

Ashland School Committee Minutes
April 9, 2025

Ashland Town Hall
101 Main Street
Select Board Meeting Room

Hybrid meeting: recorded on Zoom

Present: Laurie Tosti, Chair
Marc Terry, Vice Chair
Paul Kendall, Member
Marcy Culverwell, Member
James Adams, Superintendent
Michael Caira, Assistant Superintendent
Chris Mathieu, Director of Finance
Abhishek Karthik, student representative, Ashland High School

Absent: Tina Fitanides, Secretary

Agenda Review and adoption

Ms. Tosti reviewed the agenda items for the meeting. She took roll call and asked the School Committee members to approve the agenda as presented. Vote:

Ms. Culverwell: Present and AYE

Mr. Kendall: Present and AYE

Mr. Terry: Present and AYE

Ms. Tosti: Present and AYE

Student Advisory Council Update

Sophia Warnetski reported that the Virtual High School (VHS) courses are open for enrollment. These are a selection of online courses that are offered to students of courses that are not taught by teachers at AHS. The speaker Stephen Hill presented about substance abuse prevention to Juniors. Also, Exchange students from Japan visited for a day.

AHS Chorus participated in the recent MICCA festival. Both AHS White and Blue bands earned Silver Medals. The AMS Wind Ensemble earned a Gold Medal. The AHS Concert Choir earned a Silver Medal. Mary Nemeth, Music Director, led the AHS Concert Choir in a performance of the piece, "Connected" for the School Committee members and administrators to open the meeting.

Warrant Approvals

Between March 13, 2025 and April 9, 2025, Paul Kendall, authorized by his signature payables in the amount of \$ 944,214.27. This includes General Fund expenses of \$ 655,941.68, Revolving expenses of \$ 271,310.27, Grants expenses of \$ 16,899.39, and Meals Tax expenses of \$ 62.93.

Out-of-State Travel Proposal: Quebec City, February 2026

Alex Waldron, French teacher at AHS is proposing that a group of students join a group of students at Maynard High School on a trip to attend the Winter Carnival in Quebec City. Maynard High School hosts this trip every other year and has had great experience with the tour company that sponsors the trip. It will offer students a cultural experience and an opportunity to practice their French language. There will be options to finance the trip, and monthly payment plans will

be available. Mr. Kendall asked how do we support students needs around cost? He would like to make sure that the opportunity is inclusive and equitable to most students. Ms. Waldron noted that she is considering hosting a fundraiser to help students raise money for incidentals, tips and other extra costs. She has experience doing restaurant fundraisers with success. Mr. Terry moves to approve the Quebec City, February 2026 trip as presented. Mr. Kendall seconds the motion. Vote:

Ms. Culverwell: AYE

Mr. Kendall: AYE

Mr. Terry: AYE

Ms. Tosti: AYE

Public Hearing: Fiscal Year 2026 School Budget

Ms. Tosti opened the Public Hearing at 6:25pm. Mr. Adams reviewed that the budget review process started in November 2024. The School Committee and the administration has met every month to review the budget and spending priorities every month from November through April. They have also met with the Tri-Board Committee (School, Select Board and Finance Committee) two Saturdays to review the overall budget for the town of Ashland. The goal of the School budget for FY'26 is to be fiscally responsible, maintaining programs we have and making programs even better.

The FY'26 Superintendent's Recommended Budget is: **\$44,350,743.**

Budget Changes – At Mindess a full-time Band position will be added.

School Enrollment – numbers are flat. Staffing proposal at Pittaway - Special Education Coordinator/Director of Preschool - splitting the roles.

Per-pupil spending represents FY 2023 numbers.

Revolving Accounts

Anticipated Needs Beyond 2026

Public Comment

Diane Umholtz and Heidi Hanson from Ashland Music Association spoke. They wanted to say thank you and acknowledge that reviewing and determining a school budget is not an easy job. They feel they are getting a bargain for their children's education in Ashland. They are thrilled about the changes at the middle school to support that music program.

Liz Ackley, Board Member of Ashland Youth Basketball and Laurie Yanonne, President of AYB commented. They wanted to emphasize their priority of fixing the AMS fields and the AMS indoor basketball flooring. They are particularly concerned about player safety with the basketball courts at AMS. Ms. Tosti noted that she and the School Committee members have received letters of concern from a number of community members about the AMS fields and the safety of the basketball court at AMS. Ms. Culverwell asked, what is the best mechanism to advocate for making these improvements a priority in the town? Mr. Adams noted that they should consider attending the Town Meeting. Go to an upcoming Select Board meeting, request that this get put on the agenda.

Jason MacDonald from the Ashland Lacrosse Association commented. He asked what do other towns do to maintain their fields for town-wide usage? Mr. Adams noted that some towns have a large enough Parks and Recreation Department that maintains playing fields throughout the town. Currently, in Ashland, the School Department manages most of the available playing fields

in town. Mr. Adams noted that there needs to be a longer term solution. He also noted that rental fees from the fields do not generate enough revenue to maintain the cost of replacing a turf field.

Ms. Tosti thanked the people who attended to offer comments on the annual budget and acknowledged that she appreciates their time to contribute.

She then opened the floor to the School Committee members for their comments or questions on the FY '26 budget proposal. Mr. Kendall thanked Mr. Adams and the administrators for all their work to develop the budget. Mr. Terry also expressed appreciation for the collaborative efforts of the group. He recognized that there are a lot of good changes to come notably at the middle school for 2025-2026. Ms. Culverwell noted that it is a solid operating budget and it was a very clear and thoughtful presentation.

Ms. Tosti moved to close the public hearing, Mr. Kendall seconded the motion.

Mr. Terry then moved to approve the recommended FY '26 school budget of **\$44,350,743** as presented. Mr. Kendall seconded the motion. Vote:

Ms. Culverwell: AYE

Mr. Kendall: AYE

Mr. Terry: AYE

Ms. Tosti: AYE

Driscoll Scholarship Committee

This scholarship committee requires that a member of the School Committee participate in the selection process. Mr. Kendall moves that Laurie Tosti be nominated as the participating member. Mr. Terry seconded the motion. Vote:

Ms. Culverwell: AYE

Mr. Kendall: AYE

Mr. Terry: AYE

Ms. Tosti: AYE

Ultimate Frisbee Head Coach Athletic Stipend

As Ultimate Frisbee is a new Varsity Sport at AHS, there will be a stipend paid to the coach. The stipend will be: Step 1: \$3,375, Step 2: \$3,966, Step 3: \$4,280.

Mr. Terry moves to approve the stipend as presented. Mr. Kendall seconded the motion. Vote:

Ms. Culverwell: AYE

Mr. Kendall: AYE

Mr. Terry: AYE

Ms. Tosti: AYE

Public Hearing for School Choice Participation for 2025-2026 School Year

At 6:40pm, Ms. Tosti opened the public hearing to review School Choice for 2025-2026. Mr.

Adams reviewed with the group that annually, before May 1st, School Committees in the state need to vote on whether to participate in School Choice, or not, for the upcoming school year.

Mr. Adams presented a current enrollment spreadsheet, with recommendations for the coming year. He is recommending that the District open a total of 75 seats for the School Choice program across all grades, including 10 seats in Kindergarten and 10 seats in Grade 3.

At 6:47pm, Ms. Tosti moves to close the public hearing. Mr. Terry moves to approve Ashland's participation in the School Choice program for 2025-2026 with the 75 seats available as presented. Ms. Kendall seconded the motion. Vote:

Ms. Culverwell: AYE

Mr. Kendall: AYE

Mr. Terry: AYE

Ms. Tosti: AYE

First Read of School Committee Policies

BGB - Policy Adoption

Consent Agenda

The consent agenda includes approval of Gifts and Donations, five policies that have been reviewed and have no substantive changes, and the meeting minutes from April 2, 2024, and March 12, 2025. Mr. Terry moves to approve the Consent Agenda as presented. Mr. Kendall seconds the motion. Vote:

Ms. Culverwell: AYE

Mr. Kendall: AYE

Mr. Terry: AYE

Ms. Tosti: AYE

Reports from School Committee Members

Ms. Culverwell attended the AMS Site Council meeting. At this meeting, they reviewed the School Improvement Plan and had good conversations around ISSPs. They also discussed expectations for each grade level and demands increasing over time. They also discussed the Science MCAS at the middle school.

Mr. Kendall reported that we have received the expected tax rebate from the Mindess Project, but, unfortunately, there are restrictions on what the town can do with the money.

Mr. Terry attended the High School Site Council meeting today. The group decided to table the issue of weighted grades and weighted GPAs.

Ms. Tosti missed the most recent Warren Site Council meeting. She will be participating in the Community Read Day at Warren School along with Tina Fitanides.

At 7:56pm Mr. Kendall made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Terry seconded the motion. Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Gretchen King

Executive Administrative Assistant to the Superintendent

Documents used during the meeting

Copy of Warrant Approvals - APRIL 9, 2025

Quebec Field Trip Form - Overnight and Out of State Travel

Maynard HS&Ashland HS_26-11399_250213.pdf

Public Hearing FY 2026 School Budget

4.9.25 FY'26 Budget Hearing Presentation

Driscoll Scholarship Committee
MOA.UltimateFrisbeeHeadCoach
25-26 School Choice Recommendation
File: Red-Line BGB - POLICY ADOPTION
4/9/25 SCHOOL COMMMITTEE G&D ACCEPTANCE LOG.docx
ADDA - BACKGROUND CHECKS
ADDA-R - DCJIS MODEL CORI POLICY
BDG - SCHOOL ATTORNEY
BG - SCHOOL COMMITTEE POLICY DEVELOPMENT
IC/ICA SCHOOL YEAR/SCHOOL CALENDAR
Minutes - April 2, 2024
Minutes - March 12, 2025