



**Town of Amherst  
Special Joint Town Council and School Committee Meeting  
Presentation on the Crocker Farm School Expansion Report  
Tuesday, July 28, 2020  
7:30 p.m.  
Virtual Meeting  
Minutes**

Complete video is available online: <https://amherstmedia.org/content/amherst-town-council-amherst-school-committee-joint-meeting-july-28-2020>

**1. Call to Order**

Councilors Participating Remotely: Councilors Bahl-Milne, Brewer, De Angelis, DuMont, Griesemer, Hanneke, Pam, Ross, Ryan, Schoen, Schreiber, and Steinberg

Councilors Absent: Councilor Swartz

School Committee Members Participating Remotely: Peter Demling, Ben Herrington, Heather Lord, Allison McDonald, Kerry Spitzer,

School Committee Members Absent: None

Others Participating Remotely: Town Manager Paul Bockelman, Superintendent of Schools Michael Morris, Crocker Farm School Principal Derek Shea, IT Director Sean Hannon, Clerk of the Council Athena O’Keeffe, TSKP Representatives Ryszard Szczypek and Jesse Saylor, and Crocker Farm Feasibility Study Committee Members Maria Kopicki and Toni Cunningham

After confirming participants could hear and be heard, President Griesemer declared the presence of a quorum, called the meeting to order at 7:33 p.m. and announced audio and video recording by Amherst Media.

School Committee Chair Allison McDonald confirmed members could hear and be heard and called the meeting of the School Committee to order at 7:34 p.m.

Note: Pursuant to Governor Baker’s March 12, 2020 Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c. 30A, §18, this meeting of the Town Council was conducted via remote participation.

**2. Announcements**

Upcoming Town Council Meetings:

- Regular Town Council Meeting: August 3, 2020 6:30 p.m.
- Regular Town Council Meeting: August 17, 2020 5:00 p.m. - The Council reading period will begin at 5:00 pm, the meeting agenda will begin at 7:00 pm
- Regular Town Council Meeting: August 31, 2020 6:30 p.m.

Upcoming Council Committee Meetings:

- Community Resources Committee: August 4, 2020 2:00 p.m.
- Finance Committee: TBD
- Governance, Organization, and Legislation Committee: July 29, 2020 10:30 a.m.
- Town Services and Outreach Committee: August 6, 2020 6:30 p.m.

All meeting agendas and details are posted at [www.amherstma.gov/calendar](http://www.amherstma.gov/calendar)

### **3. Presentations and Discussion**

#### **a. Crocker Farm School Expansion Report**

President Griesemer noted the study was conducted due to a resident request to the Joint Capital Planning Committee, which the Town Manager then included in the Capital Plan. The scope of the purpose of the study was to estimate the useful life of the current building and to explore possible additions and modifications in light of possible district reconfiguration.

TSKP Studio representatives Jesse Saylor and Ryszard Szczypek spoke about the following:

- Facility needs: roof leaks, inadequate security, HVAC, ADA non-compliance
- Currently unmet educational needs: half sized gymnasium, PreK specialist space, instrumental music space, staff lunch room, large conference room for IEPs, break out space, part time staff/testing room, undersized OT/PT spaces, limited food storage, cafeteria lacks acoustical treatment, classroom cubbies too large, visual display lacking in corridors
- Enrollment scenarios: K-5 and K-6, consolidated school K-5 or K-6 with/without PreK
- Range of addition options between 7,850-18,260 square feet or base repair option to address facility needs alone
- Flexibility of enrollment scenarios within addition options
- Parking capacity and space for busses and vans
- Detailed space allocation plans
- Sub option for small group instruction rooms
- Costs

Superintendent Michael Morris noted sub-rooms are used at Pelham Elementary School.

Demling stated the purpose of the study was to expand Crocker Farm, that a study on a potential new school building has not begun yet, and expressed concern about cost estimates included in the presentation that are outside the scope of the study.

Councilor De Angelis commented that the presentation gives insight and that Crocker Farm needs work now.

Councilor DuMont spoke about the possibility that Crocker Farm students would feel “second class” to students attending a new school, appreciated that the study considered not using fossil fuels and the solar-readiness of the roof, and asked about the firm’s experience with net zero buildings.

J. Saylor responded that the firm has worked on four net-zero school buildings in Connecticut and the first LEED Silver certified school building in the state of Connecticut.

Councilor Schoen asked about the options, student capacity at Crocker in the various options, and if a solution would be to put PreK classes at a different school.

J. Saylor responded that capacity could be increased at Crocker Farm if preK is moved to another school.

Councilor Pam asked about fresh air in classrooms.

J. Saylor responded that courtyards exist in the school now which allow fresh air, the renovation approach maintains the courtyards, and that general education classrooms would be moved to the perimeter of the school.

Councilor Pam spoke about the need for additional space and fresh air in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Councilor Bahl-Milne joined the meeting at 8:09 p.m.

McDonald asked about the enrollment scenarios.

J. Saylor responded that scenario 5 shows the current enrollment capacity of 435 students.

McDonald stated that cost scenarios for a new school building should not appear in the report, the report does not reflect current cost estimates and assumes that those costs have been studied, and that there are too many assumptions about those costs.

Councilor Schreiber spoke about social distancing and COVID-19, and stated that it is hard to look at occupancy numbers in the middle of a pandemic.

Ryszard Szczypek spoke about the firm's experience with other schools including air filtration systems and touchless bathrooms.

Councilor Hanneke asked about difference between K-5 and K-6 enrollment numbers, and if cost estimates include net zero for the addition.

J. Saylor responded that the additions are estimated with net zero, and spoke about enrollment scenarios.

Councilor Steinberg spoke about the cost estimates and asked if scenarios can be completed without closing the school for a period for construction, or if a swing location would be needed.

J. Saylor responded that outside swing space would not be needed in these scenarios.

President Griesemer noted the presentation is a public record, but the costs could be moved to an appendix; it can be helpful to have a sense of cost.

Councilor Brewer stated that it is not helpful to publish information with an assumption of Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) investment, and asked for an explanation why there is no written report.

J. Saylor responded that there is a 300 page report that was created, there are space summaries for all five enrollment scenarios, and an explanation of the MSBA participation and reimbursement rates in the report, and it was part of the RFP to develop cost estimates for the consolidated school.

Councilor Schoen asked about space and security regarding moving cubbies to hallways.

J. Saylor responded that the younger classrooms would keep cubbies in the classrooms and that lockers would replace cubbies in the hallway for older students.

Demling stated there is community disagreement about options and costs, and that we need to make sure the studies are in the proper scope and that the information is clear.

Spitzer asked about a cap of 600 students at a consolidated school.

M. Morris responded that the statement of interest indicated a school of no larger than 600 students, there are various ways of achieving that including moving the sixth grade to the middle school or expanding Crocker Farm School. The information in the study is incredibly useful when submitting enrollment scenarios for study to the MSBA.

Councilor Pam asked for more information about security changes.

J. Saylor spoke about the changes at the main entrance, limited access to a new gym and cafeteria after school hours, and addition of intrusion-resistance security film on outside windows.

Councilor Hanneke asked what classroom sizes were assumed, if classroom sizes are in line with MSBA recommendations or smaller, asked about School Committee guidelines, and MSBA reimbursement calculations.

J. Saylor responded that the firm was working with an assumption of 20 students per classroom for this study which is in line with MSBA guidelines, the MSBA guidelines vary depending on grade level, and that the study built the class size numbers into the options and reimbursement percentage projections.

M. Morris added that the School Committee's class size guidelines are available online, and the guidelines are lower than the MSBA guidelines.

Maria Kopicki stated that if the consolidated school has a 600 student capacity with a K-5 grade span, it would mean Crocker's capacity would be 240 students with two classes per grade and would bring into question the distribution of special education. Kopicki stated the numbers in the estimates were derived from the Fort River Feasibility Study which looked at 315, 360, 420, and 460 students and examined space summaries. Kopicki went on to state the cost estimate numbers were pulled from the Fort River study and assumed a modest MSBA reimbursement, and that the current study provides a better understanding of educational needs that are not being met.

Demling stated that it was not within the scope of the study to determine whether Crocker is meeting educational needs of students, and that it is not accurate to state that Crocker is not meeting students' educational needs.

Crocker Farm School Principal Derek Shea stated that he has worked with the schools for almost 24 years, that Crocker is a beautiful school with wonderful staff and a fabulous school community. Shea stated that last year the school educated 416 children and employed approximately 100 teachers and staff. Shea stated that students at Crocker students will not be “second class.” Shea added that improvements would be welcome and that the school does a tremendous job of meeting the needs of the students.

Herrington spoke as a member of both the School Committee and the Crocker Farm Building Feasibility Study Committee, stating that the costs are estimates and not exact numbers, that comparison is useful, and that it has been a great experience working with the committee.

4. **General Public Comment - None**
5. **Topics Not Reasonably Anticipated by the Chair 48 Hours in Advance of the Meeting**
6. **Executive Session – None**
7. **Adjourn**

MOTION McDonald moved, second by Lord, to adjourn the meeting of the School Committee.

VOTED 5-0 by roll call (Demling, Herrington, Lord, McDonald, and Spitzer voted Yes) to adjourn the meeting of the School Committee.

President Griesemer declared the Town Council meeting adjourned at 9:10 p.m. on July 28, 2020.

Respectfully submitted,



Athena O'Keefe  
Clerk of the Council

**Record of Agenda Packet Materials and Documents Presented**

00. 07-28-2020 FINAL Town Council School Committee Agenda - Crocker Farm Expansion Presentation

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