

**Facilities and Enrollment Task Force
February 26, 2020
Simsbury High School – D172
6:00 p.m.**

Minutes

In attendance: Melissa Appleby, Scott Aronowitz, Scott Baker, Matt Curtis, Josh Falco, Mike Luzietti, Wendy Mackstutis, Steve Matyczky, Craig Meuser, Erin Murray, Andy O'Brien, Lisa O'Connor, Susan Salina, Maggie Seidel, Jeff Shea, William Sickinger, Neil Sullivan, Colleen Thompson, and Tara Willerup

Not in Attendance: Andy Estell, Burke LaClair, Steve Patrina, Derek Peterson, Tom Roy, Jeff Tindall, and Matt Wittmer.

Susan Salina called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m.

Approval of January 30, 2020 Minutes:

Mrs. Willerup: MOVE that the minutes of January 30, 2020 be approved

Ms. Mackstutis: Seconded.

So Moved

Feedback on Options

Mr. Sullivan stated that this evening's meeting would be an opportunity to share feedback that was provided by community and staff members at the neighborhood meetings and through the use of the survey. He stated that the neighborhood meetings were well attended at all of the elementary schools with each school having at least 30 in attendance and in some cases, 80-100. He went on to say that he was pleased with the participation rate of the survey sharing that 250 of the approximately 370 certified staff members and over 1200 community members participated.

Mr. Sullivan provided a recap of the presentation shared with the Board of Education at their February 25, 2020 meeting. He reviewed the most recent elementary projections highlighting Latimer Lane and Squadron Line as having the fastest projected growth. He added that the projections show rapid growth in the first half of the timeframe resulting in the high-point for Latimer of 550 and Squadron of 704 in roughly 5 years.

Mr. Sullivan clarified that the options are numbered in no priority order, as that had been a misconception of some at the neighborhood meetings. He reviewed the options and costs as follows:

Option 1: New 5-6 Campus with 3 or 4 elementary schools remaining as well as a new 5-6 campus leaving all elementary schools intact. Total projected cost that would be on the referendum: \$65,517,488 and actual projected cost after state reimbursement: \$52,322,266

Option 2: 6th Grade Addition illustrated with 4 or 5 elementary schools remaining. Total projected cost that would be on the referendum: \$66,070,773 and actual projected cost after state reimbursement: \$49,318,149

Option 3: Renewal of existing elementary schools and maintain current K-6 structure with and without redistricting. Total projected cost as would be on the referendum: \$45,466,801 and actual projected cost after state reimbursement: \$31,763,107

Option 4: Status Quo illustrating phased/targeted renovations to each school. This option was not a part of the Master Plan, but is basically how we currently operate the continued maintenance of the schools.

He reviewed the Phase 1 timeline indicating that a referendum would potentially be in the Spring of 2021, with proposed occupancy for Phase 1 in the Fall of 2024. The overall timeline is over a much longer period and spreads out the tax burden through 2037.

Mr. Sullivan reviewed the feedback from the neighborhood meetings, as follows:

- Community very interested in hearing more about the research and data regarding a 5/6 school or 6th in middle school and the educational benefits associated.
- Community interested in what other communities are doing for grade structure configuration. Neil shared that Avon and Farmington have 5-6 schools while Granby and West Hartford have a 6, 7, 8 model. He indicated that in DRG A & B, the K-6 model is a minority.
- Agreement that we must do something now with Latimer Lane
- Concern that it will take 4 years before relief is seen
- Lack of support for any option that results in any school closing
- Questions about what happens to vacant building if we consolidate?
- Would like more details on logistics i.e., start times, who is riding the bus together, etc.
- Questions about previous 5-6 study conducted.
- Encouraged us to have the teachers involved. Mr. Sullivan shared that at the last two neighborhood meetings several teachers were in attendance.
- Emphasis that “doing nothing” still has significant costs in terms of on-going maintenance to old buildings.
- Concerns about capacity of core spaces for special events – cramped spaces and no parking.
- Concerns about multiunit housing being built
- Like the idea of preschool in more buildings as it would be beneficial for the transition from PK to Kindergarten.

Mr. Sullivan then highlighted some of the survey results. The staff survey illustrates large support of a 6th grade addition to Henry James (80/20). When asked about support of a new 5-6 school, those in favor dropped significantly (60/40). When asked to rank potential grade structures, their number 1 choice was a 6th grade addition to Henry James, PK-5 elementary schools, and a 9-12 high school. Fifty percent of the staff believes that the most effective location for Grade 6 is at the Middle School. Less than 18% believe the most effective place for Grade 6 is the current configuration.

While the majority of the community would support a 6th grade addition, the percentage was less drastic (55/45). When asked about a 5-6 campus, the community support drops to one-third. The community ranks the current grade configuration first with a 6th grade addition in 2nd place. Forty-eight percent of the community believes that the elementary school is the best location for Grade 6. When asked if they would support a long range capital improvement program if it meant an increase to your taxes, 2/3 of the community answered wither “yes” or “yes, with a phased approach.”

Mrs. Salina shared with the task force that the Board of Education saw this presentation at their meeting on February 25, and that they came to the conclusion that a 5-6 school was a non-starter in all of the community meetings as it directly results in the potential of a school closing. Additionally, the Board determined that the Status Quo is not an option as it is already how the BOE handles maintenance of the buildings, i.e., roofs, windows, heating, etc. The Board of Education is requesting that the Facilities & Enrollment Task Force concentrate on framing the Public Forum around two options: Option 2B (6th Grade addition with all elementary schools intact) and Option 3 (Elementary Renewal). Mrs. Willerup reinforced that the Board of Education needs to think further ahead than the status quo and make a pledge to the future while being fiscally responsible. Mrs. Salina stated that many audience members at the

community meetings may not still have children in elementary schools in 2024 and were asked to think about the future for what is best for the town. She added that we are working with 10-year enrollment projections that allow us to shape a plan with the ability to go back and revisit with each phase.

Mrs. Murray reviewed information with the task force from an educational lens. She shared that as we frame the Public Forum she will be working on the educational pros and cons regarding grade configuration. She stated that we are fortunate to have the experience of 3 administrators in district that have served or are serving as Middle School administrators. Additionally, there is a lot of literature available on developmental stages from childhood through adolescence. She shared that 6 districts in DRG A and 9 districts in DRG B (the reference group that Simsbury is a part of) currently have the 6, 7, 8 configuration and that she would be reaching out to those districts to hear the pros and cons. Mrs. Salina asked if any of the districts in DRG A and/or DRG B went through a configuration transition in the last 5-6 years, and if so, felt that would be valuable information. Mrs. Murray shared that elementary principals would be meeting with 6th grade teachers to discuss and share their thoughts as well. Mr. Matyczuk stated that he met with his 6th grade team and had a very productive conversation.

Mr. Meuser stated that emphasis should be given at the Public Forum to communicate that this committee has been reviewing a 6th grade move for several years, and that it is not a new proposal adding that if we do not entertain a 6-8 configuration, Latimer Lane will need modulares immediately. Mr. Sullivan added that the Facilities & Enrollment Task force was presented with a proposal for a 6th grade wing back in 2017.

Ms. Mackstutis inquired as to why the Board of Education is not recommending option 2A with 4 schools rather than 5 stating a concern about flexibility down the road. Mrs. Salina stated that the town support for closing a school is not there. Additionally the option to close a school does not exist if 6th grade is moved. Mr. Curtis stated that the analysis of enrollment and district needs will continue to be in the periodic BOE conversations, adding that the current need is to define the first, best option. Mrs. Willerup stated that the long range planning would be reevaluated continuously. Mr. Falco shared that in his opinion having the 2A option with potential school closure on the table at the Public Forum could result in biased support for Option 3 as community members may vote to protect their schools. He also suggested that talking with current 8th graders about their thoughts about 6th grade in elementary school versus middle school might be beneficial. Mr. Baker stated that he would attempt to talk with a group of students to obtain their perspective. He also shared that with regards to the concern about 6th graders on the bus with older students, from his experience as an elementary principal, there were more issues with kindergarteners on the bus with 6th graders than with 7th graders on the bus with older students. Mrs. Seidel shared a story about 3 new 6th graders at Tootin' Hills who came from a school where 6th grade was in their middle schools and now they are experiencing much less independence. She also expressed the importance in considering how special education instruction and transition looks with 6th grade located at the elementary level versus having it located in the middle school.

Mr. Sullivan shared information from a demographic lens. A handout was distributed that illustrates the most current Milone & McBroom elementary projections through 2025-26 as well as the projected number of classrooms necessary to accommodate the students in each year. The data illustrates the areas of concern as Latimer Lane, Squadron Line, and Tootin' Hills in the years 2022-23 and 2023-24. Mr. Sullivan went on to say that Squadron Line and Tootin' Hills do have some flexibility built in to their buildings that might allow special programs to move to different locations to help accommodate the need for more classrooms; however, Latimer Lane cannot go beyond 23 classrooms without the need for modulares. Mrs. Seidel added that although Tootin' Hills may appear to have physical space to provide flexibility to add classrooms, it would be at the expense of interventionists and other programming. Mr. Sullivan stated that he would be visiting each building to revise the inventory of physical space for the next meeting.

Mr. Sullivan asked for suggestions on the format for the Public Forum. Mr. Luzietti stated that sustaining comprehensive character education programs over 7 years can be challenging, and

that emphasis should focus on the best social and emotional structure for students. Mr. Falco questioned the available space at Squadron Line, and Mr. Curtis shared that special programs had been moved to Squadron Line in the past to compensate for the additional physical space and that there is flexibility in moving things around for the future needs for classrooms. Mr. Falco suggested that the Squadron Line community may need clarification. Mrs. Willerup stated that an explanation about the costs and where the numbers were derived from would be crucial to share at the forum.

Mrs. Mackstutis agreed that more details on the cost would be important for the public forum and questioned why the Status Quo option would not be included. Mr. Curtis clarified that Option 4, as presented this evening, was never a part of the Master Plan and that it illustrates what is already done on an annual basis through the general maintenance of the buildings.

Adjournment

Tara Willerup: Move to Adjourn

Susan Salina: Seconded. So moved at 7:29 p.m.