

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education Utilization Committee met in Regular Session on October 25, 2018 at 6:00 PM in the Library at Coginchaug Regional High School, Durham, Connecticut.

Committee members present: Mr. Augur, Dr. Friedrich, Mr. Hicks and Mr. Moore

Committee members absent: Mrs. Boyle, Mrs. Geraci, Dr. Taylor and Mr. Yamartino

Other Board members present: None

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

The meeting began at 6:05 PM.

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Public Comment

None.

Approval of Agenda

The agenda was agreed upon, but no vote was taken due to a lack of a quorum.

Approval of Minutes - September 25, 2018

It was agreed to table the minutes until the next meeting due to a lack of a quorum.

Korn School Referendum

Mr. Moore explained that there will be a town meeting next week to authorize the referendum. Mr. Hicks stated that the town meeting will set the date and time of the referendum as it has already been authorized. Mr. Moore also explained that there is a meeting at Korn School tonight that Mr. Moore will attend to explain the outstanding debt on the facility and how it would be applied to Middlefield through the MOU with Durham.

Mr. Moore also pointed out that the committee needs to discuss what options would be available should the referendum not pass. So far, the two options that have been discussed are demolition at a cost of almost \$1 million and moth-balling it at approximately the same cost, including the debt service. Mr. Moore suggested that maybe another use may come up for the building or the town would want to try again with a different approach. His opinion is that the Board shouldn't move very fast on the course of action if it doesn't pass referendum.

Dr. Veronesi commented that she knows other Board members have a different opinion as far as maintaining the building. Mr. Hicks felt that Durham should buy the facility as there is such a need and he hasn't given a lot of thought to what happens if the referendum fails and that the district would be back to square one. Mr. Moore suggested that the town may have looked at other options already.

Mr. Moore felt that there may be somebody else who would buy it. Dr. Friedrich asked if the demolition numbers included the remaining debt on the roof and Mrs. Neubig explained that the State portion of that debt has been forgiven, but the district's debt of approximately \$300,000 remains.

Dr. Veronesi felt that if the referendum fails, the district would be back to square one in terms of decision-making and any cost updates with a slight modification of implications. If Durham acquires the building, part of that agreement is that they would pay Middlefield's share of the debt. If the building is demolished, both towns continue to pay. Dr. Veronesi explained that it currently costs about \$30,000 to maintain the building. Mr. Augur felt that demolition creates a different level of certainty, with a different environment for future plans.

Mr. Augur also felt there were other options, but asked if there would be an advantage to looking at closing Lyman and Brewster and renovating Korn. He also felt that Durham may look at its needs for a community center if it were a totally different building. Mr. Augur felt that they would not be able to go back to the townspeople about Korn School if it doesn't pass this time. Mr. Augur also felt that Durham should come in with a lower number and has voiced that concern to them.

Dr. Veronesi hoped that the committee would have some type of concise summary of these issues for the rest of the Board. Mr. Augur reviewed that he would not be in favor of trying to sell the building nor does he feel it would be in the region's best interest to have a non-community partner in a building within the school campus. Mr. Moore also mentioned that in order to convey that land, they would probably have to convey some access down Pickett Lane (private driveway).

To summarize, Mr. Augur felt that a private sale would be a very high hurdle and low likelihood. Mr. Moore felt that that cuts to the quick too much because there may be other options that the Board could support. He did agree that selling to a private party would be very difficult. Mr. Hicks has never been a fan of selling it to a private individual, due to traffic issues with a private business on a private road with children around. Mr. Hicks described a property owner on Pickett Lane wanted to put a driveway cut in and there was public support to keep private things off of that street.

Dr. Veronesi mentioned that a few people have mentioned the possibility of Korn School being purchased by a RESC, but she didn't know that that would be desirable for a magnet school setting due to geographic location. Mr. Hicks commented that ACES is in the process of trying to buy the Wintergreen magnet school building because Hamden wants to take the building back. He had jokingly mentioned that Region 13 may have a school available. He commented that Durham and Middlefield are at the outermost boundary of ACES' RESC and they would need a school nearer to New Haven and Hamden. Mr. Hicks also stated that charter schools have kind of fallen out of favor and there have been some serious issues with them.

Dr. Veronesi reviewed the options of razing, selling or repurposing the building. She also mentioned that an option had been explored of having Korn School has a K-5 building for the district, with all three other schools being closed. That would mean three buildings vacant and a big building project of about \$32 million. Mr. Augur asked if anyone remembered the timeline for that project and everyone generally agreed that that could not happen by 2021.

Mr. Moore also explained that if the referendum doesn't pass, the Town of Durham has not met the conditions of the MOU and there would be no agreement.

Strategic Visioning Update

Dr. Veronesi reported that the school-based team had a meeting last week for the purpose of reporting on the focus groups. Each team member had completed focus groups with students in each building. They received great feedback from the students, with themes that run from elementary school to high school. These include the students wanting to be with their peer group as much as possible, wanting to go outside, teaching being too fast with too much pressure and no time for questions and coordinating homework. The students also felt that, with the increased pressure on them, kindness and understanding from teachers is more and more important.

They have also organized the feedback from the past eight months into student achievement, well-being and engagement. Dr. Veronesi felt that this has been one of the finest examples of collaboration, teamwork and consideration of feedback that she has ever experienced. They are now discussing how their conclusions align with a grade configuration and if either of the two options for grade configurations more significantly enhance or detract from the stated priority themes. They will have a final wrap-up on Monday afternoon and she will compile a report to share with the Board.

Dr. Veronesi also stated that the question of whether the Board has already made a decision came up in these discussions. She told the group that the Board has specifically asked for the feedback from the committee without the influence of cost, busing, etc. Dr. Veronesi feels that it is abundantly clear that what people are describing they believe is best for all students and not differentiated by one or two defining characteristics. One of the questions that came up is how the Board would decide who goes to which school and the possibility of a Durham and a Middlefield elementary school if the Pre-K-5/K-5 option is selected. The committee liked the K-5, with the students staying in one school for six years and having the benefit of older role models and considered whether there were other options of having younger and older students together if they are not in the same building. Dr. Veronesi reviewed that this has been outstanding work.

Mr. Moore commented that the feeling at the end was that the teachers felt that, whatever the decision is, they will make it work.

Vestibule Study

Mr. Augur reviewed that only one option was recommended for Coginchaug and Strong, by virtue of their design. The other three buildings were a bit pricier due to their layout. Mr. Augur asked if the committee felt there would be a benefit to do the vestibule project across all assets or would staging it make sense. He felt that it would work well to start with Coginchaug and Strong and then learn from those and possibly make a slightly different choice at the other schools. He wondered if the Utilization committee would want to recommend moving forward in the near term with Coginchaug and Strong and move to the others in due course.

Dr. Friedrich felt that it makes sense to do it where the architects see that it is straightforward and learn from that before doing extensive work at the other schools. He wasn't sure, however, how the parents would feel about that.

Dr. Veronesi reviewed the total cost of \$195,000 after State reimbursement and each project will take approximately nine months, start to finish. Mrs. Neubig was not quite sure what the lead time would be

at this point. Dr. Veronesi felt that, either way, there needs to be a rollout of this. Mr. Augur agreed, but felt that there would be a commitment made.

Dr. Veronesi also mentioned that they will ask Silver Petrucelli what the timeline would be for each project, and for the total project. Mr. Moore felt that there wouldn't be much disruption. Mr. Augur felt that the additional video would be separate from the vestibule project. Dr. Veronesi would feel very good about getting started. She felt that it would be a good idea to get started with the buildings that have the most intact entryways.

Mr. Augur asked if any responsible architect would design a new building without a secure vestibule and Dr. Veronesi didn't think they would. Mr. Hicks would check to see if it was included in a project he is working on in Hamden. Mr. Augur felt that that would become de facto practice.

Mr. Augur asked if the Board would be willing to authorize the \$150,000 to begin the project and Mr. Moore felt that that would happen and it could then go out to bid. Mrs. Neubig confirmed that the funding is there and application for the State grant can be done. Mr. Moore suggested it be brought forward with a recommendation to go ahead.

Capital Improvements/Building Alterations

Mrs. Neubig had a printout from the presentation she made at the ERC meeting. She reviewed that this would be the time to address building needs and asked that the Board doesn't leave out the other schools that have needs. Mrs. Neubig also included a chart that summarized construction costs and capital improvements along with budget impact and closing offset.

Mrs. Neubig had also done some graphing of the debt service, with the different bonding options and savings from closing Lyman School. She explained that those two combined provide some significant budget decreases, up to 2.78 percent in 2027 and as little as .28 percent in further out years. She had also provided a capital cost avoidance at Lyman School and she will also provide impact on the mill rate once she gets more input. Mrs. Neubig will review her numbers and provide that information to the committee members.

Dr. Veronesi thanked Mrs. Neubig and explained that this is exactly what people have been asking for. She felt that this is compelling information with the priority to address the capital needs that have been neglected and that it can be accomplished in a planful manner that does not represent an overwhelming impact to the budget.

Safety Update

Mr. Augur summarized that they have just talked about the vestibules and had also received an update from the SRO at the last Board meeting.

Mrs. Neubig distributed a chart and explained that the items in bold are new since the last revision. She added the vestibules. The window film can be done with the security grant. Cameras and buzzer stations have been completed at all schools, with some small tweaks remaining. This is just at the buzzer stations. Open door alarms are in process and have been completed at Cuginchaug and Strong. Interior and exterior cameras at all schools are priced at a maximum of \$59,000. Mrs. Neubig also provided

information on interior door locks. Dr. Veronesi reviewed that doors are in the locked position, but there is a thin magnet strip that gets pulled out during a lockdown.

Window numbering has been updated because the first responders did not recommend it. Universal cell coverage was mentioned and would be about \$10,000 per building, including installation. Mrs. Neubig believes that all of the priority items that were discussed have now been priced out. Dr. Veronesi felt that the radio system could also use an upgrade and she detailed who currently has radios. They will look into new radios in more detail and report back to the committee. Mr. Augur asked if there were apps that could accomplish the same thing as a radio and he asked that that be an option that the committee discusses.

Public Comment

A comment on radios from a parent from Durham was that radios aren't as good as they might think. She feels that the elementary schools need something as well as Cuginchaug and Strong and that it should be equal across all schools.

Missy Booth, from Durham, has heard a rumor that sixth grade is going to move next year. Her concern is that ID in sixth grade will be going away. She also stated that many people are being let into the schools that she doesn't know. She is also still in favor of K-5. In terms of the SRO, he had not gone around to all of the classrooms at Lyman as of the Durham Fair. She felt that it is important that he be seen throughout the district.

Theresa Weimann, from Durham, agreed with Ms. Booth and noted that her kids have not seen the SRO. Dr. Veronesi explained that the SRO will be going to faculty meetings from now through December, but he has not yet met all of the faculty. He will also be going to assemblies and visiting classrooms.

Adjournment

Due to a lack of a quorum, no adjournment vote was taken.

The meeting ended at 7:10 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Debi Waz
Alwaz First