

Facilities and Enrollment Task Force
October 1, 2019
Board of Education Conference Room
6:00 p.m.

Minutes

In attendance: Matt Curtis, Superintendent; Neil Sullivan, Director of Personnel; Burke LaClair, Business Manager; Erin Murray, Assistant Superintendent; Jeff Tindall, BOE Member; Tara Willerup, BOE Member; Scott Baker; Maria Capriola; Andy Estell; Mike Luzietti; Andy O'Brien; Lisa O'Connor; Steve Patrina; Derek Peterson; Jeff Shea; Bill Sickinger; Colleen Thompson; Matt Wittmer

Not in Attendance: Scott Aronowitz; Tom Roy; Susan Salina; Craig Meuser

Jeff Tindall called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m.

Approval of May 22, 2019 Minutes:

Mike Luzietti: MOVE that the minutes of May 22, 2019 be approved

Steve Patrina: Seconded.

Abstain: Tara Willerup, Erin Murray

So Moved

Facilities Master Plan Update

Neil Sullivan provided background on the work that has been undertaken since the May 22, 2019 meeting, which included several administrative meetings with Tecton as well as a Public Hearing. With all of the information/feedback collected in these meetings, the Central Office team worked with Tecton to come up with several options for reconfiguration that will be reviewed this evening. This evening's goal will be to hear from Jeff Wysznski and Ed Widofsky regarding the options, provide time for group discussion about the options, and share out thoughts regarding benefits and challenges associated with the options.

Mr. Wysznski shared that in developing the options for tonight, existing conditions, programmatic challenges, and the demographic information provided by Milone & McBroom were at the forefront of that development.

Mr. Widofsky discussed some of the major points that were brought up at the Public Forum:

- Include new housing developments in the demographics
- Agreement that buildings are being used at their maximum potential and that it is time for a larger, holistic look.
- Sustainability
- Flexible spaces – not oversized
- Site schemes that address security, accessibility, and student drop off issues
- There are no preconceived ideas going into this project
- Be fiscally responsible and transparent

Mr. Widofsky went on to share some points from the administrative meetings:

- Equity – provide students with similar experiences in all of the schools
- Do not make the schools overly large
- Take 6th grade out of the elementary schools
- New schools will generate more excitement than renovation. Make sense to use open space to construct new buildings, while keeping existing operational.
- Options 4a and 4b (maintaining K-6 configuration) were ruled out

Mr. Widofsky stated that all 5 options being provided tonight are near enough in cost that it allows us to look at what makes the most sense for all reasons – not just cost. He reviewed the 5 options with the group, as follows:

Option 1: All Existing Elementary Schools Renovated as New: Renovate all existing elementary schools as new and keep current grade configurations. This option maintains neighborhood schools and addresses the shortage of space at Latimer Lane. Additionally, this option has the potential to be the lowest in construction costs, as there are no new buildings. However, in this option, there is an addition to Squadron Line, which would allow for no “swing space” for students, and may require the use of modular classrooms during construction.

Option 2A: New Lower Middle (5-6) @ Henry James/Three K-4 Schools: New school on the HJMS campus for Grades 5-6, new construction on existing sites for Latimer Lane and Squadron Line, Renovation of Central School, and repurpose Tootin’ Hills. Tariffville would be renovated and potentially house the Preschool and Board of Education offices. This option provides a new school that potentially all students would benefit from as well as a 4-year campus environment at Henry James. Additionally, it aligns with current trends with the creation of a lower middle school. However, there is a potential for redistricting frustrations and a need to find a purpose for Tootin’ Hills. Equity is an issue with this option as Squadron Line’s population is higher than the other K-4 schools.

Option 2B: New Lower Middle (5-6) @ Henry James/Four K-4 Schools: New School on the HJMS campus for 5-6, new construction on existing sites for Tootin’ Hills and Squadron Line, renovations at Latimer and Central School. Tariffville would also be renovated for potentially housing Preschool and BOE offices. Similar to Option 2A, this provides a new school for all students to benefit from as well as the 4-year campus environment at Henry James. This option maintains more of the neighborhood schools, and the schools are more equally sized. Concerns include that there may be more administrative costs involved due to less consolidation, and that it leaves Central School as a larger school than needed.

Option 3A: Add 6th Grade to Henry James/Three K-5 Schools: Renovation at Henry James including the addition of more classrooms and bigger cafeteria/kitchen facilities. Renovation at Central School, and new buildings for Latimer Lane and Squadron Line. Tariffville would continue to be a potential site for PK and BOE offices, and Tootin’ Hills would be repurposed. This option does consolidate student populations, provides new space for all, and reduces administrative costs. Central School is appropriately sized, but the equity in population would be off leaving Squadron Line with significantly more students. Latimer Lane’s population would also be large, with limited space and the possible need for an additional Assistant Principal.

Option 3B: Add 6th Grade to Henry James/Four K-5 Schools: Renovation at Henry James and Central School, new buildings for Latimer, Squadron, and Tootin’ and the repurpose of Tariffville School for PK and BOE Offices. This option maintains the majority of current neighborhoods, and elementary schools are similarly and appropriately sized. However, it does not consolidate schools, and may result in more administrative costs due to new construction at three elementary sites.

Mr. Widofsky reviewed thoughts for a matrix for evaluating the various options stating that it would be the goal during this meeting to determine whether we continue to present all options, or narrow it down to less. Mr. Sullivan shared that we would like to narrow down during this evening to discuss in more detail possibly 2-3 options at the next Task Force Meeting. Mr. Curtis shared that he has been in conversation with Kate Carter, Superintendent in South Windsor, who is on the tail end of a similar 10-year Master Plan. She has been helpful in sharing how the similar community of South Windsor handled the process. The communication of the process will be important moving forward, and being able to answer questions about the vetting process and whether we looked at certain options will be important to the community. Mr. Widofsky shared reimbursement rates, stating that they can vary based on what a district actually proposes to the state as their plan. He went on to share current trends in grade configurations stating that the majority of districts in Connecticut have K-5, 6-8, and 9-12 but that some nearby districts have moved to 5-6 schools in the past few years. Additionally, the trend is going towards less neighborhood schools and fewer overall schools. Lastly, he discussed the timeline stating that another meeting of this task force would be taking place at the end of October, a recommendation to the full Board of Education, a public hearing, and a review of the project with the State of Connecticut will take place prior to the end of the year.

Mr. Estell asked about what enrollment time period was being utilized to determine size needs. Mr. Wysnski shared that Milone & McBroom projections are 10 years out, and that the State looks at an 8-year period. He added that enrollment is increasing relatively quickly with approximately a 200 student increase in 3-4 years in K-5 creating an immediate need. He stated that doing an intermediate school first would buy some time to do the other schools. Mr. Sullivan indicated that October 1 will be our official enrollment and that Latimer Lane and Squadron Line have come in larger than Milone & McBroom anticipated.

Mr. Tindall asked about what the process is to review the project with the State of Connecticut. Mr. Wysnski answered that while not required, it is a good practice to meet with the State to review the proposal and determine reimbursement rates. He stated that although generally renovations receive more reimbursement, many times the State will look at long-term planning and give more reimbursement than originally anticipated.

The task force worked in small groups to discuss the options and were asked to share out benefits versus challenges. Mr. Wysnski reviewed the elementary and middle school projected enrollment information. In 2028-29, the elementary schools will increase by a projected 286 students – Latimer Lane – 74; Squadron Line – 99; Central School – 58; Tootin’ Hills – 46; and nominal change at Tariffville School. While Henry James is expected to increase by 65 students in the same time period, they will decrease in 2022-23 and begin to creep up again a few years later.

The feedback from the group discussions is summarized below:

Option 1:

Benefits:

- Community may like as there wouldn't be much change
- Mr. Peterson felt that tax payers would see this as the less expensive option. Mr. Widofsky shared that a preliminary look at the costs associated with the various options indicated that Option 1 would be an approximate cost of \$100 million, and that the other options would be approximately an additional \$30 - \$50 million dollars. He added that there would also be significant cost in Option 1 for swing space, disruption of students, and operational costs. Mrs. Willerup states that with the old buildings, there could be hidden costs as renovations begin.

Challenges:

- Difficult to renovate
- Inconvenience to all with limited benefit
- Most difficult with swing space
- Little change for cost

Option 2A:

Benefits:

- Creates needed swing space
- 5-6 and 7-8 real partners
- Vertical articulation K-4, 5-8, 9-12
- Curricular approach; team teaching, professional development
- Doesn't isolate one school for closure

Challenges:

- Create a connector for 5-6 and 7-8 schools
 - Shared resources
 - Auditorium, library
- Traffic patterns/Transportation
 - Staggered times would put a burden on parents.
- Loss of athletic fields

Option 2B:

Benefits:

- Creates needed swing space
- 5-6 and 7-8 real partners
- Vertical articulation K-4, 5-8, 9-12
- Curricular approach; team teaching, professional development
- Keeps more of the neighborhood schools
- Equity in enrollments

Challenges:

- Create a connector for 5-6 and 7-8 schools
 - Shared resources
 - Auditorium, library
- Traffic patterns/Transportation
 - Staggered times would put a burden on parents.
- Community losing use of fields

Option 3A:

Benefits:

- 6-8 together – 6th grade benefits from curriculum and older students
- Operationally efficient
- Works with what has already been completed at HJMS
- Doesn't isolate one school for closure

Challenges:

- Large elementary schools and not equitable
- Potential of possibly additional Asst. Principal at Squadron Line in 3A
- Possible need for additional Asst. Principal at Henry James in either 3A or 3B
- Public may not support adding to Henry James just following renovations
- Auditorium and ensemble rooms cannot accommodate an additional grade level

Option 3B:

Benefits:

- 6-8 together – 6th grade benefits from curriculum and older students
- Operationally efficient
- Works with what has already been completed at HJMS
- Elementary is right sized – equity
- Maintain neighborhood school

Challenges:

- Large elementary schools
- Potential of possibly additional Asst. Principal at Squadron Line in 3A
- Possible need for additional Asst. Principal at Henry James in either 3A or 3B
- Public may not support adding to Henry James just following renovations
- Auditorium and ensemble rooms cannot accommodate an additional grade level

Mrs. Willerup shared that the Simsbury community is very pro-neighborhood school, and that she sees it as even more important now in providing socio and emotional support. Mr. O'Brien added that in his new role he does see a lot of parents walking with their students to school, and agrees that this carries value in our evaluation. Mrs. Thompson commented that not all of the areas in town have the ability to walk to school, so it is not the whole community that shares this concern. Mrs. Willerup added that the people who choose to live close to the schools did so because of that community feel. Mrs. O'Connor also stated that aside from the walking to school, the neighborhood school provides more connectedness and that when the school gets too large – that is lost.

Mr. Sullivan commented that an option to look at could be having each new school be PK-4 rather than moving PK to Tariffville adding that we have enough preschoolers to accommodate this concept. Mr. Wysnski commented that this option should be further looked at from an enrollment standpoint if it is to be pursued as when large "bubble classes" come through, accommodating them can be difficult. He added that this first phase of the long-range planning needs to provide relief in the projected increased population in elementary. Mr. Wysnski stated that a 6-8 option would provide less relief to the elementary level as it is only removing one grade level. Mr. Petersen asked if an option could be to re-purpose Tariffville instead of renovating for PK and BOE offices. Mr. Widofsky stated that in looking at the Tariffville population over a period of 8-9 years that the population will be flat and shared that putting PK there was a nod toward the sensitivity of the community.

Mr. Petersen asked how many options we would be putting forward to the community, and Mr. Sullivan answered that the goal would be 2-3. Mrs. Willerup stated that we want to be sure that the community has real input with those options put forward. Mr. O'Brien suggested that as we evaluate the options that we be aware of the need for athletic facilities for the community as well as the high school and possibly utilize space at alternative facilities. Mr. Tindall stated that

having preliminary redistricting information would be helpful for the task force and community to have as we evaluate options. Mr. Patrino stated that he would be remiss if he didn't mention that having been on the Facilities & Enrollment Task Force for several years, it was always his opinion that Central School would be the logical building to be repurposed given its central location, but also recognized that the numbers do not support that concept.

A vote was taken that resulted in a further review of Options 2A, 2B, and 3B. These will be further reviewed at the October 30, 2019 Facilities & Enrollment Task Force Meeting.

Adjournment

Lisa O'Connor:

Move to Adjourn

Mike Luzietti:

Seconded. So moved at 8:02 p.m.