

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education Utilization Committee met in Regular Session on Thursday, October 24, 2019 at 6:00 PM in the Art Room at Memorial Middle School, Middlefield, Connecticut.

Committee members present: Mrs. Booth, Dr. Friedrich, Mr. Hicks, Dr. Taylor and Mr. Yamartino
Committee members absent: Mrs. Geraci
Other Board members present: Mr. Moore and Mrs. Petrella
Community members present: Mr. Giammatteo
Administration present: Dr. Veronesi, Superintendent of Schools

Mr. Yamartino called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Public Comment

Phil Augur, from Durham, reiterated that he believes Durham has asked for a change in the term of office for its members and to respectfully leave Middlefield's terms as is.

John Szewczyk, from Durham, also agreed with the change in term for Durham's board members. He felt that they are not allowing the townspeople to vote on the board members' elections by having them at town meeting. He has spoken to a number of people who cannot drive at night and are therefore unable to vote on Board of Education elections. He would like to make sure that people are able to vote on who they would like to serve on the Board of Education. He also agreed that Middlefield did not vote to change their method of election and respects their sovereignty to be able to do that. Mr. Szewczyk summarized that more than 176 people should be allowed to vote on who serves on the Board of Ed and the townspeople should be given the opportunity to vote.

Rick Parmelee, from Durham, stated that he attends many town meetings over the years and walked into one where they were electing a Board of Ed member, with very few people there, and he didn't even know who was running. He felt that the polls would be more accessible for the townspeople to vote. He added that more people vote at a referendum than a town meeting and that it is not fair to the majority of people to have those votes at town meetings. He added that he felt it was very exclusionary and, in fact, discriminatory.

Cheryl Pizzo, from Middlefield, thanked the board for having tonight's meeting in Middlefield. She stated that over the years, they have felt like Middlefield has diminished and lost their voice in the district. She would like to see it returned to where it was started, as equal partners, and having the meeting here is a great first step. Mrs. Pizzo added that young people in Middlefield are frustrated because they feel like the plan to close John Lyman School is a done deal. She does not see how it could be a done deal with the steps that still have to be taken and a vote taken. She suggested that the Board gets the message out to young people for them to participate in this process because they are very discouraged with what is being proposed.

Kindra Liptak, from Middlefield, also thanked the committee for meeting in Middlefield and reiterated that it is a good step in trying to help Middlefield feel like they have a voice.

Approval of Agenda

Mr. Hicks made a motion, seconded by Dr. Taylor, to approve the agenda, as presented.

In favor of approving the agenda, as presented: Mrs. Booth, Dr. Friedrich, Mr. Hicks, Mr. Moore, Dr. Taylor and Mr. Yamartino. Motion passed unanimously.

Approval of Minutes - September 19, 2019

Dr. Veronesi stated that under the Brewster/Memorial Alteration project, Mrs. Neubig has noted that the district has not received any grants, but may be able to apply for one for the culvert project.

Mr. Hicks made a motion, seconded by Dr. Taylor, to approve the minutes of the September 19, 2019 meeting, as amended.

In favor of approving the minutes of the September 19, 2019, as amended: Mrs. Booth, Dr. Friedrich, Mr. Hicks, Mr. Moore, Dr. Taylor and Mr. Yamartino. Motion approved unanimously.

Brewster/Memorial Alteration Project**A. Review current status**

Mr. Moore stated that there has really been no change and the issue is whether or not to withdraw the application to the state prior to November 15, 2019. If the state were to act on it and it is not complete, it will be treated poorly. He felt that if the district is not going to go to referendum until May, the application should probably be pulled from the state and re-submitted next year. This issue can be voted on at the next full board meeting on November 13, 2019.

Dr. Veronesi added that there had been some discussion about adding enhancements to the original proposal because of the timeline. She was not sure that that would be the best decision as the project has been put forward. Any changes in the project must be approved by the Department of Administrative Services. One change is acceptable, but usually for a decrease in scope, not an increase. An increase in the project size could be rejected by DAS after the initial application is submitted. Mr. Moore stated that if the current application is withdrawn, the new application could, in fact, be different.

There were no objections to recommending withdrawal of the application to the full board. Mr. Moore pointed out that the costs associated with these projects were generated last spring and will have to be looked at again before it goes to referendum.

B. Additional considerations

Dr. Veronesi explained that the resubmission has to be in by June, 2020 and any changes to the project would need to be decided on by that time. The referendum would then be in place, but the money would not be received for another year. The project currently is very basic for both schools.

Dr. Veronesi reviewed that they had had discussions about the project being done in phases, but everyone agreed that the entire project should be talked about. She added that they have reached out to the architects to inquire about any additions they would suggest if any were to be considered. Michelle from Silver Petrucelli suggested an addition of a cafeteria and a rerouting of the drop-off/pick-up area. It was also suggested that perhaps new cabinets or storage systems could be added at Memorial as well as spaces for small group collaboration and meetings. She also suggested moveable partitions between classrooms

and HOT school criteria, including expanding the music classrooms with wall-hanging displays throughout, technology integration and space for Makerspace. There could also be some alterations to drop-off, parking and playground improvements. Dr. Veronesi also felt that the furniture could be upgraded in all of the schools.

Dr. Friedrich asked if HOT school improvements were planned for Brewster as well and Dr. Veronesi explained that the state is no longer talking about HOT schools, but a HOT approach. A team of teachers from Brewster as well as the principal and Dr. Veronesi attended a HOT approach conference just last week. A big facet of the HOT approach is the display of student work and performance areas. Dr. Friedrich felt that the schools should be equal in their HOT capacity and Dr. Veronesi agreed.

Dr. Taylor added that they needed to look at the long-term needs and felt that there wasn't a lot of flexibility in the size of the schools. He questioned how much investment should go into the schools that currently exist vs. thinking where the district will be 10, 15 years down the road. He suggested that this be revisited at some point down the road.

Mrs. Petrella felt that since they would be withdrawing the current submission and resubmitting a new plan, she would like to strongly request that the board looks at both proposals (Pre-K-2 and K-5). She also asked if the population demographics have been reviewed and Dr. Veronesi stated that that was in process right now with updates from Milone & MacBroom. Dr. Veronesi also added that she felt that the board did a phenomenal job with the process, including community information and surveying, and the decision about the grade configuration was primarily driven by what they believed was best for the children in the district, not the costs. She also noted that the projected enrollment pattern doesn't indicate that there will be a large student increase.

Mr. Yamartino explained that the current enrollment numbers show a decline of 65 students this year and none of the projections had ever suggested that. He felt that the decline in enrollment might actually be accelerating, but this is only one year's data. Mrs. Petrella noted that that data also included high school students.

Mr. Moore explained that he looked at the January, 2017 report where they began looking at two K-5 schools and the total costs were \$52 million which included work at Strong, Memorial and Brewster. Both of the K-5 schools were in the \$20 million range. At that time, the board decided that that couldn't be done and looked at one K-5 school at the Korn School site which was around \$30 million. The board felt that that would be too much as well and went back to look at what could be affordable and still meet the needs of the district.

Dr. Taylor stated that the board made its decision on this and didn't feel it needs to be revisited. He brought this up because he felt that it may be a consideration further down the line. Dr. Taylor also felt there was more uncertainty with the enrollment numbers, but felt that the district doesn't have a lot of additional capacity within the school structures. He also felt it might be a little disingenuous to add items to the original proposal.

Mr. Giammatteo felt that a clear explanation should be presented at the time of the referendum would help with the public perception of this. Mrs. Booth felt that since the bonding will not cost the district any more than they are currently paying, it may be better to do more. She strongly felt that Brewster needs the cafeteria. Mrs. Petrella stated that if the bare bones project was put forward, additional items will come up later. She felt that those things should be proposed from the beginning.

Mr. Yamartino felt that the committee needs to lay it all out, look at the costs and make a decision. He also reiterated that the decision was based on moving to a single program and not based on cost. He felt

that the division of the program created division in the communities as well. Keeping all of the grades together in one school helps to mend that division. Mr. Yamartino has heard discussions about having a K-5 school in each town and he noted that neither school, in its current configuration, can handle the entirety of its own town. He also added that the geographic boundaries of those schools would be based on the distance to school, not necessarily the town the students live in. He also felt that the teachers could develop the program much more robustly if they are in the same building.

C. Grant status and next steps

Mr. Yamartino reiterated that they will recommend that the board withdraw the request to the state.

Korn School Status Update

Mr. Moore has not had the opportunity to meet with Laura Francis. Dr. Taylor asked what the intent of the discussion would be with Mrs. Francis and Mr. Moore explained that she had indicated that the town would be willing to invest in rental fees, but not in implementation. He felt that they needed to look at options for someone to take it over, to raze the building and to operate the building. The building is, in fact, operational as it is now.

Mr. Moore felt that the gym, art/music rooms and bathrooms are all usable right now. They have been asked about having youth basketball there. Dr. Taylor felt that the board needed to be clear that they are in the business of what is best for the district and its students and not what is best for the towns. He felt the same about the Memorial tennis courts as well.

Dr. Taylor felt that things were being delayed at Korn School and that they were not moving fast enough. He would like to see a decision made and doesn't feel they will get a lot of community interest in the building. Dr. Friedrich added that if they were to find tenants, they would still be looking at multimillion-dollar costs to keep the building open. He too felt that they would never get the tenants they would need to do that.

Dr. Taylor felt that any speculation about tenants would be just that, speculation, and a gap would still remain. He felt that it was time to move forward with educated guesses about the capital and operating costs and then make a decision. Dr. Friedrich added that the Utilization committee brought a recommendation to the full board to simply decide that, absent a plan from the town, the building needed to be razed. That recommendation was withdrawn because it was felt that the Town Planner could add some clarity.

Mr. Yamartino felt that one step would be to reach out to someone in the real estate business to look at what would be available for leasing or selling the building. Dr. Taylor stated that it was unanimously decided that the building would not be sold other than to the town and he felt that that should not be part of any discussion. Mr. Yamartino felt that that should be brought to the full board for a vote. Mr. Giammatteo agreed that no one wanted a non-school-related entity on school property. Dr. Taylor would be against selling that land to anyone and felt that that should be voted on first. Mr. Yamartino mentioned that a land use restriction could be put on the land.

Mrs. Booth agreed with Dr. Taylor that a decision needs to be made and feels that there are a few people on the board that have an emotional attachment to the Korn School building. The town has said no to the renovations at Korn School and the field house, yet both are still being talked about. She added that the Korn School site could be used as a parking lot. She also felt that a decision should be made before the next budget.

Mr. Yamartino stated that the property has never been put on the market and the district doesn't know if it could be sold or rented. He proposed that they get an assessment of the property and see if it can be listed. Dr. Taylor stated that he will make a motion at the next board meeting to drop the possibility of the sale of this building. Mr. Giammatteo asked if there was a buyer willing to spend \$50 million for the property would that change Dr. Taylor's mind and he stated that that is incredibly unrealistic, but if it were \$2 or \$4 million, he would still say no as it would destroy the character of the campus. Mrs. Booth asked if this process would cost money and Mr. Yamartino stated that it is usually done for a very low cost.

Dr. Taylor reiterated that he is strongly against the sale of the property, but would be open to having a rental analysis completed even though he feels it will be futile. He would not want to see the process drag out any longer. Mr. Yamartino just wanted to have the facts and figures available for the full board.

Dr. Friedrich stated that they had reviewed the options of razing the building or having it go to the town, but never considered any other entities renting it because they were giving the town first priority. Mrs. Petrella felt that they have not been dragging their feet, but were holding off for the town and then noted the costs of razing the building. Dr. Friedrich would like to see the possibilities of other entities renting the property. Mrs. Petrella added that this information would also be helpful when and if a decision is made to raze the building.

Mr. Yamartino added that the Town Planner would have the expertise that is needed, however one has not been hired yet. Dr. Taylor asked if money was available to have a market analysis done for rental of the building without burdening the administration and Dr. Veronesi stated that she would try to get costs for that.

The majority of the committee then decided that they would ask for a market analysis and Mr. Moore would talk with Laura Francis about the town's intentions.

Mr. Yamartino added that he has been advocating for pickleball at the tennis courts in Middlefield as it is the fastest growing sport in the country and the target age groups are 8 to 13 and 50 to 80.

Regionalization Plan Amendment

Mr. Yamartino reviewed that Mr. Moore had presented the text for the Regionalization Plan Amendment to the full board and asked if anyone had any changes they'd like to suggest. Mr. Moore reviewed that he had an incorrect date in the history part of his original text that should be January 9, 2019 and not December 11, 2018.

Dr. Friedrich wanted to be sure that they don't lose the opportunity to modify the part of the agreement about closing schools in the dust of changing board terms and the election of the representatives. He asked that they be sure that the two proposals are presented separately to the towns for the referendum. Mr. Moore agreed that there will be two separate items on the agenda and assured him that the board will write the questions on the referendum.

Mrs. Petrella asked what would happen if both towns do not approve this amendment and Mr. Moore stated that they would have to try again with a different amendment. The bond counsel will not approve the bonding until he is sure the board has the necessary authority. Mr. Moore reviewed that the district will have to submit a report to the state for approval that includes an amendment in language to the original report. After approval by the state Board of Education, it will have to go to public hearing and then referendum.

Dr. Taylor asked if any information has been received about partisanship on the board and Dr. Veronesi explained that she has not heard back definitively from the attorney. Dr. Taylor felt that the minority party representation rules will not apply. He did not feel that Middlefield would be forced to elect their board members any differently and that they can, in fact, vote against that question on the referendum. Dr. Veronesi hoped that the wording could be such that the manner of elections and terms could be approved in Durham and not in Middlefield.

Dr. Friedrich read from the attorney's comments regarding the election of board members and that it would not apply to Middlefield unless Middlefield's legislative body requested it. Dr. Veronesi added that the Board of Education has the right to request that both communities are electing in the same manner and serve the same length of terms. Mr. Yamartino felt that Durham has the right to choose the manner in which they elect their members to the Board of Education, but Middlefield has not asked for that change and he did not feel that the Board of Education should pass a vote for a request like that. He added that this issue never came up in any of Middlefield's charter revision discussions. Mr. Yamartino explained that Durham's town charter was changed in 2006 and the Board of Education never took action on it.

Mr. Moore added that the towns have to adjust the existing terms and not the Board of Education and that will be removed from the report. Mr. Moore explained that they hope to have the report voted on at the November 13th board meeting.

Public Comment

A member of the public from Middlefield wondered if the meeting notices could be made public on the parent forum and Mr. Moore explained that the website has all of the meeting dates on it. She understood that, but hoped that parents could be directly notified. She was struck by how much time, effort and energy has gone into this. Mr. Yamartino added that the agendas for these meetings are also posted on the towns' website. She then asked if meetings could be scheduled so that parents can attend and not be on nights that conflict with other activities.

Heidi Johnson, from Durham, asked if the bond counsel gave an opinion as to what the amendment should say and if they will review what is being proposed. Mr. Moore stated that they had and they will.

Adjournment

Dr. Friedrich made a motion, seconded by Dr. Taylor, to adjourn the meeting.

In favor of adjourning the meeting: Mrs. Booth, Dr. Friedrich, Mr. Hicks, Dr. Taylor and Mr. Yamartino. Motion passed unanimously.

Meeting was adjourned at 7:28 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Debi Waz
Alwaz First