

SCHOOL FACILITIES INITIATIVE TASK FORCE MINUTES
THURSDAY, JULY 25, 2013 – 6:30 P.M.
TOWN HALL ANNEX, COMMUNITY ROOM 1

I. ROLL CALL

Present: Ambroise, Bresnahan (7:20 p.m.), Bryer, Cabral (7:07 p.m.), Greenleaf, Heller, O'Donnell, Peruzzotti, Semancik (6:35 p.m.), Trejo, Zod
Ex-officio: Somers
Staff: Oefinger, Murphy, McKenna, Robarge, Bresnyan
Consultant: Mike Zuba, Ali Church, Tom Jokubaitis
Other: Rick Norris

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – None

III. PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS

Heller provided an overview of the July 22nd meeting with the Board of Education.

Trejo expressed concern with Task Force members talking to the press outside of the group. O'Donnell agreed noting that the Task Force must first get through the process. Somers feels that there should be one person talking to the press (Chairman Heller) so that there is one consistent message.

IV. ITEMS OF BUSINESS

a. Recap of July 22, 2013 Board of Education Meeting

Mr. Zuba provided an overview of the July 22nd presentation to the Board of Education on the activities of the Task Force. The majority of the Board supports a 6-8 or 5-8 grade configuration in a single middle school, sited in proximity to the high school. A majority of the Board also supports a pre-K program expansion in all of the elementary schools rather than standalone facilities. The Board is leaning toward a pre-K-5 configuration for the elementary schools. It was explained to the Board that the Task Force is being slowed down by not having the Board's educational specifications. The Board indicated they will form a subgroup to provide the Task Force with the necessary information in a timely manner so that it can be incorporated into the process. Similarly, information developed for the Task Force needs to be shared with the Board going forward.

Mr. Zuba noted that although the Board has not produced vision reports for the schools, they will be working on them as the Task Force proceeds with its work. Heller noted that the Board did indicate that they do not favor early childhood centers or sister school scenarios.

Mr. Jokubaitis address grant reimbursement (80%) for racially imbalanced schools noting that the legislation appears to be exclusive to West Hartford. Also the state has placed a moratorium on magnet schools and is moving toward open choice/charter schools.

Mr. Zuba then provided a recap of Options 1-3. He discussed educational considerations of a single middle school noting a general preference for middle schools of three years or more. He reiterated operational efficiencies, uniform curriculum, and the ability to organize teams to create smaller learning communities. A new single middle school would also lead to uniform professional development and larger spaces for community use. The two existing middle schools could be reused resulting in consolidation of elementary schools.

- b. Presentation of Additional Options
- c. Impacts and Considerations of Each Option

Mr. Zuba reviewed additional options and highlights as follows:

Option 2A: adds four classrooms to Northeast and closes Pleasant Valley; unlikely to address racial imbalance; fractured feeder pattern. Would result in four large projects occurring at the same time.

Option 4: sister school pairing; however, sistering at Charles Barnum and Mary Morrisson will not work because of the demographics (decrease in students from K-2 to 3-5) and there would have to be a different grade configuration to sister Catherine Kolnaski and West Side; additional transitions for military families would be difficult.

Option 5: two new middle schools; fractured feeder system; still some racial balance concerns; would allow phased implementation. Mr. Jokubaitis noted that educationally there is a greater opportunity for student leadership roles in smaller schools, but a program can be implemented in a larger school to achieve the same results. The key element is always the teacher. Siting two schools could be difficult.

Option 6: two 5-8 middle schools; eliminates an additional elementary school; 5 elementary schools necessary to accommodate Pre-K; expands attendance zones; maintains Mary Morrisson and inequity would have to be addressed. Mr. Jokubaitis noted that research on grade configuration is inconclusive, but the typical middle school is 6-8. There is typically some pushback when grade 5 is moved up to the middle school.

Option 7: one 5-8 middle school; direct feeder pattern; larger school; larger spaces for community use; same issues as Option 6.

Mr. Zuba asked the Task Force to break out into three groups and reflect on Options 1-3 and 4-7, with an understanding of the Board's vision. He asked for a list of pros and cons so that the group could begin to focus on three or four options. The consultant has developed a list of approximately 40 sites and they need time to narrow them down based on school size and further analysis. Mr. Zuba suggesting cancelling the next Task Force meeting.

Trejo asked how institution of universal pre-K would affect the numbers. Mr. Zuba suggested the numbers would likely mimic 1st grade enrollment figures so it would be the same as adding an entire grade level. McKenna noted that there is a current wait list for pre-K. Trejo suggested that if the community's desires universal pre-K, it should be discussed by the Task Force for planning purposes.

The group broke into groups and regrouped 30 minutes later. Highlights of the discussions were as follows:

Group 1

Option 1 preferred, with a middle school location as close to the high school as possible; feel the community will support a single middle school; presents opportunities for interesting programming.

Group 2

1 middle school preferred; 6-8 model; costs need to be lower than the failed referendum; locate as close to the high school as possible.

Group 3

The majority prefers Option 1; brings students together at a younger age; 6-8 model because of size/cost; discussed Option 3, but more vested vote will be for middle schools; need to address closed schools and have a plan including identification of demolition costs if necessary.

O'Donnell stated his preference for Option 3. Greenleaf noted that the middle schools are not adequate as they stand and will require significant work. Norris noted that the square footages of the existing middle schools work for elementary programs. Discussion followed on population density, racial balance, and grade configuration.

Discussion then turned to identifying three options. Option 1, the preferred option was chosen. The consensus was that a two middle school option should also be included.

Options 6 and 7 were eliminated because of the 5-8 grade configuration. Option 4 was eliminated because of the sister school difficulties. Option 5 was eliminated because of the expense and 5-8 grade configuration.

Mr. Zuba reviewed a PowerPoint slide showing the cost of "status quo." The priority elementary schools require an approximately \$27 million investment and the two middle schools require \$28 million. After the other elementary schools are added, the necessary investment is over \$69 million.

Mr. Zuba stated that he can look at renovate to new costs for all schools and cost out two middle schools in addition to Option 1 while also including reimbursement factors.

The consensus of the Task Force was to provide cost estimates for Options 1, 3, and 3A (renovate middle schools to new). Mr. Zuba explained that he will cost out parts of each plan can they can be mixed and matched.

Christine Cabral, a new member of the Task Force, introduced herself.

Heller distributed note paper and asked Task Force members to provide feedback on his leadership and the consultant, noting one thing done well and one area where there is room for improvement. He then asked Task Force members to talk to 6 to 12 stakeholders and noted that Holly Bresnahan will be working on a social media presence for the Task Force effort.

Mr. Zuba noted that there is a community survey on the Town's web site for interested residents.

d. Update on Potential Sites

Discussion of this item was postponed to a future meeting.

V. ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Peruzzotti, seconded by Ambroise, to adjourn the meeting at 8:58 p.m.

The motion carried unanimously.