

**Revised**

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education met in special session on Wednesday, December 15, 2021 at 6:30 PM via Zoom.

Board members present: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello (arrived late), Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Mr. Stone

Board members absent: Mr. Yamartino

Administration present: Dr. Schuch, Superintendent of Schools and Mrs. Neubig, Director of Finance

Mrs. Petrella called the meeting to order at 6:31 PM.

**Pledge of Allegiance**

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Mrs. Petrella asked for a moment of silence for Ed Bailey.

**Approval of Agenda**

*Mr. Roraback made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Dahlheimer, to approve the agenda, as presented.*

*In favor of approving the agenda, as presented: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Mr. Stone. Motion carried.*

**Public Comment**

Charles Stengel, from Durham, reminded the board of the district's core ethical values, respect, responsibility, honesty, kindness and courage. He also mentioned transparency. The warning letter is for \$7.5 million on a project which is estimated to cost \$13.5 million with anticipated state reimbursement of approximately 53 percent. Mr. Stengel felt that the board members all knew at the last meeting that state reimbursement will probably not happen due to the underutilization of buildings, yet the architect gave the option of using the \$7.5 million for the referendum. He felt that choosing to use that number is far from transparent and is, in fact, deceptive. He asked for the board to reconsider the numbers and use the full amount when rescheduling the meeting. Mr. Stengel stated that the board is not being transparent and not being honest and he felt this was really a shame as the first action of this board.

**Reschedule the Thursday, December 16, 2021 District Meeting to Wednesday, December 22, 2021 at the Coginchaug Regional High School Auditorium, 135 Pickett Lane, Durham, Connecticut at 7:00 PM for the purpose of conducting a public hearing on the recommendation of the District Board of Education to appropriate \$7,500,000 for renovations and improvements to John Lyman Elementary School in Middlefield and to authorize the issuance of bonds or notes of the District in an amount not to exceed \$7,500,000 to finance the appropriation; and to approve the Warning of District Meeting attached hereto.**

Mrs. Petrella explained that the original date of December 16<sup>th</sup> needs to be changed as one of the legal notices was not published within the proper time frame. She suggested that it could be rescheduled for December 22<sup>nd</sup>, however she would prefer having it on January 4<sup>th</sup> in order to avoid the holidays.

Mrs. Booth asked why the meeting can't be held on a Wednesday as she would have a potential conflict on January 4<sup>th</sup>. Ms. Betty added that Tuesday don't work for her and Wednesdays are better. Mr. Stone felt that Wednesday would be better for him as well. Mrs. Dahlheimer and Mr. Mennone were available either night.

Dr. Schuch and Mrs. Neubig stated that the action taken on the Warning would actually establish the meeting date and should be done in one motion. Dr. Schuch also noted that they will need to wait at least 30 days after the meeting to hold a referendum. Mrs. Booth confirmed that they will also need to hold a special Board of Education meeting after the District meeting and then would not be able to use district money to advocate for the issue. Dr. Schuch stated that they have received legal advice about advocacy and it is limited after that date. Mrs. Booth then asked if they will also reschedule the retreat and Dr. Schuch explained that the board will have to discuss that, but they could put in a placeholder in the budget.

Mrs. Petrella reviewed that they need to decide which option they support which would drive the amount of money in the proposal. Mrs. Neubig stated that she felt it was not accurate to accuse the board of not being transparent about this as they went off information that she and the architect had provided. There are two parts to a state construction grant application, one is the appropriation and the second is the bonding authorization. The State requires the full appropriation amount in case they don't get the funding and the towns must guarantee the total amount. The district has to vote to approve the bonded amount because they would be hoping to get state reimbursement. If the \$13.5 million is appropriated, the bonding of \$7.5 million can be approved and an application can be made for a state construction grant. If the grant application is denied, the project can be pulled at any time and, if the grant gets approved at \$13.5 million, the district can proceed with either renovate-as-new or capital improvements.

When the board reviewed the bonding amount last week Silver Petrucelli had stated what had to be bonded, not appropriated. If the board chooses to move forward with renovate-as-new, the motion will have to be revised to appropriate \$13.5 million but the bonding can stay at \$7.5 million. The motion can stand as is if the board chooses to do capital improvements and not renovate-as-new. Mrs. Neubig apologized for the incorrect information.

Mr. Roraback reviewed that Ms. Miller had recommended 10 to 15 percent above the expected amount and asked if that would apply to the \$13.5 million number as well. Mrs. Neubig explained that the recommendation is to bond 15 to 20 percent higher.

Dr. Schuch asked if there was still uncertainty tonight about this decision, would the board have to go with the higher number for any chance of renovating as new. They could always go down from that number, but not up. Mrs. Neubig agreed and stated that what matters is the application that is made to the state, but the board would still be able to decide which option to move forward with up until the grant application deadline of June 30<sup>th</sup>. She added that if the board decides to just do capital improvements, there are a number of items that would still be eligible for state grants, such as LED lighting and code violations.

Mrs. Neubig explained that the question on the referendum would read exactly as the Warning which might be to appropriate \$13.5 million and approve \$7.5 million in bonding. Mrs. Booth thought that they had decided to see what the voters thought as far as which option. She reiterated that she believed it would be wonderful to have a new school, but didn't feel it would be fair. She also didn't think that

having the project take three years is the right choice because things are bound to break down before then. Mrs. Booth would lean towards fixing what needs to get fixed, however the people should have a voice and a choice.

Dr. Schuch added that the board can still wait for input if they appropriate the \$13.5 million, but cannot change it upwards. Mrs. Booth felt that many people would not want that high a number. Mr. Mennone felt there would be a lot of push-back because Durham had wanted that school closed and now they would be spending a significant amount of money on a school that could have been closed. He wondered what would happen if it doesn't pass in the referendum. Mrs. Caramanello also felt that it would not pass and it is causing the district to constantly be behind with the reconfiguration. She felt that it would be in the district's best interest for them to make decisions that would make the project move faster and the renovate-as-new would mean the kids would live with renovation for about three years which is just way too long. Ideally and fiscally, the board had wanted to close the school, but now there is no choice.

Mrs. Booth asked if the referendum needed to pass by majority or by both towns separately. Mrs. Neubig stated that it would just be by total number of votes. Dr. Schuch stated that the prior vote was to amend the charter which had to be passed by both towns. Mrs. Booth also clarified that it wasn't going to take three years, but one year for planning and one or two years of actual renovation.

Mr. Moore felt that if they were to go with renovate-as-new, they would need to say what the \$13.5 million is for and felt that the two numbers would be confusing. He agreed with Mrs. Booth and Mrs. Caramanello that doing the repairs would probably be more appropriate. Mr. Moore also noted that if that fails, they could go back for a lower number on an annual basis or bring the vote back to the voters about closing the school.

Mr. Mennone felt that the board was caught between a rock and a hard place as there is a lot of money that needs to be spent on Lyman but a large number of people who voted to close it. He has already heard from people who are not happy about that and felt it would probably not pass. Mr. Mennone added that that wouldn't be fair to the kids and it's important that they are in a safe environment. He would love to know why Middlefield voters felt they should keep the school open.

Mr. Moore felt that the purpose of the public hearing would be to get those answers. Ms. Betty asked if they could hold the hearing before making a decision and Mrs. Petrella explained that they have to come up with the number tonight. Dr. Schuch clarified that the number decided on tonight would be the ceiling, but could be reduced after the public hearing. Mrs. Neubig agreed and stated that the \$13.5 million appropriation would allow them to have the renovate-as-new discussion at the district meeting. If the feedback is negative, the board could then lower that amount at the special board meeting following the hearing.

Mr. Roraback recalled they were apprehensive about going in with the lower number as more systems may fail over time. He felt that going in with a higher number allows for some wiggle room. Mrs. Dahlheimer felt it was important that, no matter what they decide, they let everyone know why they came to that decision. She would not want to ask the public for that large an amount of money without explaining why. She would not be for renovate-as-new as it sends a message that they're not looking at the other schools. She believes that it would not be a wise choice to go with the higher number.

Mr. Stone agreed and has heard that people in town are not happy with the board spending money to repair a school that most of Durham wanted shut down.

Mrs. Petrella felt it was important that the number they propose covers at least what they feel needs to be done in capital improvements. As far as the \$13.5 million, she too is concerned. She asked Mrs. Neubig if the \$7.5 million would be enough to cover all the repairs listed and Mrs. Neubig felt that it would right now, but Silver Petrucelli estimated the cost could rise to over \$9 million over the next four years.

Mrs. Dahlheimer asked if the facilities study is online for people to review and Mrs. Neubig confirmed that the draft study is online and the complete study will go up after tonight's meeting. The only things that had changed was some kitchen equipment was added and a circulatory pump went from priority 2 to priority 1.

*Mrs. Booth made a motion, seconded by Mr. Mennone, to reschedule the Thursday, December 16, 2021 District Meeting to Wednesday, January 5, 2022 at the Coginchaug Regional High School Auditorium, 135 Pickett Lane, Durham, Connecticut at 7:00 PM for the purpose of conducting a public hearing on the recommendation of the District Board of Education to appropriate \$7,500,000 for renovations and improvements to John Lyman Elementary School in Middlefield and to authorize the issuance of bonds or notes of the District in an amount not to exceed \$7,500,000 to finance the appropriation; and to approve the Warning of District Meeting attached hereto.*

Mrs. Booth wanted this information to get out to everyone soon and hoped it could be posted on the website and notification sent out through ParentSquare. Dr. Schuch stated that they would get the information out tomorrow morning and Mrs. Maloney will get signs put up and the custodial staff will also be notified so that they can inform anyone who shows up. Dr. Schuch also explained that Mrs. Petrella, as chairman, does not have the authority to postpone or cancel the district meeting without having this special meeting.

*In favor of approving the above motion: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Mr. Stone. Motion carried.*

*Mrs. Dahlheimer read the Warning into the record: Warning of District Meeting/Public Hearing, Regional School District 13, Towns of Durham and Middlefield, January 5, 2022. The electors and citizens qualified to vote in town meetings of the Towns of Durham and Middlefield (the Member Towns) are hereby warned that the Thursday, December 16, 2021 District Meeting of Regional School District 13 has been rescheduled to January 5, 2022. The District Meeting of Regional School District 13 (the District) will be held at the Coginchaug Regional High School auditorium, 135 Pickett Lane, Durham, Connecticut on Wednesday, January 5, 2022 at 7:00 PM for the purpose of conducting a public hearing on the following recommendation of the district Board of Education: (1) that \$7,500,000 be appropriated for renovations and improvements to John Lyman Elementary School in Middlefield (the Project). The appropriation may be expended for design, construction, renovation and installation costs, engineering and professional fees, materials, equipment, purchase costs, legal fees, financing costs, interest expense on temporary borrowings and other costs related to the project. The appropriation shall include any federal, state or other grants and aid received for the project. The Regional School District 13 Building Committee (the Building Committee), established by the District Board of Education as the Building Committee for the project, shall be authorized to determine the scope and particulars of the project and may reduce or modify the scope of the project as desirable and the entire appropriation may be spent on*

*the project as so reduced or modified. The District anticipates receiving grants from the State of Connecticut for a portion of the eligible costs of the project to defray, in part, the appropriation. (2) That \$7,500,000 of bonds, notes or temporary notes of the District be authorized to finance the appropriation. The amount of the bonds authorized shall be reduced by the amount of any grants received by the District for the Project. (3) That the Chair of the District Board of Education and the District Treasurer be authorized to make representations and enter into written agreements for the benefit of the holders of the bonds or notes to provide secondary market disclosure information. (4) That the Building Committee be authorized to contract with architects, engineers, contractors and others in the name and on behalf of the District with respect to the Project, to approve design and construction expenditures for the Project and to exercise such other powers as are necessary or appropriate to complete the Project. (5) That the authorization of the issuance of bonds, notes or temporary notes shall be submitted to referendum vote by the electors and citizens qualified to vote in town meetings of the Member Towns of the District. Dated at Durham, Connecticut this 15<sup>th</sup> day of December, 2021.*

**Public Comment**

None.

**Adjournment**

*Mrs. Petrella made a motion, seconded by Mr. Mennone, to adjourn the regular meeting of the Board of Education.*

*In favor of adjourning the regular meeting of the Board of education: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Mr. Stone. Motion carried.*

Meeting was adjourned at 7:16 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Debi Waz  
Alwaz First