

PHASE II SCHOOL DESIGN COMMITTEE SPECIAL MEETING
THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 24, 2009 – 6:00 P.M.
TOWN HALL ANNEX, COMMUNITY ROOM 1

1) ROLL CALL

Present: Shirvell, Lange, Koehler, Ritter, Kolnaski, Harrell
Staff: Kadri, Norris, Greenleaf, Bresnyan
JCJ: Greg Smolley, Carol Pierotti
Other: DeMatto (Permanent School Building Committee)

Acting Chairman Koehler called the meeting to order at 7:08 p.m.

2) RECEIPT OF CITIZENS PETITIONS / COMMENTS - None

3) APPROVAL OF MINUTES of September 10, 2009

A motion was made by Lange, seconded by Shirvell, to approve the minutes of September 10, 2009 as written.

The motion carried 4 votes in favor, 2 abstentions (Kolnaski, Harrell).

4) ITEMS OF BUSINESS

- A. Grade 7-8 Test Fits on Two Potential Parcels
- B. Refinement of Grade 7-8 Test Fit on Kolnaski Site

Norris noted that after the last meeting, staff had recommended a number of additional sites for review. Mr. Smolley reviewed the following sites:

1. Flanders Road Property: This parcel is undersized unless additional property is obtained from the state. There is no water or sewer to the site and utility extension is not reimbursable by the state.
2. William Seely: Access to this site is not good and it is unknown if better access can be obtained. This site is also tight. The adjacent water tower is an issue, but it is scheduled to be replaced so there might be an opportunity to gain some square footage. There are no good field locations associated with this site.
3. Merritt Property: There are wetlands and topography constraints on this parcel. Fields could be terraced. Site access could be from the Grasso Tech driveway, but it would be steep. Traffic flow would be an issue unless the school shared access with Fitch.

Discussion followed on reimbursement rates for land acquisition and community concerns with the use of the Merritt Property for a school.

4. Claude Chester/Poquonnock Plains Park: The airport flight path is not an issue, but it would be preferable to place the school on the Poquonnock Plains site to gain some building elevation and avoid the swing space issue. There is, however, a concern with the low elevation of the Poquonnock Plains site. Also the ledge between the two sites should be removed.

Discussion followed on the loss of Poquonnock Plains Park and alternative locations on the site(s) for the school.

5. Kolnaski Site: Concerns were previously expressed with the power lines. Two fields could be located at least 100' away from the power lines. This test fit includes a two story building that stays away from wetlands. Development would be hard against the Amtrak right-of-way, but the tracks are at a lower elevation so noise would not be a big issue. The design maintains the existing knoll and includes parking available to all three fields. There would be no more than the expected amount of site work for a middle school facility on this site. Additional parking would be required, most likely under the power lines. Mr. Smolley suggested this is the most useable site of the Town-owned property.

Kadri and Shirvell feel that a middle school on the Kolnaski site will be a tough sell because it is not centrally located. Ritter noted that even some current bus routes are long and people will complain no matter what. Middle schoolers are not small children who can not handle long us rides.

Mr. Smolley suggested that the group must identify the sites that might work and then look at the pros and cons. Norris noted that two site alternatives can be brought to the voters at referendum time. Lange questioned the number of middle school students in the southwest versus the northeast areas of the Town. Mr. Smolley responded that one-third of middle school students are in the southwest; one-quarter are in the northeast; and one-third are in the south.

Shirvell noted that a number of Board of Education members would prefer not to push the 6th graders down to the elementary level. Koehler noted that grades 6-8 in one school will be a bigger school and 6th grade parents will not vote for it. That would push the plan back to two schools. Koehler stated that the School Design Committee needs direction from the Board of Education so that they can stop going round and round.

6. University of New Haven Site: This site has severe topography that would result in a staggered, two story building with only one field. There is the potential for additional field space on adjacent open space land. This may be a good site if two middle schools are going to be built.

7. Downes-Patterson Site: This site is not Town-owned. Topography issues prevent getting to the rear of the property so a test fit was done for the front of the site. The site is centrally located and is a good piece of property that could result in a campus setting. The Town would have to purchase the entire parcel, and development along the frontage would effectively preclude further development of the rear of the site, resulting in a large expanse of open space. Development of the school further to the east could be explored. This site may require blasting.

Koehler feels this land should be retained by the Town for industrial development for the tax revenue. Smolley agreed that from a planner's standpoint, this property should remain on the tax rolls.

In conclusion, it was decided that viable middle school sites are the Merritt property, Downes-Patterson, and Kolnaski. Mr. Smolley noted that the Merritt property would probably drop off the list if a 6-8 school is proposed.

Koehler expressed concern with the idea of bringing the 6th grade back into the middle school. Greenleaf noted the 6-8 grade configuration would reduce the number of schools to eight (four elementary schools). Koehler does not feel that east side voters will support a single 6-8 school. He asked if one versus two schools could be considered at referendum and Mr. Smolley stated that would not be possible because it would be considered an advisory referendum.

Mr. Smolley explained that the educational specifications must be modified and then voted on by the Board of Education. If the Board decides on a 6-8 middle school, JCJ will adjust the sites as necessary. He noted that educational specifications approved by the Board of Education would normally be available before the School Design Committee got this far in the process. Koehler expressed a need to wrap up this process once and for all.

The next meeting was scheduled for October 22nd.

5) ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Harrell, seconded by Shirvell, to adjourn the meeting at 8:37 p.m.

The motion carried unanimously.