

Finance Committee Minutes
FINAL

Date: 14 April 2020

Scheduled Start Time: 6:00PM

Location:
Online/Zoom Meeting

Tri-Board Meeting
School Committee, Select Board and Finance Committee

Members Present

X	Scott Warnetski, Chair	X	Ryan Turncliff
	Jonathan Moore, Vice Chair		Ed Hart
X	Jenn Cooney, Secretary		Ashwini Chitnavis
X	Jack Walsh		

Guests Present

X	Michael Herbert, Town Manager (7:45 PM)	X	Presenters for the Mindess School Building Project: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jeff D'Amico, Compass Project Management • Kent Kovacs, Flansburgh Architects • Chris Schaffner, The Green Engineer
X	Jim Adams, Ashland Public Schools Superintendent		
X	Michael Cairra, Mindess School Principal		

Minutes:**1. Call to Order**

- The Chair called the meeting of the Finance Committee (the “Committee”) to order at 6:30 PM when a quorum was present. The Committee joined the meetings of the School Committee and the Select Board (together with the Committee, the “Tri-Board”) already in progress.
- At the outset of the meeting, the Chair of the Select Board read the following:

Pursuant to Governor Baker’s March 12, 2020 order suspending certain provisions of the open meeting law, we are utilizing the Zoom conferencing platform to conduct our meeting and all board and committee members are participating remotely. The goal is to maintain the spirit of the open meeting law, providing access and transparency to all proceedings. When appropriate, efforts will be made to allow for public participation through the Zoom platform.

- The Chair of the Select Board also noted that the meeting was being broadcast and recorded by WACA TV and live on Facebook. He also announced a change

in the order of the meeting agenda to defer the COVID-19 update to later in the meeting to accommodate the schedule of the Town Manager.

2. Discussion of Mindess School Building Project Recommendation

- Mr. Kendall, School Committee member and representing the Mindess School Building Committee, provided a brief overview of the committee's recent activity, including its meeting on March 31, 2020 at which the committee engaged in a robust discussion of all of the building options and made its recommendation to move forward with Option 2D.2 on the current Mindess School site. Mr. Kendall noted that a public forum was held on April 7, 2020. He then introduced the presentation for the Tri-Board meeting, explaining that the focus would be on the Option 2D.2 recommendation given previous presentations to the Tri-Board covering the alternative options.

Materials presented during the meeting are located here:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/14e3CS5BvCDa9KfEZMhOn4gVQsAWwAAPd/view>

- Mr. Schaffner explained the sustainability features and design options in light of the net-zero resolution previously approved by Ashland Town Meeting, focusing his presentation on the differences between the Net-Zero and Net-Zero Ready (hybrid) building options. He noted that the building will meet (and exceed) the MSBA green school requirements.
- Mr. Kovacs then provided an overview of the two sites (existing Mindess School site and Middle School site) and design alternatives.
 - With respect to education plan considerations, Mr. Kovacs discussed the timeline, including district and community discussion of the grade configuration options, and the decision by the School Committee on February 26, 2020 to move forward with the grade 3-5 configuration (635 students).
 - Mr. Kovacs explained the key considerations for the selection of Option 2D.2 at the current Mindess School site, including benefits of the larger site, reimbursement eligibility for demolition of the existing building, field availability and improvement, and expansion opportunity going forward. Mr. Kovacs also presented the design and mapping of Option 2D.2
 - Mr. Cairra discussed the academic benefits provided by Option 2D.2, including the three two-story academic "houses" with common areas providing for horizontal grade-level and vertical multi-grade collaboration. He explained that the selected option supported the new unified Mindess School program.
- Mr. Kovacs then provided an overview of the project costs, including but not limited to site preparation for the 16+ acres (including demolition of existing building), storm water management system, plant and tree allowance, gymnasium extension to match current size, mechanical, electrical and plumbing systems at

baseline for option using geothermal with backup generator, LED lighting, insulated envelope, sunshades, and certain interior building components typical for an elementary school.

- Mr. D’Amico explained the costs of the alternative options and presented the estimated cost for Option 2D.2 at \$84.1 million (\$67.3 million construction costs plus \$16.8 million soft costs). He noted that the building square footage costs between the Mindess School site and Middle School site options are similar, and explained that the cost differential primarily relate to increased site work at the Mindess School due to size, field replacement, and demolition.
- Mr. Kovacs then discussed the timeline moving forward, including voting by Ashland residents.
- Tri-Board members were then given the opportunity to provide comment or ask questions. Mr. Kendall and Ms. Greaves commented on their experience serving on the Mindess Building Committee and noted the thorough process leading to the recommendation. The Tri-Board asked questions and discussed flexibility for fluctuating enrollment, demolition of the existing Mindess Building, variance around the estimate of costs, clarification of included costs as they related to the sustainability options and additional reimbursement opportunities. Mr. D’Amico provided clarification around the additional 2% MSBA reimbursement for inclusion of sustainability features. He further explained that, although the total potential reimbursement rate was 55.5%, when taking into account certain caps, the realized total reimbursement will be closer to mid-40%. He further noted that, unlike other building projects, Town Meeting will vote before having bids in hand and the vote will include a “not to exceed” amount.
- The Chairs then provided an opportunity for public comment and questions. Mr. Marshquist, Chair of the Sustainability Committee, stated that they had been involved throughout the process and supported many of the proposed features. He indicated that the Sustainability Committee preferred the all-electric heat option, but felt the hybrid approach was also a good compromise. He further commented on how the improved air quality and temperature control in the new building will provide a better learning environment for students.

3. Selection of Mindess School Building Project Preferred Design Option

- It was noted that votes of the Select Board and School Committee were required for submission to the MSBA, and that the Mindess Building Committee was also seeking support from the Finance Committee.
- Following unanimous votes from the Select Board and School Committee, the Finance Committee recommended to submit Option 2d.2 as the preferred option for submission to the MSBA:
 - Motion: Ryan Turncliff
 - Seconded: Jenn Cooney
 - Vote 4-0

4. Update on the Public Safety Building Project

- Mr. Magnani, member of the Select Board and representing the Public Safety Building Committee, noted that the meeting scheduled for earlier in the afternoon had been re-scheduled to Thursday, April 16, 2020 at 4pm with discussion to focus on the HVAC system for the new building. He noted that the meeting would be held via Zoom and can be accessed with meeting number **526 885 695**. Mr. Magnani also stated that architects were actively working to meet deadlines.

5. COVID-19 Update

- Mr. Herbert provided an update on COVID-19 cases in Ashland and his appointment of Sargent Ed Berman from the Ashland Police Department as Task Force Lead. He discussed various services offered by the town, including additional social services to address food insecurity.
- Mr. Herbert then discussed highlights from the state legislature's economic roundtable held earlier in the day. He relayed that the worst-case scenario showed state revenues declining 20% (compared to 13% decline during 2008-2009 recession), but noted that it was too early to accurately determine the impact on the budget. He stated that the town was looking at moving Town Meeting to June, and hoped that any revised state aid numbers would be available at that time.
- Mr. Herbert noted that Ashland's stabilization fund is in significantly better shape (approximately \$7 million) than 2008 (approximately \$600k). He also discussed the possibility of availability stimulus funds for building projects.
- Members of the Tri-Board asked questions about the state's rainy day fund and distribution of CARES Act funds. Mr. Herbert noted that distribution of funds were unclear and unknown at this time, but indicated there was a concerted effort to ensure municipalities received funds.
- At this time, the Chair of the School Committee asked Mr. Adams to provide an update. Mr. Adams stated that on April 11, 2020 a bill to cancel MCAS testing for the current year was signed by Governor Baker. Mr. Adams said that he expected guidance on extended closure of schools in the coming days. He explained that the estimated peak for Massachusetts continues to be extended later in the month, and that the CDC recommends there should be four weeks of continual decline before opening schools. Mr. Adams also noted the potential for staggered school openings in the Fall.

6. Adjourn

- Following adjournment of the School Committee and Select Board meetings and there being no further business, the Committee adjourned the meeting:
 - Motion: Ryan Turncliff
 - Seconded: Jenn Cooney
 - Vote 4-0

- Meeting adjourned at 7:33 PM

List of Documents Presented at Meeting:

Mindess School Building Project:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/14e3CS5BvCDa9KfEZMhOn4gVQsAWwAAPd/view>