

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education Utilization Committee met in Regular Session on April 25, 2019 at 4:00 PM in the Library at Coginchaug Regional High School, Durham, Connecticut.

Committee members present: Dr. Friedrich, Mr. Hicks, Dr. Taylor and Mr. Yamartino

Committee members absent: Mr. Augur, Mrs. Caramanello and Mrs. Geraci

Other Board members present: Mr. Moore

Administration present: Dr. Veronesi, Superintendent of Schools

Also present: Laura Francis and Ed Bailey (arrived late)

Dr. Taylor called the meeting to order at 4:00 PM.

### **Pledge of Allegiance**

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

### **Public Comment**

None.

### **Approval of Agenda**

*Dr. Friedrich made a motion, seconded by Mr. Moore, to approve the agenda.*

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

### **Approval of Minutes - March 28, 2019**

A correction was offered to change the word morphine to morphing on page 2.

*A motion was made, seconded by Mr. Yamartino, to approve the minutes of the March 28, 2019 meeting, as amended.*

*In favor of approving the minutes of the March 28, 2019, as amended: Dr. Friedrich, Mr. Hicks, Mr. Moore, Dr. Taylor and Mr. Yamartino. Motion passed unanimously.*

### **Korn and Lyman School Building Status Update - Discussion with First Selectmen**

Laura Francis stated that she and Ed Bailey met with Dr. Veronesi after the referendum and explained that her opinion has changed about whether the building should be leveled. While trying to figure out the best use for the building, she realized that the building is in pretty darned good shape even though some capital improvements are needed. She had asked Dr. Veronesi if there was a way for the towns to start using the building and they received a great deal of advice.

Mrs. Francis then went on to say that the Town of Durham is no longer in a position to take the lead on this, but would be willing to be a partner. If the district decided that they agreed that Korn School is a community asset, Mrs. Francis would love to partner with them and help utilize the space. The Town has

a budget for the Activity Center that can be brought over, but she can no longer take the lead or have the town be the only user. She will not repackage this and send it to the community.

Mrs. Francis felt that the community sent a clear message that the price tag was too high and even people who voted yes were concerned about that. Of the people who voted no, she believes that the reaction was mixed. Some felt it was just too much money, others didn't think they would ever use it.

Mrs. Francis explained that Durham's Activity Center is used every day, all day and programs are full. Durham does have programming and does have needs and she would like to offer that partnership to the district. She and Ed Bailey have talked and her opinion is that everyone needs to get in line and she would not support razing the building until there is further discussion. She would like to explore options of how the building can be used.

Mrs. Francis talked about an article she read about a school in East Haven that hasn't been used as a school for 20 years and they have now decided to sell it. She wondered if there were other possibilities for the building here and asked the committee members for their thoughts. She also noted that she and Mr. Bailey have spoken about Lyman School and the fact that Middlefield has no interest in the building.

Mr. Bailey stated that that was something that the town would reevaluate because that was the thought several years ago, though he believed the chances were pretty slim because the town already has too much square footage for a town its size. Middlefield already has an auditorium and lots of meeting rooms. He also noted that Center School sat vacant for 10 years before the town actually started using it. At one point, it had been recommended to tear it down. The town did end up eventually spending about \$600,000 to \$700,000 and now have a fairly nice building. A long-term goal would be to combine all town offices into one building. He felt that Lyman School is just way too much square footage for the town to contemplate and is not in a great location as they are trying to build a town center.

Mr. Bailey also stated that they are in the process of hiring a new town planner and they will be asked to work on a short list for the district as to possible reuses of Lyman School and to help put together an RFP to help the district dispose of the school, if that is what is determined. Mrs. Francis mentioned that the town planner will be a position shared by the two towns.

Dr. Taylor asked what Mr. Bailey thinks the citizens of Middlefield feel about having their tax dollars go to something that they wouldn't really be involved in, like a shared community center with Durham. Dr. Taylor stated that if he was a Middlefield taxpayer, he would be a little concerned that the building would be potentially dedicated to one town but mutual taxes would support it. Mr. Bailey felt that it would depend upon the model used. He suggested that if Durham was to utilize the building, they would cover the costs of the building or at least a portion of it to the point of negating any large expenses by the district.

Mrs. Francis explained that Durham would utilize the space in the same manner they utilize space now. Durham currently spends money to utilize space for basketball and she expects there would be utilization fees. She explained that if the district found an acceptable or desired use for the building but it was only for part of the building, Durham would be willing to be a partner for some of the excess space.

Mr. Bailey stated that some people feel that 10 years from now, the district will be desperate for school space and there would be a tremendous cost to get them back up to speed. He has heard that Korn School costs about \$30,000 a year to keep in mothballs and Dr. Veronesi explained that that number is more around \$68,000. People felt it was worth keeping the building at \$30,000 a year. Mr. Bailey felt that if the district can receive income for Korn School to offset those costs, it might be an argument to retain the

building. One of the things that concerns Mr. Moore is the demolition cost is also about \$60,000 a year for 20 years and somewhere in between would be better.

Mr. Moore felt that the district's inability to lease the building ends when the bond issue is paid off. Dr. Veronesi agreed and felt that that is in three years. At that point, the district could then look for organizations that would like to lease space. He reminded everyone that the fields are still being used, both by the district and the town. The gym has also been used for recreation. He also believes there would be some value in trying to see if there would be a use of the kitchen. Mr. Moore agreed that tearing the building down would not be high on his priority list and he would rather see some kind of use.

Mrs. Francis asked if there were any auxiliary educational activities that could happen there, i.e. Makerspace, Innovation Center, that wouldn't necessarily be part of the curriculum. Mr. Moore mentioned adult education courses. Mrs. Francis has spoken to the Chamber of Commerce and they feel like Makerspace will soon outgrow its space.

Dr. Veronesi reminded everyone of the restrictions on Durham's use of the building, including the town bearing the cost of custodial, maintenance and security and any capital improvements related to its use. The town would also need to obtain any necessary approvals related to its use.

Dr. Veronesi added that the district has an Innovation Lab at the middle school and there will be something similar at the high school so they wouldn't necessarily need that for the students, but if the town were to make it available after hours or on the weekends then she could see that. She does feel that the district is in the position, like a lot of other communities, of having more building space than is needed. While she believes it could be an asset to have the space, she felt these bigger issues need to be agreed on.

Mrs. Francis felt there was a lot of information in the engineering reports and stated that if she could supplant what is being spent for the Community Center, but no more than that, to Korn School, she would be willing to do that. When she refers to it as a community asset, she means for both communities and if it is not viewed that way, she believes they are at the razor's edge perspective.

Mr. Yamartino did not understand why the district can't lease the building, but they can charge a fee. He didn't see any reason not to try to pursue this and would like to see what the costs will look like. He thought it may even be able to be done as a lease-to-own. Mrs. Francis did not want any partnership to look like a new way to package this to Durham which is why she is offering to be a partner if the district wants to keep the building as a community asset and cannot be the driver. She commented that she did not feel like a partner in the process and felt more like a stepchild. She wants to be part of a solution.

Mr. Bailey asked how long the building could go without any major capital improvements and Mrs. Francis felt that the water, the heater and the HVAC would probably be the quickest to go. The engineers believe that there are code issues that could be triggered and that would need to be explored. Dr. Taylor felt it would be a really hard sell to go to the public to ask for any capital money for a building that has been effectively closed down. Mrs. Francis didn't disagree and felt they would need a proof of concept.

Dr. Friedrich asked Mrs. Francis if she intended to move the community center to Korn School if the district kept the building. Mrs. Francis stated that if the district had a desire to obtain some revenue out of the building while figuring out the best use, she could be part of that revenue stream. She explained that she would want the gym, the art room, the music room and the cafeteria to continue their current programs. Mr. Hicks agreed that that would allow the town to continue to supply the services that are supplied now with the added convenience of parking. Mr. Hicks also commented that the food pantry has

almost outgrown its current space and would need more space. Mrs. Francis also noted that if the district found a use for those spaces, she would be willing to use excess space instead.

Mr. Bailey asked what the thoughts are on the district managing the property and Mrs. Francis asked if discussions are going to continue on shared services, which may include a shared buildings and grounds model. Mr. Bailey stated that Middlefield's community center requires about an hour a day to administer. They also have a part-time custodian.

Dr. Friedrich asked what dollar amount Mrs. Francis is thinking about and she explained that their current budget is about \$56,000. She also noted that she has had an offer to buy the building, but she will not be entertaining that option. She also noted that the seniors are not comfortable being on the second floor of that building. Mrs. Francis also explained that it was never meant to be a permanent solution.

Dr. Taylor felt that the issue will become the dollar difference between the income and whatever costs become associated with that. Dr. Friedrich stated that if the district pays \$60,000 a year to keep the building in a condition so that it can be used for other activities and generate some income, at the end of 20 years, they would still have the building and then the roof would be bad or the HVAC is gone and it will still cost \$1 million plus to tear it down. He feels that part of the issue is to look at spending the \$1 million twice. Someone else mentioned that there would be community value.

Mr. Yamartino felt that if they wanted it to be revenue neutral, it costs \$68,000 per year now and would be \$68,000 per year to tear it down. If the town pays \$56,000 and the district can operate the building on \$120,000 to \$130,000, it would be revenue neutral to the district and to the town. That would delay razing the building and allowing people to continue to use it. The only issue being whether \$56,000 is enough to do even some nominal repairs as well as the increased cost of heating and cooling the building. It was also mentioned that it could be tried for a few years and stop if it isn't working.

Mrs. Francis explained that the risk that Durham would be taking is to get out of their current lease and then not have any space. Mr. Yamartino asked when the current lease is up and Mrs. Francis stated that it is a three-year lease, but she can get out of it at any time. The current landlord is aware of this situation.

Dr. Veronesi believes that the district made the decision to close the building because they didn't have a use for it and they didn't want to be landlord or incur the costs of maintaining or repairing. They wanted to direct their assets to things that would have a greater impact on the students. This would be a complete conceptual shift of consideration. She again related this to the field storage discussions they have had with the ability to identify the potential costs and considerations. She just felt that the district needed to very clear on the issues.

Mrs. Francis did not feel that Durham's use would cover all of the costs. Mr. Yamartino reviewed how the building is maintained at the moment and what the difference would be to make it habitable. Mrs. Francis reiterated that she felt it needs to be part of a bigger plan, whether it be storage, a partnership or compatible uses.

Mr. Bailey explained that Middlefield had a very strong opinion to eliminate Center School and not have a community center, but they turned it into a community center anyway. Today, it is so integral to the community and that may, in fact, be the case here for Durham. He couldn't imagine that the building couldn't be used for another five years without a lot of work and that decision point could be moved out into the future. Dr. Taylor stated that a problem with that is, at that point, it may be best for the district to put a new school there.

Carl Stoup mentioned that the water heater is the biggest thing at Korn School. He added that if the district can keep the designation of the building as primarily education, that doesn't trigger the code requirements. He, too, liked the idea of trying to share the building.

Mr. Yamartino also noted that they could install split HVAC systems for just the rooms being used at a relatively low cost. He does feel that it would take some work.

Dr. Veronesi stated that the district pays Middletown \$40,000 per year for adult education and she wasn't sure how many Durham and Middlefield residents actually use it and how many would if it were here in town. She wasn't sure that would be a compelling argument as there are other buildings available. Dr. Veronesi reiterated that the board had made the decision to close Korn School because Durham was going to buy it.

Mrs. Francis reiterated that she was not here to ask, but instead was offering to be a partner. Dr. Veronesi felt that the board will need to make a decision and that is it important for this committee to hear Durham's offer. Mrs. Francis also stated that Durham is at risk now because the landlord could sell the building and they would no longer have a lease. She also noted that the current space is just not ideal for a number of reasons. Mr. Hicks noted that they are light years ahead from where they were when it first opened about 10 years ago.

Dr. Veronesi stated that if the Utilization Committee brought the recommendation to the full board to really look at this, they would have to look at current costs and what mechanical systems are coming up for repair/replacement.

Mrs. Francis would rather that this be proposed in a very different way. She would like it to go to the full board as if the district decides to keep the building open or pursue other uses, to purchase, rent or whatever, the Town of Durham might be interested if there was excess space. She does not want this meeting to go to the full board as an ask. She is basically offering to fill space if there is excess space available after the district finds a use for the building.

Dr. Veronesi added that a part of this will be custodial fees and management expenses. Mr. Yamartino suggested delaying this until after the start of the next fiscal year because a town planner should be in place for both towns and maybe this could become a role for that person. Mr. Yamartino agreed that if they were to keep the building open, it would not be substantially viable for just Durham to support it and they would need other people to have interest. He asked if either town had economic development money that could possibly hire an outside firm to see if there were educational interests.

Mr. Bailey suggested the district put out an RFP for potential reuse of the building, to include renting some space. Mr. Yamartino noted that that RFP would call for resources that the district doesn't have and brought it back to the economic development committees of both towns. He didn't believe that a decision needs to be made within the next few months to raze the building and that would allow time to see if this information could be gathered.

Mr. Bailey asked Mrs. Francis if the Town of Durham would be interested in managing the building and Mrs. Francis stated that she did not have anybody available for that. She thought it would have to be part of the model and maybe there would be a property manager. Dr. Veronesi stated when the board first started looking at the Korn School disposition, they looked at razing it, putting it on the market, leasing it, selling it to Durham and Middlefield's allocation. She felt that they were back at the same place again, but liked the idea that a subcommittee include the town planner and other folks to see what that would look like. Again, Mr. Yamartino would like to see this driven by the economic development committees of both towns with the school board having a member or two.

Dr. Friedrich reviewed that going to the full board with a proposal will take some development. They are talking about the district operating the building and looking for people to rent space. Mrs. Francis has volunteered that the Town of Durham could be the first space renter which is an option that had not previously been discussed. The bottom line is they would be talking about entering into a system where the district owns the building and is operating it for rent, either in the short term or long term. They have also discovered now that the size of the rental offered by Mrs. Francis is not enough to carry the likely carrying costs. Mr. Yamartino pointed out that those costs have not yet been determined. Dr. Friedrich stated that it costs \$70,000 right now and that is already more than the rent being offered.

Mr. Moore added that if adult education was moved to the building, that would be an additional \$40,000 in revenue but then the district would have to run the program. Mrs. Francis added that they would help with the research as they are partners in this endeavor.

Dr. Veronesi pointed out that there would need to be a majority board vote to raze the building. If that doesn't happen, the district would have to explore other options. Mr. Bailey stated that he believed he and Mrs. Francis could work together, with their new planner, to start brainstorming. Dr. Veronesi also suggested that Middlefield could use the space while renovating their Community Center. Mr. Bailey explained that they have developed a capital plan to maintain that building for the next 20 years. Mr. Yamartino mentioned that Middlefield's fire house needs renovation as well and they have talked about a possible new building.

It was generally agreed to pursue an analysis of what to do with Korn School, from demolition to repurposing. The board would have to figure out exactly who would do the analysis.

Mrs. Francis added that she supports this fully knowing that a purpose may be found that leaves no room for the Town of Durham.

Dr. Friedrich suggested that Dr. Taylor recommend to the full board that the Utilization Committee would like to defer a decision, pending a study of other uses. Mr. Moore felt that they would want to evaluate all of the options, including demolition. Dr. Veronesi stated that they would need updated costs for razing the building as well as feedback from the district and the communities. She also mentioned that the legal advice they received was advice that primarily pertained to Durham's use of the building.

Dr. Taylor would be strongly opposed to any private sale of the building. Mrs. Francis asked if the information about the repayment was given to the district in writing or just verbally. Dr. Veronesi stated that that was in writing, with the condition of it being for municipal use.

### **Building Committee: Membership and Responsibilities**

Mr. Moore had emailed a list of responsibilities to the Building Committee members today. He reviewed the members of the committee, including Mr. Augur and Mr. Moore from the board. Mr. Moore would like to be replaced by another board member. A meeting will be held after the referendum where they will elect a chairman, vice-chairman and a secretary.

### **Field Storage Building: Next Steps**

Mr. Moore reviewed that a decision was made at the last meeting to put this issue off for now, even though \$35,000 had been offered from the booster clubs. One of the questions had been what the costs would be for bathrooms and additional costs down the road. Dr. Veronesi and Mr. Moore hoped that the Building Committee could take a look at this as well including what the requirements would be for toilets,

etc. Darin Overton has agreed to take a look at this. Hopefully, this project could be part of the school addition referendum in November. Mr. Moore felt this would be \$200,000 to \$300,000 and the school additions would be in the \$3 million range.

Mr. Moore felt that there were a couple of townspeople who are against this, but he had been at a track meet and there were four portable toilets and no water. Dr. Taylor's opposition has always just been transparency and total cost. Dr. Veronesi also noted that this would be the district's project. She felt that every minute she spends on these types of issues are minutes that she's not spending on student achievement. She hopes that the district can make a decision so they can stop talking about it. Mr. Moore felt that there will always be other people who want to talk about this. Dr. Taylor made the argument that the board had made a decision to stop talking about it when the last referendum failed.

Dr. Taylor also understood that this is ultimately directed at getting lights on the field for football games and asked what the condition was for that. He felt that the board needed to have a solid response to that as well. Dr. Veronesi believes that it had originally been decided that the athletic clubs were going to do the fund raising for the lights. Mr. Yamartino reminded everyone that that was the deal with the field house as well. Mr. Moore believed that the original plan included the field house, but they ran out of money. Mr. Yamartino was certain that the plan included only the pad. Dr. Veronesi stated that the bathrooms would need to be built before the lights could be installed. Mr. Yamartino stated that the neighbor had filed a lawsuit for fear that her property could be used as a bathroom and the agreement that was signed was for a sufficient number of bathrooms to be built before any lights are installed.

Mr. Moore summarized that there is a tremendous amount of use at the field and no real facility for fans or athletes. He felt that it is not a completed operation. Dr. Taylor would like to get the information about the bathrooms and lights. Dr. Friedrich asked if bathrooms were included in the storage shed and Mr. Moore stated that there was not. Dr. Taylor stated that that was his problem with it, knowing that bathrooms would be requested soon thereafter, followed by lights.

Dr. Veronesi added that there are regulations about how many bathrooms are necessary based on the number of seats in the bleachers. Mr. Yamartino added that it may be possible to build it in phases over a number of years which may help with prevailing wage. Dr. Veronesi stated that Jeremy Renninghoff had told her there were recent changes in legislation that would allow volunteers to work on the building as well.

It was agreed that this project will be part of the responsibilities of the Building Committee.

### **Public Comment**

A member of the public asked about the debt on Korn School that is owed to the state and stated that when the analysis was done, he thought that Mrs. Neubig stated that the restriction was gone and there were no payback requirements regardless of use. Dr. Veronesi will check with Mrs. Neubig, but stated that they had only asked about the transfer to the town.

Mrs. Francis stated that CCM is trying to negotiate some big ticket items with the legislature. Their stance was no teacher retirement requirement to the towns unless several other things happened. She also spoke with COST today and asked about the possibility of it happening and they felt it was slim to none. These proposals included revenue diversification, but it had to be net-net to the communities. She also reported that a bill is still alive to eliminate car taxes and others that could affect the towns.

Dr. Veronesi also reported that the district is over budget for Korn School for fuel.

Carl Stoup repeated that is adamantly against the field storage building and feels like it is being back-doored and the project will continue to grow. He has been approached by community members who have concerns about it as well. Some even think it's already in the budget somewhere and they can't see it. He also commented that some of the proposals that had been received about Korn School contained interest from a tennis association.

Missy Booth agreed about the field storage building and stated that the community already voted no and now it's back as something else. She also noted that the soccer club chose not to contribute to this. The email soliciting help did say that this would just be the beginning. Mr. Moore felt that they were very open about that. Mrs. Booth felt it was sketchy. She added that, in terms of uses for Korn, she wondered if it could be used as a preschool or daycare. She stated that the Middlefield Children's Center is bursting at the seams and has a wait list since the Durham Co-Op closed.

**Adjournment**

*Dr. Friedrich made a motion, seconded by Mr. Hicks, to adjourn the meeting.*

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

The meeting ended at 5:10 PM.

Respectfully submitted,  
Debi Waz

Debi Waz  
Alwaz First