

SCHOOL FACILITIES INITIATIVE TASK FORCE SPECIAL MEETING
THURSDAY, AUGUST 20, 2015 – 6:30 P.M.
TOWN HALL ANNEX, COMMUNITY ROOM 1

I. ROLL CALL

Present: Ackerman, Ambroise (7:05), Bresnahan, Dauphinais, de la Cruz, DeMatto, Fitzgerald, Greenleaf, Heller, Massett, Trejo, Zod
Ex Officio: Schmidt, Watson (7:13)
Staff: Oefinger, Reiner, Graner, Kilpatrick, Bresnyan
Consultant: Mike Zuba, Carly Myers

Chairman Heller called the meeting to order at 6:32 p.m.

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – July 9, 2015 Special Meeting and July 9, 2015 Regular Meeting

A motion was made by Trejo, seconded by Dauphinais, to approve the minutes of the July 9, 2015 Special Meeting as written.

The motion carried 8 votes in favor and 3 abstentions (Fitzgerald, Massett, Zod).

A motion was made by Trejo, seconded by DeMatto to approve the minutes of the July 9, 2015 Regular Meeting as written.

The motion carried 10 votes in favor and 1 abstention (Zod).

III. PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS - None

IV. ITEMS OF BUSINESS

a. Public Opinion Survey

Mike Zuba reviewed a PowerPoint presentation starting with a recent legislative change that allows a town to apply for school funding before local approval is granted. Mr. Zuba noted preliminary reimbursement rates for 2016, which could be approximately a 4% reduction for Groton. Discussion followed and it was noted that if a referendum passes but the state application does not, the project will not go forward.

Mr. Zuba reviewed recommendations and findings based on additional insights into the community survey such as level of support, issues that resonate with supporters, reasons for opposition, the change in the level of support after a conversation with the researcher, opposition based on financial and social situations, and areas of agreement common to supporters and opposition.

Ambroise arrived at 7:05 p.m.

Discussion followed on the types of information to focus on and to avoid to sway those who oppose the plan.

Watson arrived at 7:13 p.m.

Mr. Zuba then reviewed a demographic and geographic breakdown of supporters, the undecided, and those opposed to the plan. He noted that getting the demographic of voter turnout would be very helpful, if it is possible.

b. Public Outreach Schedule – Not discussed

c. Next Steps

There will be joint meeting of the RTM, Town Council and Board of Education on September 9th to present the plan with talking points being the key driver. The consultant will also refine the schedule in light of the legislative change.

With respect to the time line, Oefinger noted that the Task Force had previously talked about meeting more often, but it has not. At this point, it would be next to impossible to make a May referendum. A complicating factor is the election in November and the potential change in the Town Council.

Bresnahan left at 7:35 p.m.

Ackerman noted that Doreen Marvin from LEARN has suggested that the state will be lifting the ban on inter district magnet schools very soon, which would make the delay desirable. Mr. Zuba noted that referendums that coincide with major elections have a higher rate of success. Discussion followed on the impact of the legislative change on the process and timeline. Ackerman noted that Ms. Marvin also suggested that special legislation to allow Groton to have an inter district magnet school is more likely than the group thinks.

Chairman Heller polled the Task Force members on their preferred referendum date and the majority expressed support for November 2016.

Discussion followed on seeking special legislation and the need to engage local legislators in the process, as well as the impact on the schools and plan of introducing an inter magnet component. The conclusion was that the Superintendent would like to pursue the magnet component for the high school, but it is not relevant to the elementary and middle schools proposal.

A motion was made by Trejo, seconded by DeMatto, to hold the referendum in November 2016.

The motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Zuba initiated a breakout group discussion on talking points which were then shared with the whole group. Unique points were as follows:

- Cost effectiveness (new vs. renovate)
- Cost of doing nothing
- \$250 per year per person
- Newest schools that we've paid for are in New London
- Property values with new schools and fields
- Modernization – define what it means
- Technology upgrades, aging buildings
- Long-term plan
- PreK capacity
- Racial imbalance, redistricting
- Magnet school potential
- Why a single middle school (IB campus)
- Right thing to do for education of children, effective and efficient operation of schools, equality for our students

V. ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Ambroise, seconded by Trejo, to adjourn the meeting at 8:49 p.m.

The motion carried unanimously.