

Letters About School District Meeting

The resistance by the Andover School Board to not renew the lease of the Hamp House to the Andover After School Program (AASP) has been well documented.

The recent call by the School Board chair to the State Fire Marshal was yet again another failed attempt. The State Fire Marshal has cited AE/MS for many fire safety violations that have been known about by the School Board for several years. Much discussion has taken place about the fire safety concerns, yet little or no action has happened to ensure the safety of our children while they are at school.

The public should know that the School Board has expended many hours of their time and \$1,089.50 for Steffensen Engineering to review and report the Hamp House is in good condition. They have also expended \$700 on legal fees through January. This does not include legal consultation that has taken place in February. Close to \$2,000 in taxpayer monies has been expended in an attempt to thwart AASP's use of the Hamp House.

Might these funds have been better used to fix some fire safety issues at AE/MS?

Bonny Morris

Chair, Andover After School Program

I am writing out of utter frustration regarding a situation that has existed in our small town for far too long. It is my opinion that our School Board is grossly misrepresenting and misleading our townspeople.

The chair and several other members seem to have lost sight of their roles as elected officials by our community. Instead of spending their volunteered time and our cumulatively provided resources to pursue important topics such as school curriculum, fire safety, and building maintenance, they seem to have chosen to focus almost entirely on getting rid of the Hamp House.

This self-serving purpose has wasted a lot of our tax money on legal fees and engineer reports and the better part of their term and accomplishes nothing positive. Their relentless underhanded attacks have proven to be unfounded every time. When asked why they want this valuable resource either torn down or, preferably to the chair of the School Board, burned to the ground, no valid or reasonable explanation has ever been provided.

The Hamp House serves as the nearest thing Andover has to a community center. Its current principle purpose is for the much-needed Andover After School Program. It also serves as a safe meeting place for weekly Boy Scout meetings and storage for the Andover Recreation Committee and Andover One Wheelers and more.

In today's global economy, it is well

beyond me that anybody would even consider burning such a valuable resource, but it angers me that a board of trusted elected officials can pursue such frivolous goals.

Without the Hamp House, the After School Program will most likely be moved into the actual school itself. Does the School Board remember their arguments of recent years of the overcrowded school building when they proposed further expansions to the school itself?

Further I would like to say that I'm embarrassed when I watch the School Board meetings' attacks on our local television channel. I really hope other towns don't get this programming, as it would reflect poorly on our community.

In closing, I commend the Andover After School chair and board members for their dedication to their program and would encourage the School Board to take lessons from them. With elections drawing near I want to encourage the townspeople to vote for the five new candidates that are running. They have seen the problems, are all capable, and are hungry for change.

John F. Morris

The Beacon also received an anonymous letter about the Hamp House. Like most newspapers, it is the Beacon's policy not to publish anonymous letters.

Let us not forget this is year three of the school district's corrective maintenance plan developed and approved at the School District Meeting of 2007 following defeat of the proposed addition of a new gymnasium and other facilities to the Andover Elementary/Middle School (AE/MS).

Projects recommended for the first two years – exterior surface of the 1934 section, communication system, door locks, and roof surface repair – have been accomplished. Now it is time for year three: the gym floor. But it doesn't appear in the school district budget proposal.

The reason provided is that the estimated cost of \$151,200 for asbestos removal and resurfacing with a maple floor would cause an undesirable increase in the tax rate in a year when tuition costs and teachers' salaries are mandating increase. This is certainly true. But did the School Board and Budget Committee have adequate information?

Let us visit the AE/MS gym with a critical eye at midday and observe the gym class in poor light on a bright winter day because large windows are opaque and broken. Dust falls from the rafters where rolls of dust are perched to fall in a cloud, and the asbestos-filled floor tiles break up with athletic action, or even finger picks by restless children.

Upon inspection last fall by SAU 46's asbestos hazard authority, recommendation was made to increase frequency of application of wax to once a month to mitigate break down of these nearly 50-year-old vinyl tiles that contain 2% chrysotile asbestos. Over 100 gallons of wax have since been purchased at a cost of \$1,275. Application requires two days, often on weekends at a much greater cost. Does this wax really protect the students, or simply add to the quantity of inhaled dust?

The American Red Cross, upon their review of the AE/MS gym, refused permission for its use as an emergency shelter because of the asbestos presence. If it's not safe for emergency use, what makes us think it is safe for everyday use by students and family functions?

Expenditure of less than half the original estimate of \$151,200 would give us a gymnasium that the school and community could be proud of. It would remedy the asbestos hazard and provide natural lighting and a safe playing surface.

The current project quotations obtained are:

Replace four window groups with Lexan/glass for safety, sunlight, and insulation: \$18,700

Clean the rafters to remove dust

build-up that is a health hazard: \$3,600
Install protective sheeting and a new all-purpose floor: \$45,000

TOTAL: \$67,300

Replacement of the opaque, broken windows with Lexan/glass for safety, sunlight, and thermal insulation has been talked about for years. Lexan is the material of our town administrator's window to the waiting room. Clear and able to resist small arms fire, it will certainly resist a high-flying baseball or basketball.

An investigative team plans to visit three more school gyms to assure the best recommendation at the lowest possible cost. The team's findings may prompt an amendment to the warrant article at the School District Meeting.

There is talk of school children safety, a greener, more energy-efficient school, an exciting learning environment. But do we mean what we voice in public? A visit to the gym certainly shook my belief in the rhetoric.

Put year three back in the school budget by your vote, yes, on Warrant Article 7 at the annual School District meeting at 7 PM in the AE/MS Gym on Monday, March 2.

Let the Eagles fly with pride! Not in a cloud of dark and dangerous dust.

Don Gould

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