

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education held a Special District Meeting on January 5, 2022 at 7:00 PM in the Julian Thayer Auditorium at Coginchaug Regional High School, 135 Pickett Lane, Durham, Connecticut.

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

Board members absent: None

Administration present: Dr. Schuch, Superintendent of Schools

Mrs. Petrella called the Special District Meeting to order at 7:01 PM.

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Mrs. Dahlheimer read the call to the meeting, warning of special district meeting and return of the call into the record.

Mrs. Dahlheimer made a motion, seconded by Mr. Mennone, to nominate Bob Moore as moderator of the Special District Meeting.

In favor of nominating Bob Moore Hicks as moderator of the Special District meeting: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Mr. Stone. Motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Moore began the meeting with a statement from Mrs. Petrella, the Board chair.

Mrs. Petrella gave a short summary of the proposed bonding project and explained that they were studied by Silver Petrucelli. Copies of the study were available for the public and is also on the district's website. Silver Petrucelli felt that overall John Lyman is in good to fair condition and the building has been well-maintained and updated. However, there are a number of conditions that need to be addressed and a spreadsheet of those items is available in the report. Those conditions were prioritized into four phases, from urgent priority to low priority.

Projects designated as urgent priority are items that should be corrected as soon as possible and most likely encompass code, health and life safety issues. These items total approximately \$284,000 and are listed as priority 1 on the report. High priority items, listed as priority 2, are items that should be corrected within a reasonable amount of time after the priority 1 items. These may include high priority maintenance issues or accessibility issues. These maintenance items have a useful life of one to three years. These priority 2 items total approximately \$4,511,500.

Moderate priority items, listed as priority 3, include items associated with aesthetic or general maintenance issues with a remaining useful life of three to five years. These items total approximately \$1,330,000. Low priority items, listed as priority 4, include maintenance and aesthetic issues that are not in current need of replacement, but should continue to be monitored on a regular basis. These items have a remaining useful life of five to 10 years or greater and total approximately \$483,120.

The total cost of the project for all four phases is approximately \$6,680,620. The amount of the \$7.5 million bond proposed by the board is designed to cover the expenses of all four phases with a percentage

added to cover cost increases. Tonight's meeting is being held to discuss the scope of the bonding and the recommended projects.

Mrs. Petrella added that Michelle Miller, from Silver Petrucelli, was also present at the meeting to address any questions. Public comment will be limited to three minutes tonight to ensure that everyone is heard. There will be a short recess after the hearing, followed by a special board meeting to be held via Zoom for people to continue to share their thoughts.

Dr. Schuch added that Mrs. Neubig and Ms. Miller will also be on the Zoom meeting later tonight, but he will text them for any answers required at the hearing.

Mr. Moore then opened the meeting for public discussion and questions.

Bruce Eiding, from Middlefield, was a little confused that the projected costs add up to \$9 million but only \$7.5 million is being appropriated. He asked where the \$13.5 million and the half from the State comes into play. Dr. Schuch explained that the Silver Petrucelli report includes the consideration of renovating the school as new and that would be the \$13.5 million figure. The board made an earlier decision to remove that as a possible consideration. He noted that the \$7.5 million builds in cost increases and inflationary considerations and that the board felt that \$9 million would be a bit excessive.

Another person asked if this project would be considered a stop-gap or long-term and asked if this kills the district's reorganization that was previously voted on. Mrs. Petrella felt that many of the projects on the list are necessary because they need to be done to keep the school running and keep the children safe. The other phases do include regular maintenance and upkeep for an open school. The public member then asked how long this would leave the building in good standing. Mr. Moore stated that the recommendations are long-term improvements to the school, including replacing boilers, air conditioning, heat and ventilation. He felt that those items should last another 20, 25 years. Dr. Schuch noted that Silver Petrucelli has stated that they would last roughly 20 years.

Richard Parmelee, from Durham, asked why he had to take his life in his hands to go to a meeting tonight when it could've been held at another time. He felt that tonight's attendance is not a fair representation due to COVID-19. He has never liked regionalization and there will be costs beyond these numbers to keep the school open. He felt that the system should be streamlined and consolidated to capitalize on the regional concept for finances. The majority vote in Durham was to close John Lyman School, but Middlefield did not though he believes the total would have ended up in favor of closing the school. Mr. Parmelee asked the board to explain what other bonding will be coming and hoped that anybody working on the project will be American. He would like to be sure that bids are requested for all of the work. Mr. Parmelee remembers when the bond counsel found a glitch in the proposal for the athletic fields and the board decided to go to the legislature, instead of the voters. He would not like to see student activity fees come back and would also like to see building permit fees discontinued. Mr. Parmelee asked for the hearing to be adjourned until more people can attend safely. He suggested that the district do what the town does and hold meetings remotely.

Mr. Moore reiterated that there will be a special board meeting on Zoom following this hearing and Mrs. Petrella added that they are very well aware of the COVID situation, but needed to hold the public hearing in person to satisfy legal requirements. People that were not comfortable attending in person can speak via Zoom at the special board meeting that follows.

It was also explained that the first payment on the debt service on \$7.5 million is estimated at \$276,239.

Carl Stoup, from Durham, was not clear what the total costs of the project are. Dr. Schuch stated that it was \$7.5 million and does not include any grants or money from the State. Mrs. Booth added that some of the ADA and code requirements may be eligible for reimbursement, but the board does not plan to spend any more than \$7.5 million.

Tressa Opalacz, from Durham, asked if closing Lyman School was a done deal and that the school has to definitely remain open. Mr. Moore and Mrs. Petrella felt that it was. Ms. Opalacz asked if there was any other option because she didn't feel that either town can afford it. Mr. Moore felt that the only way would be to go back to referendum on a plan amendment. Ms. Opalacz asked what happens if everyone votes down the costs and Mrs. Petrella explained that the board can then make some possible adjustments to the amount and which projects will be done. As long as the school is staying open, the district has to maintain it for the safety of the students.

Mrs. Booth added that the board could add the projects to the school budget if it keeps getting voted down. Ms. Opalacz noted that that will increase taxes and the whole game plan of reducing costs would be out the door. She noted that there are administrative costs that go along with keeping the school open. Mrs. Booth explained that the majority of the board had voted to close John Lyman, but couldn't do that without a plan amendment. She noted that they have tried to do that twice now and it was voted down. Legal counsel has stated that unless the plan is amended, they cannot close the school. Tressa Opalacz stated that communication needs to be very, very clear about what this will do to taxes. She added that she loved the program at Lyman, but the towns are small and losing population. Ms. Opalacz felt that it may have to go to referendum once again and she would like the Middlefield voters to educate her on why it's important to keep the school open.

Mrs. Petrella explained that most votes in a regional district are by majority vote, however a plan amendment needs to be approved by each town separately just as they did with the original Regionalization agreement. Mrs. Petrella stated that the administrative costs to run Lyman are already included in the current budget and the only additional impact would be the yearly debt service on the bonding. She added that some debt service will drop off in the years to come. Mr. Moore also explained that a fact sheet will be prepared prior to the referendum.

A voter from Middlefield reminded everyone that the plan amendment failed during the local election period where the turnout is typically extraordinarily low, with perhaps 10 percent of Middlefield's population actually voted. He also felt that the question did not alert anyone to the fact that if the school was kept open, there would be additional expenses necessary. He wondered if a referendum was held with specific language about costs would change the mindset of the voters. He noted that he wanted to keep John Lyman open, however he understood the financials and voted to close the school.

Mrs. Booth stated that legal counsel advised them that they could not include that type of language. She added that the district is not allowed to use any funds once they have voted to go to referendum. They did have a Q&A on the website and the majority of that had to be taken down once the vote to go to referendum was taken. Mrs. Booth also reminded everyone that there are costs involved with each referendum. She added that if they were to decide to do just the priority 1 items, by the time that was

done the priority 2 items would need to be done. Mrs. Booth added that the maintenance staff has also alerted them to the fact that some replacement parts are no longer available.

A comment was made that it really is about the long-term viability. Mrs. Booth added that she has heard that Middlefield residents feel that they need an elementary school in town to maintain property values even though Debbie Huscher, a realtor, did not feel that would be the case. Mrs. Booth realizes there is an emotional component to the John Lyman building, but reminded everyone that the John Lyman ID program does not exist anymore. She added that Lyman is no longer a HOT school.

There were no other questions or comments. Mr. Moore explained that they will begin the Zoom meeting in approximately 15 to 20 minutes.

Mr. Mennone made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Petrella, to adjourn the special district meeting. Everyone was in favor of adjourning the meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:38 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

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Alwaz First