

SCHOOL FACILITIES INITIATIVE TASK FORCE
THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 10, 2015 – 6:30 P.M.
TOWN HALL ANNEX, COMMUNITY ROOM 1

I. ROLL CALL

Present: Ackerman, Beaulieu, Fitzgerald, Greenleaf, Trejo, Zoda
Ex Officio: Schmidt
Staff: Oefinger, Reiner, Graner, Kilpatrick, Bresnayan
Consultant: Mike Zuba

There was no quorum, but task force members discussed items on the agenda.

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – May 14, 2015 and August 20, 2015 – No action.

III. PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS

Bill Smith expressed appreciation for the hard work of the group, but feels that new school facilities have no impact on student performance. He stated that quality of the education is what is important and it will be hard to pay for the proposed program.

Ackerman noted that kids now learn through technology and the Town must respond to that. Schools were not built to accept the kind of technology that is needed today.

Acting Chairman Trejo noted receipt of the questions submitted by Mr. Smith at the previous night's presentation to the RTM, Town Council, and Board of Education. Additional questions can be forwarded to the Town Manager.

IV. ITEMS OF BUSINESS

- a. Housekeeping Items - None
- b. Feedback on September 9, 2015 Presentation to RTM, Town Council, and Board of Education

Mr. Zuba asked Task Force members for their take on the September 9th presentation and feedback from the public. Schmidt noted a comment about the Town "never saving any money." Zuba stated that the group needs to identify the talking points and stick to them which include speaking to the benefits and not making any promises that can't be kept. Graner noted the budgetary impact of even modest salary increases for teachers and suggested that this plan will minimize increases. Graner noted that if we do nothing now, we will be passing on 80 year old schools to our children. Oefinger suggested that the emphasis needs to be on cost avoidance, not savings. Rick Norris noted the savings associated with energy efficiencies, but Mr. Zuba noted that new buildings are actually more expensive to operate because of technology. Greenleaf

cited existing code violations in the school. Mr. Zuba cautioned that existing deficiencies in the schools are not resonating with the public. Improvements are being judged by a baseline that is very low because no work has been done to the schools.

Mr. Zuba turned the discussion to renovate like new versus new construction. The Town will exceed the renovate to new maximum dollar amount because the buildings have not been kept up over the years. Oefinger noted that maintenance of the schools is not the issue. There has been a conscious decision to hold back on capital projects at the schools because there was recognition that a plan -- including new schools -- was needed.

Beaulieu noted that people have cited “bad economic times” since 1983 even though the Town has not had bad economic times for the entire 30+ years.

Kilpatrick added that the Board of Education is still prioritizing important CIP projects based on the approval of a plan for the schools.

Discussion followed on the idea of sistering schools. Mr. Zuba noted there cannot be an equitable pairing and there is the issue of parents with siblings in different schools.

Greenleaf noted the various code issues that would have to be addressed with a major renovation. Unfortunately, the triggers and reimbursement rates are unknown until well into the project and the Town would still have 60-year old buildings.

In response to a suggestion that the public be shown pictures of actual classrooms and space issues, Mr. Zuba stated it is more important for the Task Force to understand the issues and to know why this is the best plan than to try to educate the public.

Mr. Zuba addressed the issue raised by Mr. Smith. The goal of this project is not to improve test scores, but to improve the educational environment.

Graner reiterated his three major talking points. Discussion followed on public outreach including groups to meet with and using social media. Graner feels that non-redistricting is a huge issue for the public. Mr. Zuba noted changing demographics – the Town is becoming more diverse, but not across the entire community. Mr. Zuba provided an analysis of the population at West Side. He emphasized the need to design a program around the demographics. Discussion followed on racial balance.

c. Next Steps

Mr. Zuba noted a likely reduction in Groton’s reimbursement rate of 4%. He asked the Task Force to consider how to address the reduction, which could include reexamining the educational specifications, prioritizing, and/or acknowledging the increase in Groton’s share. Norris added that the increased cost to Groton may require the Board of Education to look at program delivery.

Discussion followed on how the decreased reimbursement rate was calculated.

Oefinger noted there may be value in looking at the educational specifications. He also suggested the Town pursue a legislative change in the state maximum for renovate to new so that the Town has a fallback position if people continue to advocate for renovation.

Mr. Zuba reminded the Task Force that introducing the magnet school component would require 25% more space and would not allow portables to come off line.

Graner stated he would contact local legislators and set up a meeting.

For the next meeting, Task Force members were asked to think about the public outreach plan, key talking points, and how to handle the decrease in reimbursement rate.

V. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 8:38 p.m.