

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education Educational Resources Committee met on Wednesday, February 13, 2019 at 5:30 PM in the Library at Coginchaug Regional High School, 135 Pickett Lane, Durham, Connecticut.

Committee members present: Mrs. Geraci, Mr. Moore, Mr. Roraback and Dr. Taylor

Committee members absent: Mr. Yamartino

Other Board members present: Mr. Augur (arrived a little late)

Administration present: Dr. Veronesi, Superintendent of Schools and Mrs. Neubig, Business Manager

### **Pledge of Allegiance**

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

### **Public Comment**

None.

### **Approval of Agenda**

*Mrs. Geraci made a motion, seconded by Dr. Taylor, to approve the agenda, as presented.*

*In favor of approving the agenda, as presented: Mrs. Geraci, Mr. Moore, Mr. Roraback and Dr. Taylor.*

### **Approval of Minutes - December 11, 2018**

*Mrs. Geraci made a motion, seconded by Dr. Taylor, to approve the minutes of the December 11, 2018 meeting, as presented.*

*In favor of approving the minutes of the December 11, 2018 meeting, as presented: Mrs. Geraci, Mr. Moore, Mr. Roraback and Dr. Taylor.*

### **Presentation - Field Storage Building Proposal**

Nick Faiella thanked the committee members for allowing them to speak about this project and distributed a packet to everyone on the committee. Mr. Faiella introduced himself and explained that he is president of the football booster club. Henry Bugai, president of the Benchwarmers, and Arlene Paul, president of boys' and girls' soccer and Sandra Dellis, president of boys and girls track, were also present. Together, they represent about 250 Coginchaug athletes.

They were at the meeting to address an incomplete project that's been outstanding for about 10 years. They are proposing a donation totaling approximately \$35,000 for the construction of a proposed field house storage building. Mr. Faiella noted that a lot of change has occurred since the project was initially proposed. The total cost of the building has been reduced substantially due to significant design changes and a change in the overall purpose. The original cost was estimated at over \$1 million and the revised plan that went to referendum was between \$600,000 and \$800,000. This new proposal is estimated to be somewhere between \$110,000 and \$130,000 though it is not the same building. It will be an exterior shell that protects the concrete and underground utilities that are estimated at \$50,000 to \$150,000.

Mr. Faiella also explained that it will provide storage for teams that use the facility. The existing storage shed is filled to capacity and most of the teams' equipment has to be stored off-site. The building can also house future bathrooms. QBC from Pennsylvania, who built the Durham Fair buildings, has submitted a bid of roughly \$80,000. The concrete knee wall would be approximately \$35,000. Mr. Faiella explained that details of the proposals are included in the packets and that there will, no doubt, be other costs associated with the project, but these would be the two largest costs.

Mr. Faiella also stated that they have shown the proposal to the First Selectmen of Durham and Middlefield and both have offered their verbal support to complete the project. He believes that the school administration and coaches would like to see the project completed. The CIAC program overview report from 2013 recommended not only a completion of the building, but a time table to complete the entire project. He also mentioned that the athletes pay participation fees and have done so for the past two years at a total of \$75,000 per year and the co-op fee for the football program is an additional \$10,000. Gate receipts from the football season are about \$5,000. He summarized that most of the funds needed for the project would be directly generated by the athletics. When you add the booster clubs' donations, the building would be paid for with no impact on the educational portion of the school budget.

Mr. Moore mentioned that the Board had suggested putting this project as a separate question on the budget referendum so that townspeople can vote separately on it and read the proposed language. Mr. Faiella pointed out that the donations would be contingent upon the building going forward this year.

Mr. Moore also explained that while this would not be a slippery slope, it would be a step-wise program and the intent of the booster clubs would be to add bathrooms at some point. Mr. Faiella agreed and explained that he didn't feel that they needed to have as much as was originally proposed.

Mr. Moore also stated that Brian Falcone had told him that 280 students participated on the field last year, at approximately 38 events plus Shoreline tournaments. Graduation was also held on the field. He agreed that there is a significant amount of use at the facility. Mr. Faiella also pointed out that the cost of the building has gone up quite a bit since it was originally talked about.

Mr. Faiella also noted that QBC would like the building lifted up 2 feet off the pad, to allow them to put in structures to secure the building to the foundation and makes the interior ceilings about 10 feet.

Dr. Taylor asked if the last referendum included bathrooms and what the cost for bathrooms would be moving forward. He is a bit worried that this approach is not showing the public the true costs of the building in the long term. He felt that if the total cost comes close to the number of the last referendum, the public already voted to reject that. It was explained that prevailing wage rates was a factor that drove up the cost of the last proposal by \$200,000 to \$300,000. The original plans called for 26 fixtures and that would not be necessary. Most field houses have two or three facilities on each side. The field house in Middletown was just completed with that number of facilities.

Dr. Veronesi felt that somebody has to own the project and while the booster clubs are willing to contribute money, at some point the project will belong to the district. A project manager will be required and there needs to be a plan of projected costs. She agreed with Dr. Taylor that anticipated costs need to be outlined. She also felt that the Board and the administration have to have a conversation about the district taking this project on. Dr. Veronesi felt that the discussion should include who will do it, when it will be done and if it is in line with a May referendum, how the question should be worded. She also wondered how it would be guaranteed that the clubs would continue to contribute over the course of five years. Mr. Faiella mentioned that the Benchwarmers have been around for 50 years and the majority of the money is coming from them. The football club has been in existence for 10 years. Mr. Faiella also

explained that the primary purpose of the football club is to provide scholarships, but they budgeted \$1,000 a year towards the building.

Mr. Moore asked if the committee would be in favor of moving forward to get additional information and costs and Dr. Taylor stated that he would be in favor of that. Mrs. Geraci was interested in the project management side of the project. Dr. Veronesi stated that a comprehensive proposal would be needed so that a strategic plan could be created.

Mr. Faiella also noted that the number that triggers prevailing wage requirements is \$400,000 and he firmly believes that that will not apply to this project. He also agreed that a general contractor would be needed for the project, but he did not know what that cost would be. Mr. Faiella reiterated that if nothing is built, the district will need to spend \$75,000 to resurface the concrete in the future.

The committee generally agreed that the district should move forward to get some of the information and numbers. Dr. Veronesi will reach out to Silver Petrucelli for some help on this.

### **Presentation - DATTCO Contract Renewal**

Mrs. Neubig reviewed that the transportation contract with DATTCO is set to expire on June 30, 2019. In the past, the district has leased the buses (no property taxes or sales taxes) and paid DATTCO to operate them. There had been discussion about negotiating a three-year contract. Mrs. Neubig reviewed that the district has had a 32-year relationship with DATTCO. DATTCO did negotiate an increase of 5.5 percent in the first year and then 3 percent for years 2 to 5. In researching other districts, a 3 percent escalator is right in line with other districts. When going out for new bids, the industry has seen double-digit increases.

In discussions with DATTCO, they discussed reducing the fleet by one bus for the 2019-2020 school year. The district has been very happy with the service from DATTCO. Standard buses last about five years, but the district has been able to keep the buses for 10 years because of DATTCO's maintenance. They have provided pro bono services as well.

Mrs. Neubig also explained that response time from DATTCO has been great.

As far as going out to bid, there would be a potential to reduce the costs. A new vendor could also offer more pro bono services and new expertise could be introduced into the district.

Mrs. Neubig reviewed the proposal which was for 26 vehicles at \$1.46 million. That was negotiated down to 25 vehicles at \$1.42 million. Costs would be similar to lease or use their vehicles. There were discussions about 48-passenger vehicles and that would save the district \$5,000 on the purchase price, but it would be the same cost to run them. With grade restructuring being in process, she felt that the district may need different buses. Mrs. Neubig felt that the district may be able to contract for seven 48-passenger buses, with the remainder being 71-passenger buses.

Mrs. Neubig went on to review the pro bono services DATTCO has offered, including Project Graduation and kindergarten orientation. She also noted a survey that was done in 2018 that showed the average daily rate for busing for the 2019-2020 of the reporting districts was \$332. The average increase for 2019-2020 is 3.56 percent.

To maintain the status quo, the district would need 19 71-passenger buses, two type 2 vehicles and four district vans. The reduction of one bus would be approximately \$42,000 and other reductions would be

seen by moving to 48-passenger buses. Mrs. Neubig provided a list of the current buses and how many passengers are on each bus. Coginchaug and Strong have the most students on the buses.

Mrs. Neubig reiterated that these numbers are students that are assigned to the buses, but the district could offer an opt-out to parents with a possible reimbursement option. She didn't feel that that would have offer much of an impact. If Memorial students are moved to Strong, another bus will be necessary for that run which would mean the fleet would have to remain at 19.

Mrs. Neubig also reported ride times that are provided on route sheets, with the longest being 60 minutes and the shortest being 17 minutes. All the buses finish their routes in under 60 minutes. Average ride time is 37 minutes with an average number of students on each bus of 33.5. The routes have an average number of stops of 17 with an average mileage of the route at 10.966.

After having discussions with other business managers, Mrs. Neubig reported that if the district is happy with the current provider and they are giving a reasonable increase, they felt that would be the way to go. Mrs. Neubig has worked closely with the CFO at DATTCO and feels that she has done her due diligence. Her recommendation would be to renew with DATTCO for a five-year contract with a five-year extension.

Mrs. Geraci asked when the district last went out to bid, but Mrs. Neubig does not have that information.

Dr. Veronesi explained that she is very, very satisfied with DATTCO and has never had as few complaints while working in other districts, however she also feels that it would be good practice to go out to bid. She did feel that the district should wait until the grade level restructuring is complete. She felt that the reason to wait would be to not get a new company in who would have to do all of the restructuring. Mrs. Neubig did comment that DATTCO has provided a lot of pro bono services regarding the restructuring. Mrs. Neubig's reservation is that the district may not receive the same level of service with a new company.

Mrs. Geraci stated that going to bid didn't necessarily mean the district would select the vendor with the lowest price, but in fact provides more negotiation opportunities with DATTCO.

Mr. Augur commented that the absolute level of an increase is not known and other school districts do go out for bid. He felt that 31 years with the same vendor is interesting, especially without knowing if the district has gone out to bid in that time. Mr. Roraback felt that any time there is that level of consistency, there can also be complacency. Mr. Augur also suggested proposing all used buses for three years.

Dr. Veronesi explained that this decision does not have to be voted on by the Board and that she just wanted to share this information. She does feel it is the right decision to stay with DATTCO for another five years. Dr. Veronesi does not feel that the district has not bid this out in 30 years and Mrs. Neubig explained that it has been at least more than 10 years.

Mr. Augur asked if DATTCO owned or leased their local depot and Mrs. Neubig did not know the answer to that.

Dr. Taylor would like to get input from the full board about this decision and Mr. Moore will mention it at tonight's meeting. Dr. Veronesi has recently reached out to other superintendents about bidding and received similar feedback. Mr. Moore also noted the familiarity that the district has with the bus drivers. He also asked if the school buses will be able to have seat belts added, when they become required. Mrs. Neubig felt that that cost would probably be passed on to the district.

### Capital Bonding Recommendation

Mr. Moore explained that the Finance Committee recommended bonding \$6.9 million after reviewing the proposals. Mr. Moore was concerned about having to another bonding issue in November and felt that a \$10 million bond would cover all of that without an impact on the debt service in the coming years. Mr. Augur stated that the Finance Committee had also asked to look at the numbers of straight contributions to capital. Mr. Moore explained that the debt service starts to tail off in about 2025 and there would then be more capacity to fund capital. Mr. Augur felt that the difference of \$174,000 could be the contribution to capital. He explained that the Finance Committee's recommendation was \$6.9 and not \$10 million because of that gap. Mr. Moore summarized that the debt service budget would slowly decrease, but the capital budget could be maintained.

Dr. Veronesi felt that there was finally a comprehensive capital plan with associated costs and as long as the district maintains that, it would work. Dr. Taylor recommended that that be developed into a policy. Mr. Augur agreed and felt that the spreadsheet would need to be carefully reviewed each year.

Dr. Taylor also felt that there is the practicality of the \$6.9 million and being able to say that it will truly just cover critical expenses. Dr. Veronesi added that they would want a number that people will vote for.

Mr. Moore stated that they will bring it to the full board for a vote as part of the budget. Dr. Veronesi thanked Mrs. Neubig for her work on this.

### Public Comment

Carl Stoup, from Durham, felt that it would be nice to have a field house/storage building, but he doesn't feel that the board should be taking on any more additional costs and he worries that the costs will continue to grow each year. Mr. Stoup also felt that building code will demand a certain number of fixtures.

### Adjournment

*Mrs. Geraci made a motion, seconded by Dr. Taylor, to adjourn the meeting.*

*In favor of adjourning the meeting: Mrs. Geraci, Mr. Moore, Mr. Roraback and Dr. Taylor.*

The meeting was adjourned at 6:40 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

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