

School Committee Ad Hoc Task Force on School Names

Tuesday, April 24, 2018

5:30 PM – 7:30 PM

School Committee Room, 5th Floor, Town Hall

Ad Hoc Task Force Members Present: Helen Charlupski, Barbara Brown, Malcolm Cawthorne, John Dempsey, Lloyd Gellineau, Mark Gray, Sari Gubar, Misti Jaynes, Ken Liss, Farah Mamedova, and Pam Roberts.

Staff Present: Robin Coyne.

Others Present: School Committee Chairman David Pollak, Carla Benka, Deborah Brown, Gina Crandell, Catherine Donaher, Ruth Kaplan, Bobbie Knable, Katha Seidman, and Mike Toffel.

1) Approval of Minutes of the April 3, 2018 Meeting

On a motion of Ms. Roberts and seconded by Mr. Liss, the School Committee Ad Hoc Task Force on School Names voted unanimously to approve the April 3, 2018 minutes

2) Report on April 12, 2018 School Committee Discussion of Town Meeting

Warrant Article 23. Renaming the Edward Devotion School

The School Committee had a public hearing and preliminary discussion on Article 23 on April 12, 2018, and most members voiced support for changing the name. The Advisory Committee School Subcommittee voted unanimously to recommend favorable action on Article 23, as revised. The School Committee will be discussing and possibly voting on a recommendation on the revised language on April 26, 2018.

The Ad Hoc Task Force discussed the process going forward, particularly if Town Meeting votes to support Article 23. A Town Meeting vote in favor of Article 23 would mean that the school would no longer be called the Edward Devotion School. At that point, it is likely that the Naming Committee would work with the School Committee to develop a naming process that will engage the entire town, including students.

3) Presentation of Research on Edward Devotion and the School Name

Mr. Liss summarized his research on the Devotion family and naming of the Edward Devotion School. Edward Devotion's father or grandfather was a French Huguenot (Protestant) who came to Brookline at a time when Protestants were being persecuted. He was an early settler in the Muddy River hamlet. The school is named after either his son or his grandson, the second Edward Devotion, 1668-1744. The second Edward Devotion was a resident of colonial Brookline who held several local offices and who left money in his will for the town toward the establishment of a school in the center of town. An inventory of his property compiled after his death included land, livestock, household goods and "one Negrow" valued at 30 pounds.

In 1762, the former Devotion land and house on Harvard Street reverted to Devotion's widow Mary upon the failure of Solomon Hill to pay the mortgage on the property. It was then sold, and the town, as stipulated in the will, received funds. In 1837, these funds were recorded as amounting to \$2,281.01. The town added additional funds

received from the Federal government, bringing the total amount to just over \$4,500. In 1844, the money in the Edward Devotion Fund was allocated toward the construction of the new Brookline Town Hall on Prospect Street, near the location of the current Town Hall. The building contained two rooms used as school rooms. Town Meeting, apparently considering the use of the funds for the Town Hall not to have fulfilled Devotion's bequest, voted to add \$5,000 to the Devotion Fund to be put toward expansion of the Brookline High School on School Street. A large hall in the school was named the Edward Devotion Hall in recognition of Devotion's bequest, and a plaque commemorating his gift was placed in the school. In 1891, a large portion of the former Edward Devotion property, including the Edward Devotion House, was purchased by the Town from the estate of a later owner, Nahum Smith, for \$61,000. The property had passed through several owners after 1762, including William Marshall, Israel Thorndike, and George Babcock. In 1892, a new school named the Edward Devotion School was built on the site. Mr. Liss reported that he found no records from the 1890s regarding the discussion of the choice of the school name, though he reviewed relevant School Committee records and Town newspapers.

Task Force members reported on feedback they have received from current and former Edward Devotion School students, parents, and staff, as well as other members of the community, regarding the possible renaming of the school. There were strong opinions and emotions on both sides of the issue.

4) Consideration of Timeline to Present a Report and/or Recommendation to the School Committee regarding the Edward Devotion School Name

The consensus of the Ad Hoc Task Force was that it would be helpful to give guidance on the Edward Devotion question at this stage in the process, if possible. The School Committee will be taking up Article 23 on April 26, 2018 and Town Meeting will be considering the Article in May. The local debate is taking place amid a national conversation on the propriety of honoring slaveholders and supporters of slavery on public and private buildings and monuments. The Devotion question provides an opportunity to recognize and discuss the fact that slavery and its legacy had and have an impact in Brookline as well as nationally. The Ad Hoc Task Force will continue to meet and to research all Brookline school names and the naming process, and will then issue a full report.

5) Possible Vote to Present a Report and/or Recommendation to the School Committee regarding the Edward Devotion School Name

The Ad Hoc Task Force members had a lengthy discussion on the arguments for and against keeping the name. Members honestly recounted the arguments they had heard as well as arguments they believed on both sides, so that both sides would get a full hearing.

For Name Change: Edward Devotion was a slaveholder and our schools should not be named after slaveholders; the name of our schools should be consistent with 21st century values and the town's commitment to racial equity, diversity and inclusion; school names need to be held to a higher standard than the names of other public institutions because young children through no choice of their own assume the name of a school into their

core identity; need to consider the social emotional impact on our students, particularly students of color; we change names all the time; if people fully understood the reasons for the name change, they might be more supportive; could change the name from Edward Devotion to Devotion; important to be clear that the Ad Hoc Task Force will be looking at the names of all of the schools in town.

Against Name Change: Devotion is an important part of people's identity and history that they do not want to lose; we should teach the history of slavery in Brookline and not try to erase it; would a school name change mean we would then change the name of non-school public institutions and streets, e.g., Washington Street; it is the only school in the world with this name; the school community had not been largely involved in the process leading to the proposed name change.

Ms. Jaynes expressed her belief that Devotion families are attached to their experience at the school and that the name is the word used to express this experience/connection.

The Ad Hoc Task Force discussed the process going forward if Town Meeting decides to change the name and the need to engage the entire community.

On a motion of Ms. Charlupski seconded by Mr. Gellineau, the School Committee Ad Hoc Task Force on School Names voted unanimously to recommend that the School Committee vote favorably on Town Meeting Warrant Article 23 calling for the removal of Edward Devotion's name from the Edward Devotion School.

Mr. Liss offered to prepare a draft statement to the School Committee expressing support for Article 23. The draft statement will be sent to Ad Hoc Task Force members and a discussion and possible vote will take place at the next meeting.

6) Update on Ad Hoc Task Force Research on the Names of Other Brookline Schools

Because of the lateness of the hour, this item was postponed until the next meeting.

7) Next Steps and Agenda for Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Ad Hoc Task Force will take place on Monday, April 30, 2018, 5:30 PM-7:00 PM, in the Walsh School Committee Room, 5th Floor, Town Hall. The agenda will include consideration and possible vote on an Ad Hoc Task Force statement to the School Committee expressing support for Town meeting Warrant Article 23 and presentation of Ad Hoc Task Force research on the names of other Brookline schools.

The meeting adjourned at 7:30 PM.