are struggling with the kind of impact that charter schools have on their individual district.

5 Adjournment

Adjournment

Meeting adjourned by the Town Council at 8:04 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Christopher R. Messier, Clerk

Michelle M. Colozzo, Recorder