

TOWN OF GROTON
PHASE II SCHOOL DESIGN COMMITTEE SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
(JOINT MEETING WITH BOARD OF EDUCATION)
MONDAY, JULY 13, 2009 – 7:00 P.M.
TOWN HALL ANNEX, CR1

1) ROLL CALL

Present: Scott, Ritter, Koehler, Lange, Ritter, Smuts, Webster
Staff: Oefinger, Kadri, Schneider, Norris, Bresnyan
JCJ: Greg Smolley

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 p.m.

2) ITEMS OF BUSINESS

A. Update on Phase II Efforts to Date

Kadri provided a brief overview of the Phase II effort. Chairman Scott and Greg Smolley made a PowerPoint presentation. Scott began by providing an overview of initial efforts, noting that the Committee's original focus was on the middle schools. Smolley reviewed three different school configurations (one, two, and three middle schools) and explained how the building programs were developed from the Vision Committee report. He noted that it is difficult to provide auditorium and gymnasium space in multiple school scenarios. Smolley reviewed a comparison of program with state funding allowances, showing that the three school option is not financially feasible. A two school scenario would best be accomplished population-wise with a diagonal split of the Town, with Cutler and a northwest location being optimal. JCJ had started to develop test fit scenarios, but the two school solution presented some difficulties. A change in district leaders led to a reexamination of grade configuration. Kadri explained that a Pre-K-1, 2-6, 7-8, and 9-12 was found to be the most advantageous, and resulted in a single middle school scenario. Kadri noted the benefit of moving grade 6 to the elementary level, and uniting the community in grade 7 instead of grade 9. A single 7-8 school would maintain the team teaching model, and create an opportunity for excellence in non-core area programs as well as community programs.

Smolley noted that there are still questions to be answered, but the proposed plan is now two Pre-K-1 facilities in the east and west; four to five 2-6 schools; one 7-8 school; and 1 high school. Smolley reviewed the model building programs and noted that a single middle school of 7-8 can include a full size auditorium and gymnasium. Potential sites/locations are: Pre-K-1, West Side and S. B. Butler; 2-6, Northeast Academy, Catherine Kolnaski, Cutler, Mary Morrison or Charles Barnum, and Claude Chester; and 7-8, a location west of center of the Town. Discussion followed on Cutler versus Butler as a site for the Pre-K-1 facility, other grade configurations considered, the potential to relocate the central office facility, and opportunities for community programs at West Side.

Scott concluded the presentation by outlining next steps: analysis of projected enrollments; analysis of potential Pre-K-1 enrollment; analysis of operating costs; and analysis of budget

impacts. The next steps for JCJ are developing test fits for Pre-K-1 and 2-6 schools; developing conceptual plans for a 7-8 school; and drafting budgets, phasing options, and a construction schedule.

Kadri noted that there have been questions about the cost associated with instituting an early childhood education program. He will be studying the operational impact more fully, but Kadri believes that the new grade configuration will result in a cost structure similar to current operations. Two buildings are slated for closure: Fitch Middle School and Pleasant Valley, and one new school will be built resulting in an overall decrease of one building. The efficiencies in a single 7-8 location from a building and class size standpoint will be put into early childhood education. Average class size may go up slightly at the upper elementary and middle school levels, but it should stay flat district-wide. Discussion followed on early childhood education specifics and costs.

It was suggested that the PowerPoint presentation be posted on the Town's web site. The Board of Education thanked the Committee for the presentation. The Committee recessed at 8:25 p.m. and reconvened in Community Room 2 to resume their meeting.

B. Other

Lange suggested that the Committee needs to clarify the Pre-K-1 program approach, which is generating a lot of questions. Smuts suggested a public hearing. Discussion followed on seeking public input and the consensus was to wait until the report is completed so that there is something for the public to respond to. Discussion followed on the Friendship School in Waterford.

Oefinger questioned the next steps with Groton Public Schools and the Board of Education, and how best to identify potential Pre-K-1 enrollment. Smolley indicated he would research the methodology for estimating Pre-K-1 enrollments. With respect to public input, Smolley noted that the Town has a good vetting process. He reminded the Committee that the Board of Education's charge is the educational program and the School Design Committee's charge is to act as the liaison between the Board of Education and the Town Council. Smolley indicated that there are three to four key questions that should be posed to the Board of Education for the Committee to move forward and he will work on drafting those questions. He noted that the Board of Education has accepted the grade configuration. More research is required on the potential long-term cost savings from early childhood education and an analysis of what typically happens to enrollments when Pre-K and full-time Kindergarten are introduced. JCJ will also be looking at the Butler site more closely.

The July 23rd School Design Committee meeting was cancelled and the next School Design Committee meeting will be held on August 13th.

3) ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 9:20 p.m.