

TOWN OF GROTON
PHASE II SCHOOL DESIGN COMMITTEE MINUTES
THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 2007 – 7:00 P.M.
FITCH MIDDLE SCHOOL

1) ROLL CALL

John Scott, Gordon Lange, Michael Kane, Jennifer Smuts, Craig Koehler, Bob Peruzzotti, Brian Shirvell, Irene Ritter, Catherine Kolnaski (7:45)

Staff: Town Manager Mark Oefinger, Rick Norris, James Mitchell, Wes Greenleaf, Nicki Bresnyan

Chairman Scott called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m.

2) RECEIPT OF CITIZENS PETITIONS / COMMENTS

Smuts asked for clarification regarding the Board of education's position on the number of middle schools since she had heard that the Board had recently discussed the issue again. Dr. Mitchell confirmed that the Board supports the two middle school concept.

3) APPROVAL OF MINUTES – August 23, 2007

A motion was made by Lange, seconded by Koehler, to approve the minutes of August 23, 2007 as written.

The motion carried unanimously.

4) ITEMS OF BUSINESS

A. Review of Middle School Preferred Alternative in Pre K-12 Master Planning Study

Norris noted that the estimates for a middle school on the King property could be reduced by approximately \$3 million for infrastructure (built for Catherine Kolnaski School). It was also noted that costs have gone up, but now the Board of Education is talking about a 600 student school rather than an 800 student school.

Greenleaf distributed and reviewed four middle school options, which assume two middle schools, one on each side of the Town, consisting of 6 teams each, rather than 8 teams as originally envisioned. The options also assume the closure of Fitch Middle School.

The first option involves constructing two new middle schools, one on the King Property and one on a site to be determined on the east side of the Town. Greenleaf noted that middle school programs have changed more than any other level making renovating an existing facility to meet educational requirements difficult. This option would allow elementary school options that include converting West Side into an elementary school or converting Cutler into an elementary school.

The second option involves building one new middle school on the King property and expanding/renovating Cutler Middle School. Discussion followed on closing West Side Middle School and many members of the Committee felt that would not be a palatable option given the recent renovations at the school.

The third option would be to expand/renovate both Cutler Middle School and West Side Middle School. Although the West Side site was determined to be too small to expand into an 800 student school, it has not been evaluated for expansion into a 600 student school. Expansion/renovation of Cutler could pose difficulties regarding placing students during construction.

The fourth option would be to expand/renovate West Side Middle School and build a new middle school on the eastern side of the Town on a site to be determined.

Norris attempted to identify some numbers for the four options, based on current costs and costs identified in the Master Plan. A new middle school of approximately 120,000 square feet, at \$330/s.f. would cost approximately \$38.9 million. The cost to renovate/expand Cutler Middle School is estimated at \$35+ million. Conversion of West Side Middle School to an elementary school is estimated at \$9.8 million, and renovating S. B. Butler is estimated at \$19.9 million, close to the price of the new elementary schools. Norris noted that the costs do not include demolition costs or extenuating site conditions.

Discussion followed on site constraints at West Side and existing infrastructure compatibility at Cutler, as well as the unknowns associated with renovating an old building. It was noted that even though building new seems to be a better deal than renovating, the Committee must go through the exercise of looking at all of the options for the voters.

Ritter questions the need for the four additional classrooms at Northeast Academy. It was noted that the conversion of Cutler to an elementary school, and the additional four classrooms at Northeast Academy, would not accommodate the closure of Claude Chester and Butler as previously represented.

Smuts noted that two new middle schools would cost \$70+ million and anything beyond that might be a hard sell for the public. Discussion followed on the positive feelings that the new schools will generate.

Koehler distributed his suggestion for Phase II.

B. School Visits

There were no additional schools that the Committee wanted to visit.

C. Other Items to be Discussed

Chairman Scott distributed a sheet outlining his suggested goals for the Committee, as follows:

- 1) Identify the greatest need.
- 2) Identify Phase II
- 3) Identify a consultant/facilitator
- 4) Evaluate options
 - Public presentation
 - Picking the best option
- 5) Submitting a report to the Town Council

Oefinger explained that the Town goes through a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) and establishes a committee to hire a consultant. The consultant is not necessarily the same consultant hired for design.

Norris recommended that the Committee identify a list of remaining work and come up with a program before evaluating what the community can afford. The program should be developed with an eye toward educational requirements first. Oefinger agreed that there is a limit on what voters will spend, noting the failed referendums. That is why the plan must be airtight and documented.

Discussion followed on swing space.

For the next meeting, Committee members were asked to consider what they would like to see in Phase II and be prepared to discuss it.

5) ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Peruzzotti, seconded by Shirvell, to adjourn the meeting at 8:10 p.m.

The motion carried unanimously.