

**Regional School District 13
Utilization Study Committee
December 3, 2015**

Committee members present: Kerrie Flanagan, Victor Friedrich, Merrill Adams, Norm Hicks
BOE Members present: Jeremy Renninghoff, Francis Willett, and Bob Moore
Staff Members present: Dr. Veronesi, Mr. Melnik
Many people were in attendance representing both Durham and Middlefield.

The meeting was called to order at 4:05pm.

Public Comment: Becky Finnerty asked for more information about the formation of the district and if the documents created at the time covered the closing a school and the issues being discussed today.

On a motion by Mr. Hicks, second Mrs. Adams, the agenda was unanimously approved.

On a motion by Dr. Friedrich, second Mrs. Adams, the minutes of the meeting of October 29, 2015 were unanimously approved.

Mrs. Flanagan thanked everyone for attending and explained the purpose of the meeting was to talk about alternative uses for Korn School. The school has value and is an asset to both towns. We need community vision and cooperation to determine the use and return the best value to the community. She would like to see the formation of a formal sub-committee charged with this task. The subcommittee will be co-chaired by Merrill Adams, representing Middlefield and Francis Willett, representing Durham. Mrs. Flanagan explained that as this subcommittee meets they need to be aware that another elementary building will likely close in the not too distant future. The Utilization Committee's plan is to close John Lyman School and to make two K-5 schools in the district. Mrs. Flanagan would like the subcommittee to make a recommendation to the Board of Education by August 2016 so the Board does not have to budget for an empty building for another school year.

Mrs. Flanagan said the district has gotten a legal opinion regarding the disposition of Korn School. The district cannot lease the building. It is best if it used for community use. They have contacted State Representative, Noreen Kokoruda, regarding the \$700,000 state grant that was used for the building project at Korn. The district will have to apply for a waiver to have this forgiven but there is past precedence of this being done.

Mr. Willett questioned the equity for each town. Is the ownership a function of each town's contribution to the budget?

Dr. Friedrich said laws are written regarding dissolution of school districts and it is based on the students over the lifetime of membership in the district. This is different because the whole district is not being dissolved. Usually the towns own the assets, not a school district.

Laura Francis, 1st Selectman of Durham, asked that resources be made available to the subcommittee. The original regionalization plan, the report for Day Pitney, DRA recommendations and the capital assessment summary will all be made available.

Mrs. Flanagan said Korn will need an appraisal and possibly Lyman as well.

Dr. Veronesi wanted to be clear that the closing of Lyman would have no impact on program choice in the district. Memorial will be the K-5 ID school and Brewster will be the K-5 contemporary school. She said as the process evolves plans may change.

Mrs. Flanagan said a timeline has been done out through 2020. If we want to close another school we need to make a decision on bonding in the 2016/17 SY or the latest 2017/18 SY. It will be almost a full year after a passed referendum before a building project can begin.

Dr. Veronesi said the district currently has 1717 students, by 2021/22 SY the projected total is 1313 students. We are dropping by about 40-50 students per year.

Mrs. Francis said the demographics numbers match up with numbers from other sources.

John Brayshaw said he was on two of the three utilization committees for Center School. Demolishing the school was an option that was favored. They had a hard time coming to a conclusion that suited both towns. He has looked at the town offices but there is not much documentation regarding how it was handled between the towns.

Loraine Coe said ultimately Center School was sold to Middlefield for \$1.

Mrs. Flanagan said when the regionalized happened all of the buildings were assessed and then Middlefield contributed more until it was equalized. The difference between Center School and Korn School was that Center School had been closed for years and was determined to have no value. The subcommittee will have to go back and see if any documents exist.

Mrs. Francis asked if the Board of Selectman of each town should appoint people to the subcommittee.

Mr. Willett feels that it will be hard to make decisions if too many people are on the committee. He would like to function at an executive level with representation from the Board of Selectman, Board of Finance and Board of Education from each town. Both sides have the ability to get the voice of the people and bring it to the executive level.

Mrs. Francis and Mr. Bailey both agreed that the committee should not be too large.

Mrs. Francis said the subcommittee members need to agree to not make this a divisive issue for the two communities.

Maryjane Malavasi, Finance Director of Durham, asked what the BOE is going to do with the information once it is provided by the committee.

Mrs. Flanagan said there will be constant communication with the chairs during the process.

Mrs. Coe said it is possible that the decision may not be made by the deadline and then the BOE will have to carry the building into a future budget.

Sherry Hill, Recreation Director from Durham asked if anyone will be able to use the school next year.

Mrs. Flanagan said a decision was already made to allow recreation activities to continue at the school for the 2016/17 school year.

Becky Finnerty said another group that should be included in the decision making process is Durham Middlefield Youth and Family Services. It would be great for them to be located closer to Strong and Coginchaug.

It was agreed by the group that the committee will consist of Francis Willett and Merrill Adams (co-chairs), Laura Francis, Ed Bailey, Bob Yamartino and Lorraine Coe. Other community members or group input will be asked for as needed. The minutes and agendas will be posted and updates will be given to the Utilization Committee and to the BOE. A charge of the committee will be written.

Mr. Brayshaw asked what will happen if there is a resurgence in population in the towns in 10 or 5 years. Dr. Veronesi said it is hard to predict that far out. Populations are growing in the urban areas. Our schools are nowhere near capacity so they will be able to handle a pretty large increase in growth. What schools will look like and how children are educated is changing.

Mrs. Flanagan thanked the community participants for attending the meeting. Most people left at this time and the Utilization Committee continued with the rest of the agenda.

Critical Path: Dr. Veronesi said they have been discussing how to proceed with the work. Guidance and support to manage the project is needed. They have contacted Ed Arum, a retired Business Manager who has done this for other districts. He is willing to help but needs us to define the scope of the work.

Mr. Melnik said we need someone to lead us through the Ed Spec and State process. Ed Arum has a lot of experience with this. There is \$75,000 in the current budget to start working on the process. Mr. Arum would be hired as a consultant, at a daily rate.

Bob Moore questioned the impact of a referendum on the budget. The timing of when our debt is dropping off is important; we could have a fairly large referendum without a lot of impact.

The committee was in agreement that we should pursue Ed Arum as a consultant. He will be asked to attend the next meeting.

The establishment of a Building Committee was discussed. The Building Committee is made up of representatives of the Board of Education and members of both communities. In the past it was done once the Ed Specs were completed and the committee was ready to start interviewing architects.

Mr. Renninghoff is concerned that the committee and the architects will develop plans beyond the budget.

Mrs. Flanagan said the Board and the Utilization Committee will be looking at how much debt the district can carry and will back into the cost estimates from there.

Dr. Veronesi suggested that the committee take trips to see some newer schools and to see how schools are functioning today.

Review C-3 Plan with updated Demographics: Dr. Veronesi and Mr. Melnik shared drawings of potential configurations and movement of students through the elementary and middle schools through the 20/21 school years in order to get the building projects complete. The plan assumes two K-5 schools at the end of the process and allows for Memorial School to be empty for one year while it is renovated.

Mrs. Flanagan asked that at the next meeting the committee further discuss the closing of John Lyman School and what it will take to formalize a decision to bring to the Board of Education. The timing of the decision needs to be discussed. When is the soonest that we can comfortably go out to referendum and then back into the other decisions. Potential meeting dates of December 14th or Dec 17th, both at 4pm were discussed. Mr. Arum will be contacted to see if he can make either of them and then members will be contacted.

Public Comment: None.

On a motion by Mr. Hicks, second Dr. Friedrich, the committee unanimously approved to adjourn at 7:45pm.