

SCHOOL FACILITIES INITIATIVE TASK FORCE
THURSDAY, JULY 9, 2015 – 6:30 P.M.
TOWN HALL ANNEX, COMMUNITY ROOM 1

I. ROLL CALL

Present: Ackerman, Ambroise, Beaulieu, Dauphinais, DeMatto, Fitzgerald, Greenleaf,
Heller, Koehler, Massett, Trejo
Ex Officio: Schmidt, Watson
Staff: Oefinger, Kilpatrick, Reiner
Consultant: Mike Zuba, Carly Myers

The meeting was called to order at 6:35 p.m.

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – May 14, 2015

A motion was made by Trejo, seconded by Dauphinais, to approve the minutes of May 14, 2015 as written.

The motion carried unanimously.

Task Force members also received the notes from the June 11, 2015 meeting, which did not have a quorum.

III. PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS

Mr. Zuba recapped that the last meeting had focused on discussion of avenues for public outreach. There had also been discussion of drafting a letter to The Day as a guest op-ed piece. There was back and forth between Ackerman and Heller about the wording of the letter, with Ms. Ackerman saying the letter was going to be redrafted.

IV. ITEMS OF BUSINESS

a. Public Opinion Survey – Jerry Lindsley

Jerry Lindsley from the Center for Research and Public Policy gave a presentation on the results of the phone surveys conducted June 9-25, 2015 to collect input on public school facilities in Groton. A random digit telephone sample was used to collect a randomized, representative sample of Groton residents. Completed surveys were collected from 386 residents. This sample size gives a statistical margin of error of +/- 4.96% at a 95% confidence level.

Overall, Mr. Lindsley felt that the response was very positive. When residents were initially asked how they might vote in a referendum if “held today” on the plan, 36.5% indicated that they would definitely or probably support the Plan, 44.6% said they would probably or definitely

oppose the Plan, and 18.9% were unsure or didn't know. However, over the course of the survey, residents were supplied with further facts about the Plan, such as the fact that it was meant to be a long-term fix, the fact that short-term repairs would also be costly, and the fact that Magnet Schools would be included, etc. Again in the survey, the same residents were asked if how they might vote in a referendum "held today" knowing that the average cost to the median homeowner in Groton would be \$250 a year. When asked this question, 51.8% would now definitely or probably support the Plan.

The phone survey also presented resident survey responses with a number of statements and asked if they strongly agreed, somewhat agreed, somewhat disagreed, or strongly disagreed. Mr. Lindsley suggested that the results from these perceptions should be used to formulate messages that resonate with residents. The top messages that resonated with residents based on the survey results were:

- That this Plan represents a long-term fix
- GPS has 60-year old, outdated facilities that need modernization
- Quality is tied to modernization
- Pre-K is incorporated in the Plan
- The Plan solves racial imbalance issues
- The Plan includes magnet schools

Mr. Lindsley said that for many communities, the key is to have a concise, consistent message that focuses on 3-5 issues. Groton residents have strong support for their schools, so with enough outreach this Plan is very doable.

Discussion followed, including varying levels of support by geographic area in Town. Other discussion concerned current pending racial imbalance, and consequences of failing in terms of State funding. Mr. Zuba discussed similar situations in other CT municipalities, but that also changes may happen in the near future in how the State funds schools, including reimbursement for construction. Groton should act quickly to take advantage of current reimbursement levels and interest rates. Timing of meetings with the Council, RTM, and BOE were also discussed in relation to timing of outreach and education before a referendum. Mr. Lindsley said that opposition groups may form, and that it was important to address their concerns. He suggested that the PAC group should have a subcommittee concentrating on opposition groups.

b. Outreach Update – Not discussed

c. Next Steps

Next steps were discussed: methods of messaging and outreach; joining the PAC, including opposition engagement; and getting on the docket for meetings with the Town Council, RTM, and Board of Education.

The date for the next meeting was set at August 6th to further discuss the results of the survey and outreach methods.

V. ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Ackerman, seconded by Heller, to adjourn the meeting at 8:33 p.m.

The motion carried unanimously.