



## **Assabet Valley Collaborative Board of Directors Meeting**

February 26, 2021 -- 9:00-10:00 a.m.

Virtually via teleconference

### **MINUTES (APPROVED)**

**Present:** Amber Bock (9:16), Marco Rodrigues, Jay Cummings, Greg Martineau, Brian Haas, Joseph Sawyer, Michael Bergeron, Ernie Houle, Casey Handfield, Gregory Myers, Jeff Zanghi, Brooke Clenchy (9:12).

**Also Present:** Cathy Cummins and Suzanne Pomerleau.

#### **CALL TO ORDER**

After a Roll Call (Marco Rodrigues, Jay Cummings, Greg Martineau, Brian Haas, Joseph Sawyer, Michael Bergeron, Ernie Houle, Casey Handfield, Gregory Myers, Jeff Zanghi) the meeting was called to order by Chair Jay Cummings at 9:04 a.m.

#### **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Joseph Sawyer motioned to approve the minutes of January 22, 2021. Michael Bergeron seconded the motion. A roll call vote was collected: Marco Rodrigues, Greg Martineau, Brian Haas, Joseph Sawyer, Michael Bergeron, Ernie Houle, Casey Handfield, Gregory Myers, Jeff Zanghi and Jay Cummings voted unanimously (10-0) to approve the minutes of January 22, 2021.

#### **EXECUTED DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

Cathy Cummins started her report by acknowledging that today's meeting marks AVC's 45th anniversary - as it was founded on February 26, 1976.

Cathy updated the Board on the dissolution of another collaborative - EDCO. She stated their dissolution may result in media coverage and it may raise questions for member district school committees and community members about AVC. She shared a draft Talking Points memo in preparation for questions or concerns superintendents may receive in their districts. The memo is in draft form at this time, and will be refined as more information about EDCO's dissolution becomes more publicly available. A final version of the talking points can then be shared publicly with school committees - and can serve as one of four AVC School Committee reports. Cathy predicts that the most likely questions will be related to AVC's financial stability, debts, liabilities, spending practices, and credit practices.

Dr. Cummins updated members on the open leadership positions. More than 50 applications for Finance Director resulted in 8 first round interviews, and 2 finalists participated in a full site visit. Following the site visits, the committee decided to repost the position at a later date. In the meantime, AVC has begun working with a finance consultant from TMS which will bridge the gap between now and when the committee is ready to repost and fill the vacant position. TMS will present a FY21 budget update at the March 26 Board of Directors meeting and begin working with team members to propose a preliminary FY22 budget in the following month.

More than 150 applications for Facilities Director resulted in invitations to 15 applicants for first round interviews which will begin in the next two weeks. The hiring committee has invited Facilities leaders from two member districts to design and participate in the 2nd round process which will take place at the end of March/early April. As our needs for facilities continue to grow significantly, we have decided to prioritize the Facilities position as a full time position. Especially now since we can rely on TMS for our financial needs. We have contracted with TMS to manage the RFP for the construction project here in the newly purchased units at Lord Rd for Evolution. They are working with Mary Sharma and Karen Laskey to address the needs.

Cathy shared that she is aware of the frustrations and concerns districts' business managers and special education directors have had this year with transportation billing - both in terms of timeliness and accuracy. She noted that the COVID-related routing and ridership nuances have exacerbated both timeliness and accuracy for a variety of reasons (including different rates for reserved non-running routes (50%), remote learning days (78%). It has been difficult to track routing changes that result from quarantines, shifts between learning models, and weather related shifts to remote learning or cancellation. In addition, the amended agreement with Vanpool to keep students on "reserve" (at 50% rate), has resulted in discrepancies between what Vanpool considers to be a reserved non-running route and what districts will agree to pay. These nuances have led to errors, and revisions that have compounded from month to month. AVC's Ina Williams has now distributed invoices to districts from October to January, with revisions to September still needed. As more schools have become more consistently open for in-person school, tracking and billing will inherently simplify for the months of February through June. The Board had approved the current amendment to the contract with Vanpool (pandemic-related pricing and methodology) through the end of February; although there are still many nuances to address and improvements to make in the execution of that amendment, Cathy recommended that the Board approve an extension of the amendment through the end of the fiscal year. She noted that a new contract for July 2021 is needed and that AVC will engage with district special education directors and business managers (a working group) to ensure the next contract represents improvements in workflow, efficiency, accuracy, while maintaining competitive pricing. She noted that the current practice of invoices coming to AVC to overwrite, adjust and send to districts for collection makes more work for all parties.. AVC and Vanpool would be interested in exploring a model in which the vendor directly bills districts and AVC's participation adds value (processing background checks, investigating incident reports, resolving problems), without adding work that adds no value or detracts from value. She also noted that historically, AVC has been dependent upon transportation revenue to subsidize other cost centers at AVC; the dependence on transportation revenue is a liability that needs to be addressed in our redesign work at AVC. Michael Bergeron noted that even though transportation services are now eligible for Circuit Breaker reimbursement, districts recoup more reliable Circuit Breaker funds for tuitions that exceed the threshold than for transportation; he recommends that as AVC sets tuitions for next year, this move from relying on transportation revenue to relying more on revenue associated with individual cost centers (tuitions) will be better for both the collaborative and for districts. Mike offered to join an upcoming meeting with business managers to explore this concept more fully.

***Request to approve the extension of the amended contract with VanPool to June 30, 2021***

Cathy Cummins recommends extending the Van Pool amended agreement through June 2021.

Michael Bergeron motioned to approve the extension of the amended contract with VanPool to June 30, 2021. Amber Bock seconded the motion. A roll call vote was collected: Marco Rodrigues, Greg Martineau, Brian Haas, Joseph Sawyer, Michael Bergeron, Ernie Houle, Casey Handfield, Jeff Zanghi, Brooke Clenchey, Amber Bock and Jay Cummings voted to extend the VanPool amended agreement through June 2021 (11-0) (Greg Myers absent for the vote)

Cathy finished her report with AVC's journey toward shared leadership with a foundation in equity and antiracism. She noted that at the last meeting, AVC's Board of Directors completed her evaluation which included feedback from the Board of Directors and 14 staff across AVC including 7 members of the leadership

team. She noted that the feedback forms had illuminated for the Board that AVC's leadership team was divided - with some sharing feedback that Cathy's "singular" focus on and approach to prioritizing equity was having a negative impact on the future of AVC and others noting that Cathy's commitment to equity was a strength for AVC's future. Cathy said that she wanted to frame for the Board the predictable nature of this divide as the crossroads organizations face when undertaking transformative change - particularly transformative change founded in racial equity. She shared a [presentation](#) that included slides that reviewed core principles and theories of the organizational redesign methodology she has used to frame her approach - including the Equity by Design framework from Stanford's d school, AVC's published Commitments to Educational Equity, Racial Equity Stages by Dismantling Racism, and the "Teal Organization" from Laloux's Reinventing Organizations. She walked the Board through the Racial Equity Stages slide which began with the status quo (Familiar Dysfunction), then through an Explicit Commitment to Equity the development of Shared Language/Shared Framework, leading to the start of Culture Shifts (Unfamiliar Dysfunction), followed by a Not Knowing Stage (Frustration/Fear/Quick Fixes). The next stage Relational Trust is needed in order to advance to the Explicit Equity Goals Clarified Stage and culminating in the Equity Practice Stage. She noted that AVC's journey is following this predictable and common trajectory and that we are now in the crossroads inherent in the "Relational Trust" stage. She asked Board members to take a moment to read the slide describing the Relational Trust stage which describes the "messiness" and "chaos" of redesign and the need for individual and collective power and inter accountability for alignment of our intent (commitments) and our impact (outcomes.) The slide noted that in this stage, when an organization is unable to make strides out of the 'Not Knowing Stage' often because those in power are "too disturbed by changing power dynamics" it reverts all the way back to the status quo (Familiar Dysfunction). Predictably, in this stage the organization either abandons the equity journey or those unable to take the next steps required for relational trust leave the organization. She noted that it is not possible to stay in the "Not Knowing Stage" and also support and retain those team members who are committed to the redesign.

Cathy explained that she takes responsibility for and is accountable for where AVC is currently. As she had written in her self assessment, she had published "shared language" before it was understood by other team members at AVC. She had invested in her own learning over the last 8 years leading her to recognize and prioritize the need for redesign, but had not scaffolded or shared her learning effectively with team members across AVC or with the Board of Directors; as a result, some members of the leadership team do not see the need for redesign. Her efforts to date had been superficial and ineffective in building the collective buy-in needed to have advanced further on the journey. She noted that the Board, like AVC's leadership team, has a role to play in determining next steps. Either AVC can abandon the current journey and revert to the prior organizational model (in which case Cathy would resign from AVC to allow the Board to hire a new Executive Director) or AVC could keep at this effort by disrupting the divided leadership team.

Cathy concluded her presentation with a slide showing Laloux's developmental stages of organizations - an evolutionary model. She noted that this model was effective for framing organizational redesign as "innovative" and "evolutionary." She noted that there were significant parallels between the Racial Equity and Reinventing Organizations frameworks but that Laloux's work may be more accessible for those who haven't yet had the opportunity to access deep learning related to equity - with both models supporting deep, sustainable, and impactful transformation.

Board members engaged in open discussion. Joseph Sawyer asked about "either/or thinking" (only one right way of achieving equity) and if that limits the opportunity to benefit from the kind of divergent thinking needed to innovate. He asked if this forced ideological compliance and group think. Cathy noted that "either/or thinking" is actually an area in need of disrupting but that the team has experienced barriers to progress when this concept is conflated or when false equivalencies are used. She used an example: if you had a teacher who resisted including a student in their classroom whose needs were different from others, that wouldn't be a perspective that should be considered in a school where inclusion is prioritized. At the same time, that school would have an obligation to work with the teacher to build their skills and address their values/beliefs - but how much time would be given for this? And at what cost to that student and future students? Cathy noted that in this case, more than two years and many resources had been provided - thus the crossroads and importance of

this moment for AVC. Can AVC continue to operate in the “not knowing” stage? For how long? At what price and to whom?

Regarding “ideology,” Cathy noted that AVC’s focus on racial equity is extremely complex and difficult and while some would feel more comfortable if we focused on other areas of equity first (disability, socioeconomic, for example), racial inequity persists when we don’t explicitly address it. She also noted that all the other areas of inequity can be lifted up and addressed when we’ve done the hardest work related to race. She noted that the Board had voted several times over the years to approve her vision of racial equity being the priority and that at times the Board may have voted to approve a vision they didn’t fully understand or buy in to and if AVC is to continue on this path, there will be work needed with the Board as well as the rest of the organization.

Ernie Houle noted that relational trust is critical. Amber Bock noted the tension between needing to provide time and learning for team members at different points in their equity journey to have a role to play and a place to learn while also needing to hold team members accountable for their growth. Mike Bergeron noted that if AVC could make it work and then model it out to others, it would be a value to members.

Cathy noted that she can envision what it can look like on the other side - it wouldn’t be dependent on any one leader, would involve stakeholders in decision making and innovative solutions toward a mission that is worthy, attainable, and sustainable. She noted that some wins so far have been EdTech hiring, Facilities design and hiring process, AVC’s design Team, calendar planning, Covid Response, Pool Testing, Shared Nurse Leadership and that continuing threats are a divided leadership team, reform resistance, and lack of follow through.

Several Board Members added comments - praise for moving this initiative forward despite the challenges; a suggestion of acquiring mentors, a request to keep at it and not to give up. Amber Bock stated that AVC is the right type of organization to do this work: smaller, more nimble, some key components in place. She stated that if AVC can do it and be a model for others, it would be a value to membership. Cathy stated that she will have an update at subsequent Board meetings.

Greg Martineau departed (9:59) Casey Hatfield departed (10:12)

### **ADJOURNMENT**

Michael Bergeron motioned to adjourn. Ernie Houle seconded the motion. A roll call vote was collected: Marco Rodrigues, Brian Haas, Joseph Sawyer, Michael Bergeron, Ernie Houle, Gregory Myers, Jeff Zanghi, Amber Bock, Brooke Clency and Jay Cummings voted (10-0) to adjourn. The meeting was adjourned at 10:32 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Suzanne Pomerleau  
Administrative Assistant

and Cathy Cummins  
Executive Director