

SCHOOL FACILITIES INITIATIVE TASK FORCE SPECIAL MEETING  
WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 9, 2015 – 7:30 P.M.  
GROTON SENIOR CENTER

I. ROLL CALL

Present: Heller  
Staff: Oefinger, Graner  
Consultant: Zuba

Other Task Force members present observed the presentation as part of the general audience.

II. ITEMS OF BUSINESS

- a. Presentation of School Facilities Initiative to Representative Town Meeting, Town Council, and Board of Education

(Note: The following minutes were excerpted from the September 9, 2015 RTM Minutes.)

A power point presentation for the School Facilities Initiative Task Force (SFITF) was given by Chairman Jon Heller, Superintendent of Schools Dr. Mike Graner, Director of Buildings & Grounds Sam Kilpatrick and Mike Zuba, Consultant from Milone & MacBroom, Inc.

Chairman Heller began the presentation with the resolution establishing the SFITF. The process which began in February 2013 is currently in the Community Outreach Phase, Summer 2015 through Summer 2016. He noted that many issues were addressed early in the planning process, such as age of schools, code issues, substandard portables, security and safety concerns, etc.

Dr. Graner addressed Groton's educational needs. He discussed the modernization of facilities, providing for 21st century learning environments. He discussed Groton's interest in Magnet Schools and eliminating the need for redistricting for racial balancing. He stated this initiative will expand opportunities and be part of a long term plan to consolidate schools, equalize class size and improve efficiency. He added that reducing the number of buildings from 10 schools to 8 schools is cost effective. Total potential annual cost avoidance: \$1.47 million.

Sam Kilpatrick discussed the needs of the elementary and middle schools. He stated that a conservative estimate to address critical school issues only is approximately \$55 million. That figure represents no modernization, just keeps the buildings standing. He added that if Groton were to bond \$55 million in improvements, the average annual cost to a median homeowner would be approximately \$150 over the life of the bond.

Mike Zuba addressed Planning and Design considerations. He discussed the Groton 2020 Plan which includes 1 new middle school and 2 new elementary schools. The new middle school will be built in close proximity to Fitch High School to encourage and take advantage of multiple

interface activities. The 2 new elementary schools would be built on existing middle schools sites. He stated that this is the best use of existing Town owned assets and maintains the historical presence of schools.

Chairman Heller closed the presentation with a cost summary and the implications for taxpayers. He stated the total cost for this project is \$191.7 million with a net cost to Groton taxpayers of \$94.8 million. The cost to taxpayers would be an average of \$152 per \$100,000 of assessed value for an average annual cost to a median homeowner of \$252. He believes the Groton 2020 Plan is the right thing to do for the education of all Groton's children. He opened the floor for comments or questions.

Rep Pasqualini asked if there would be a reduction in next year's school budget due to the \$1.47 million in annual cost avoidance by going from 10 to 8 schools.

Dr. Graner stated that there would be savings, but annual budgets reflect increases in union salaries, health care costs, etc.

Rep. Smith read data from the FYE 2016 Adopted Budget showing projected increases for FYE 2017 & 2018. He stated those increases in addition to the cost of the Groton 2020 Plan could become a burden for taxpayers.

Chairman Heller acknowledged that tax increases are unfortunate but necessary at times. He stated that the longer we wait, the more expensive school construction will get.

Rep. Cini asked if the \$94 million price tag included financing.

Mr. Oefinger confirmed that it did not. He suggested that now was the time to borrow due to the current low interest rates.

Rep. Watrous asked if the referendum scheduled for November 2016 will include both the middle school and the 2 elementary schools or if they would be separate.

Chairman Heller stated that they would be combined all together as the Groton 2020 Plan.

Councilor Flax expressed his displeasure with the disparity between education opportunities within the schools, and asked that the problem be fixed.

Councilor Antipas expressed his concern of having over 950 students in one middle school.

Dr. Graner stated that students would be separated by different programs and that 25% of the middle schools in the state have that many students or more and that they are working well.

Rep. Kotowski read an article from the Day newspaper that offered another solution that would not include building new schools, therefore saving millions of dollars.

In response to Rep. Kotowski's statements, Chairman Heller noted that the Task Force looked at this proposal along with another fifteen. He added that the Groton 2020 Plan was the best option to present to the Town of Groton. He continued to say that the voters will make their decision in November 2016.

Rep. Newsome asked if the Task Force had contacted any neighboring towns that have had similar projects done for lessons learned.

Mike Zuba stated that members of this Task Force have been involved in numerous similar projects and are working for the best interests for the people and Town of Groton.

### III. ADJOURNMENT

The presentation and meeting concluded at 9:50 p.m.