

SCHOOL FACILITIES INITIATIVE TASK FORCE SPECIAL MEETING
THURSDAY, MARCH 26, 2015 – 6:30 P.M.
TOWN HALL ANNEX, COMMUNITY ROOM 1

I. ROLL CALL

Present: Ackerman, Ambroise, Beaulieu, Bresnahan, Cabral, Dauphinais, de la Cruz,
Fitzgerald, Greenleaf, Ilvento, Koehler, Massett, Trejo, Zod

Ex Officio: Watson, Schmidt

Staff: Oefinger, Graner, Kilpatrick, Bresnyan

Consultant: Mike Zuba, Kemp Morhardt

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – February 12, 2015 and February 26, 2015

A motion was made by Trejo, seconded by Ambroise, to approve the minutes of February 12, 2015 and February 26, 2015.

The motion carried unanimously.

III. PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS – None.

IV. ITEMS OF BUSINESS

a. West Side Middle School Test Fit.

Mr. Zuba provided an overview of the student populations for West Side and Cutler Middle Schools and the impact on diversity of two 600 student elementary schools. He explained that larger schools and adjusted boundaries alone do not solve the racial balance problem - West Side would still be out of balance. Assuming that both schools serve as Choice Schools, some students from other elementary schools move to both Cutler and West Side, and preK is available at all schools at the districtwide percentage, then Kolnaski and West Side drop below 15% racial balance. Northeast remains out of balance and could become a Choice School.

The next scenario looked at a smaller West Side. Three schools would then be out of balance with the revised catchment areas. The scenario assumes Cutler as a Choice School with a draw from West Side and Kolnaski. It is clear that there must be a larger school with a choice component on the west side of town so that the draw works in both directions. Discussion followed on making theme programming attractive and the challenges associated with outdated racial balance mandates.

Mr. Morhardt reviewed a prototype fit study for West Side, parking and site circulation, and recreation fields. Construction could take place while West Side Middle School is open. If the task force finds this option feasible, the consultant will look closer at technical aspects including drainage and the use of geo-thermal.

From a population standpoint, a larger West Side is preferable, but there must be parity with Cutler. Bussing will always be an issue with Choice Schools but parents are more concerned with programming than bussing. Discussion followed on the size of West Side and the willingness of parents to send their children to non-neighborhood schools (as evidenced by the number of Groton students going to schools in New London).

b. Revised Cost Estimates

Mr. Morhardt reviewed cost modeling assumptions and refinements for each of the scenarios.

Scenario 1: Construct a new middle school; convert West Side and Cutler to elementary schools of 600 students (renovate to new); close Claude Chester, Pleasant Valley and S. B. Butler; and remove portables at Charles Barnum and Mary Morrisson. The first schedule provides for at-risk design with construction pushed to July 2017 after approval of the state grant. Total cost is \$171,003,552 with a net cost to Groton of \$75,988,239. An alternate construction schedule defers design until May 2017 after approval of the state grant. This time line increases the cost to Groton to \$77,970,298, primarily due to escalation costs.

Scenario 2: Construct a new middle school; construct new elementary schools at West Side and Cutler; close Claude Chester, Pleasant Valley and S. B. Butler; and remove portables at Charles Barnum and Mary Morrisson. The first schedule for at-risk design with construction deferred to July 2017 results in a total cost of \$191,665,358 and a net cost to Groton of \$94,823,104. The alternate construction schedule that defers design until May 2017 after approval of the state grant increases the cost to Groton to \$97,012,063, primarily due to escalation costs.

Scenario 3: Construct a new middle school; renovate to new West Side as an elementary school; build a new elementary school at Cutler; and close Claude Chester, Pleasant Valley and S. B. Butler. The at-risk design with construction pushed to July 2017 schedule results in a total cost of \$176,021,449 with a net cost to Groton of \$80,366,150. The alternate schedule increases the cost to Groton to \$82,369,023. Mr. Morhardt reviewed the Connecticut renovation status impact (\$450 per square foot maximum project cost).

Discussion followed on the loss of playing fields during construction and the potential impact.

Scenario 4: Construct a new middle school and do EA (extensions and alterations) projects at West Side and Cutler. Mr. Zuba reviewed identified middle school needs expressed in 2011-2012 dollars. He then presented a matrix showing various project values and percentages of project cost eligibility, based on the 2015 reimbursement rate for renovations of 58.57%.

c. Summary of Options and Considerations

An additional consideration is sustainable energy initiatives (i.e., geothermal, solar energy) that may require allowances of \$1.5 million for the middle school and \$750,000 for the conversions of West Side and Cutler.

The next steps are to develop and deploy a public survey. Mr. Zuba will ask Jerry Lindsley of the Center for Research and Public Policy (CRPP) to come to the next meeting to discuss the survey with the Task Force. Mr. Lindsley will prepare a draft survey that will be vetted with the Task Force. Next, a public outreach plan will be developed that includes public informational meetings for discussion and dialog about the project and the process.

d. Group Discussion

Acting Chairman Koehler opened up discussion to the group. Opinions expressed by Task Force members included:

- Support building all new schools
- Create a video presentation for public television
- Highlight incremental costs of renovate to new versus build new
- Identify return on investment (ROI) for geothermal and other sustainability initiatives
- Identify ROI for new versus renovate to new
- Conduct neighborhood and business/civic group meetings
- Identify increase in taxes (per \$100,000 assessment)
- Identify a firm cost so the number doesn't change
- How do we determine which school to apply the 80% reimbursement to? If West Side, need new estimates.
- Need to consider geothermal and other sustainable initiatives, even if they are presented as an alternative in the referendum
- Once the decision is made to take the project to referendum, cannot use public television to promote the project; would be useful during initial public outreach
- Important to let people know about the alternatives that have been considered
- Important to have a backup plan
- Avoid the term "Phase II", which has negative connotations
- Need to be clear what portion of the project is designed to solve the racial balance problem versus facility problems
- People need to understand the need for two new elementary schools
- Project will bring equity and opportunity to Groton's children
- Need a maintenance cost estimate if the three elementary schools scheduled for closing were to remain open
- Need to explain the 450 sq. ft. renovate to new restriction and impact on the project.

Mr. Zuba asked Task Force members to brainstorm names for the initiative.

Discussion followed on racial balance and diversity.

Mr. Zuba explained that for the differential in the cost between new and renovate to new scenarios, the Town has the hurdle of special legislation and less than optimal layout with renovation.

Based on the scenarios presented tonight, the consensus of the task force was to support building a new middle school and two new elementary schools.

Town Manager Oefinger noted there needs to be another scenario reversing Cutler and West Side as the diversity school. Mr. Zuba stated that Scenario 4 will be revised to reflect a new middle school and a certain amount toward improvements at Cutler and West Side as elementary schools.

Discussion followed on justifying the differential between a full EA and building new for the public. Mr. Zuba explained that it is not hard to identify the work required, but it is hard to identify the reimbursement rate. Fitzgerald noted that Scenario 4 does not meet the educational specifications and should not be presented to the public as an option.

V. ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Ambroise, seconded by de la Cruz, to adjourn the meeting at 9:23 p.m.

The motion carried unanimously.