

TOWN OF GROTON
PHASE II SCHOOL DESIGN COMMITTEE MINUTES
THURSDAY, DECEMBER 27, 2007 – 7:00 P.M.

1) ROLL CALL

Present: Ritter, Scott, Smuts, Koehler, Shirvell, Harrell, Kolnaski
Staff: Schneider, Norris, Greenleaf, Bresnyan

Chairman Scott called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m.

2) RECEIPT OF CITIZENS PETITIONS / COMMENTS

Chairman Scott noted that although he was not re-elected to the Town Council, the Town Council has endorsed his continued service as the Council's representative on the School Design Committee.

3) APPROVAL OF MINUTES – November 8, 2007

A motion was made by Smuts, seconded by Shirvell, to approve the minutes of November 8, 2007 as written.

The motion carried unanimously.

4) ITEMS OF BUSINESS

A motion was made by Smuts, seconded by Harrell, to add approval of the 2008 regular meeting schedule to the agenda.

The motion carried unanimously.

A motion was made by Harrell, seconded by Smuts, to adopt the 2008 meeting schedule as presented.

The motion carried unanimously.

A. Program Development, Planning Conceptual Design Services - Presentation

Scott Celella and Greg Smolley from JCJ Architects were present to address the Committee. Chairman Scott provided a brief history of the Committee's efforts to date. Mr. Celella noted that JCJ has been involved with the Town of Groton for about six years. He introduced Mr. Smolley, the main contact for the Town's school projects to date. Mr. Celella noted the Pre-K – 12 Master Planning Study previously developed by JCJ. He described the process as a collaborative effort to produce a document and a plan to meet the community's needs. Mr. Celella then provided information on his firm's background and experience.

Mr. Celella reviewed JCJ's previous involvement with the Town and tasks completed to date that can be built upon in Phase II. The Master Planning Study started with a review of previous

studies and the Vision Committee Report, the cornerstone of the educational specifications that provide a sense of purpose for the school buildings. Working with staff and committee members, JCJ reviewed the salient points and overall plan and identified fundamental issues such as a single high school, two middle schools, and seven elementary schools. JCJ then derived a program based on educational specifications and a preferred option was distilled from that effort. Working with the School Design Committee, JCJ then looked at the restraints of a referendum, maximizing reimbursements, etc. and developed alternatives as well as some ideas for Phase II.

Mr. Smolley noted that maximizing state reimbursement and getting the maximum value out of the buildings is the next step in the current process. With the determination that two middle schools is the way to go, the next step is to update the demographics and then look for the best return on investment. He cautioned the Committee not to focus too heavily on the fact that the school buildings are owned and therefore on what to do with vacated buildings. Mr. Smolley noted that the two new elementary schools set the standard for what the elementary schools should be and his experience with the Town to date has been to build what is educationally required. Shirvell noted that the Committee must also have a sense of how Phase II will fit with subsequent phases. Mr. Smolley noted that the next step would be to update the Master Planning Study based on Phase I. Another issue to be considered is swing space. Mr. Smolley feels it is generally better to invest in something that doesn't go away (like modular classrooms).

Koehler raised the issue of maximizing reimbursement from the state and renovating to new versus building new. Mr. Smolley noted that renovating to new results in a "new" old building, however renovating to new can be a very useful component of an overall program as long as the educational program fits. If the project is done properly, renovating to new and building new are within a percent or two on the reimbursement rate.

Chairman Scott noted the Committee is hoping for a November 2008 referendum. Mr. Celella feels that is reasonable, although the definition of the program will determine the time schedule. Mr. Smolley concurred that November is possible because the Town has so much knowledge about its buildings. Also, as the phases progress, there are fewer options for changes that can be made. JCJ previously recommended leaving the elementary schools until the end because it gives the Town the most flexibility to address demographic changes.

Kevin Trejo, a member of the public, suggested that to have a November referendum, the Committee must have answers for the public to overcome their objections. Smuts asked what the options are for holding a referendum on a different date. Chairman Scott noted that there are added costs associated with a referendum that does not coincide with an election, and there is a chance that there will be fewer voters. Ritter suggested that a November referendum might take advantage of the wave of positive feelings about the new schools.

Smolley noted that the most difficult part of building new is finding land and fighting the public perception of walking away from an existing building. Kolnaski suggested that disposition of the four empty schools must be addressed for the public.

Greenleaf added that demographics and racial balancing need to be studied.

Schneider noted that the next step would be to ask JCJ to prepare a scope of services and identify a fee, which would be reviewed by staff and the committee, prior to entering into a contract. Funding is available and authorization is in place for staff to proceed.

Mr. Ceella noted that JCJ included preliminary conceptual "site fit" studies in the original plan. Greenleaf confirmed that educational specifications have not changed, just the size of the schools based on enrollment. The updated Master Planning Study will include a look at available land. JCJ will also look at options for West Side which will depend on how creative the Town wants to be with components such as athletic fields.

A motion was made by Smuts, seconded by Shirvell, to direct town staff to engage JCJ Architecture in developing a Pre-K-12 Master Planning Study Update for Phase II of the Groton Public Schools construction program.

The motion carried unanimously.

Norris provided a brief update on the schools and upcoming ceremonies.

Chairman Scott asked Greenleaf to arrange to have the School Design Committee's February 14th meeting at Catherine Kolnaski Elementary School and the February 28th meeting at Northeast Academy.

5) ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Kolnaski, seconded by Harrell, to adjourn the meeting at 8:12 p.m.

The motion carried unanimously.