

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education Utilization Committee met in Regular Session on November 29, 2018 at 5:00 PM in the Library at Coginchaug Regional High School, Durham, Connecticut.

Committee members present: Mr. Augur, Dr. Friedrich, Mrs. Geraci (arrived at 6:00 PM), Mr. Hicks, and Dr. Taylor

Committee members absent: Mr. Yamartino

Other Board members present: Mr. Moore

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

The meeting began at 5 PM.

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Public Comment

None.

Approval of Agenda

Dr. Friedrich made a motion to approve to the agenda, seconded by Dr. Taylor, to approve the agenda, as presented.

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

Approval of Minutes - October 25, 2018

Mr. Hicks made a motion, seconded by Dr. Taylor, to approve the minutes of October 25, 2018, as presented.

In favor of approving the minutes of October 25, 2018, as presented: Dr. Friedrich, Dr. Taylor, Mr. Augur and Mr. Hicks. Motion passed unanimously.

Finalize Grant Submission: Review Safety and Security Items

Mrs. Neubig explained that the grant submission is due on December 4th. Items that have already been completed are included in the grant. Vestibules would be a separate item and would not be included in the grant as they are reimbursable by the state at a higher rate. Mrs. Neubig was inclined to include window film and upgraded cell service. She did explain that this is a reimbursable matching grant and the district would not receive the money until the projects are done.

Mr. Hicks felt that \$50,000 was a lot for cellular coverage and asked if the providers could do something on that. Mrs. Neubig suggested it be tagged as “enhanced communication” which could then be cell service or radios and allows time for further investigation. The reimbursement rates are 38.57% for Durham and 45% for Middlefield, but the grant will most likely not be 100% funded.

Mr. Augur didn’t feel that there was consensus on the window film and Dr. Taylor agreed that the feelings have been mixed on that. Mrs. Neubig stated that a lot of districts are putting in visitor information systems and she feels that would be a good thing and even better when coupled with a vestibule.

Mrs. Neubig explained that the radio system is currently school-specific and the upgrades included would be boosting that. Not all teachers would have radios. Dr. Taylor would rather spend money on something that would reach every student and every device within the system. It was generally agreed to include enhanced communications at \$50,000.

Dr. Veronesi reviewed that window film had been one of the top three recommendations that they received after the Parkland incident. At this point, she feels strongly about the vestibules and the visitor information system. Mrs. Neubig suggested installing window film on the front of the buildings. It was agreed to apply for the window film.

Mrs. Neubig reviewed that \$140,000 was spent for the SRO and the vestibules at Strong and Coginchaug will be about \$150,000, leaving \$110,000 in the budget. Mr. Moore felt that the visitor identification system and security linked to the vestibules may be the place to start.

Dr. Taylor asked how these systems work when you have an event at a school and Mr. Moore felt that they would be used during school time only. Dr. Veronesi stated that she used to have two people physically checking identification when she was a principal. She did believe that there is probably a feature in the system for large events.

Mr. Augur asked Mrs. Neubig to summarize what will be submitted for the grant for the next Board meeting.

Bonding Options

Mrs. Neubig has created a full presentation to be made at ERC and had a few slides for tonight. The bonding options researched were \$6.9 million (which would be level funding), \$14 million and \$17 million. The bonding can be anywhere in between. The numbers are independent of other budgetary changes and assuming a Lyman operating cost avoidance of about \$925,000 that would begin in 2021-2022. The Lyman cost avoidance is in the capital budget.

Looking at the total immediate critical systems, \$7 million is needed for the 2019-2020 year. If that were to be put into the operating budget, it would result in a 19.4 percent increase. In 2022-2023, there will be another \$5.5 million dollars of critical end-of-life systems, resulting in another 15 percent increase.

The total funding needed for the various options includes critical systems. For example, option A would need \$8 million with the critical systems. Bonding option 1 (\$6.9 million) would provide for option A and including 46 percent of the critical systems. This option would not increase the yearly budget but does extend the debt another 14 years to 2039. The Lyman capital cost avoidance could begin in the 2019-2020 year after a restructuring vote.

If the district were to bond \$13 million, that would accomplish the option A construction costs, including 100 percent of critical systems, with 5 percent left for other capital responsibilities. With option D, 70 percent of the critical systems could be updated. This would increase the debt service by .66 percent in 2020, 1.15 percent in 2021 and then it would decline and level off. Mr. Moore reminded everyone that that would be if the money were borrowed all at the same time.

Mrs. Neubig stated if the district bonds \$17 million, 100 percent of the critical systems and 46 percent of remaining would be able to be accomplished. This would increase the debt service budget by 1.13 percent, 1.6 and then drop and level off.

Mrs. Neubig then showed the decline, percentage-wise, based on the different bonding options. If the Board chooses not to level-fund, the debt service would drop .82 percent. Bonding \$6.9 million, the debt service goes up .02 percent, .66 and then 1.19. She pointed out that all of the numbers are below the zero line and incorporate a closing of 2.5 percent for Lyman operating costs. She then reviewed the status quo option and option D as well. The existing debt services goes down to \$1.3 million in 2019-2020 and level funding would keep it at \$1.59 million.

The bonding time line is still under construction, working backwards from a referendum and a June application deadline. Bonding would not take place until after the referendum, state approval and bids. There was \$245,000 in the 2018-2019 budget for debt service to be used for advanced cash payments or towards bonding, but that ability has been lost as the budget is too far into the year.

Dr. Taylor worried that the highest option would be a tough sell to the public though it makes sense financially. Mr. Moore agreed that a lot of marketing would need to be done. Mr. Augur felt that the \$17 million had zero appeal to him as he feels it is committing too much for too long. Dr. Veronesi thought it was important to let the public know what is being taken care of and how it will be done, but felt that the sticker shock may make people not care what is being done. Dr. Taylor wondered if it would be better to break the school alteration projects and the critical systems apart. Dr. Veronesi felt that the simpler the message and the lesser the impact to the overall budget, the more likely the success.

There was some discussion about having the school alterations, critical systems and school budget as separate votes at the referendum. If the critical systems bonding failed, the district may have the potential to have an MBR issue. Mr. Moore stated that the budget would have to include the debt service for both referendum questions. It was agreed that further discussions are warranted on how to strategically approach this.

Dr. Veronesi asked if the Utilization Committee agrees that the largest bond package is too high and Mr. Augur stated that it's not just too high; he wouldn't want to bond for a track that goes out 20 years. Dr. Taylor would personally be in favor of separation of the two issues and minimization of both. Mr. Moore felt it needed to be sized right, not minimized. Dr. Taylor clarified that he meant that there would be no fluff, only items that are critical. Dr. Veronesi confirmed that Mrs. Neubig has already done that on the critical systems. Dr. Taylor also felt that they would have a better idea of the general public's outlook on spending after the referendum next week. Dr. Veronesi also felt that part of the messaging on this budget will be the collaborative work with both towns on the Finance Committee and how it will impact the individual taxpayer.

Dr. Veronesi reiterated that this is the time to move forward with bonding based on the current and future debt schedule. Mrs. Neubig also stated that Mr. Yamartino's formula suggests \$1.2 million per year in a

capital reserve account. Mr. Augur also noted that the money saved from closing Lyman would be used to enhance the other schools and maybe shouldn't be identified as a savings.

Strategic Visioning Design Elements and Building Options

Dr. Veronesi reviewed that she looks at the two grade configuration options as a primary/intermediate school configuration model or two elementary school model and whether those options would have significantly different buildings and grounds needs. She believes that it would be the same application regardless of building configuration, in terms of bathrooms, size of rooms, playground equipment, etc.

Classroom space would need to meet size recommendations, especially for the younger students. They would like classrooms where students can be involved in self-directed, independent, small group and whole group learning. They would also want rooms that aren't cluttered and allow for greater student movement and exploration with appropriate storage and furniture.

When talking about the areas that support family and community involvement, Dr. Veronesi is talking about flexible space within the schools. She would like people to be able to drop in for a play group, have a cup of coffee and possibly assist with clerical type tasks in a workroom. They may also want that space to allow for three classrooms to come together for various activities. The lunchroom is also a very important space for all students. Dr. Veronesi also reminded everyone that the cost estimates do not include furniture or internal windows and thought that maybe they need to consider putting money into the budget for next year.

Indoor and outdoor learning are critically important as well as STEAM, Makerspace and Innovation Lab. Movement is also critically important throughout the day. Dr. Veronesi also talked about opening up walls between classrooms in the high school and considering different types of internal windows and paint. She also stated that as much work as possible needs to be done as soon as possible so that the timeline checklist is ready to go for the June deadline.

Utilization Committee Survey

Mr. Augur had distributed a draft of a survey and made some revisions. Dr. Taylor noted that this had been talked about at multiple meetings, especially because option B was not included in the initial survey. Most people agree that not knowing that information would be detrimental to making a decision.

The initial portion provides a perspective on where the Board is headed from a Strategic Visioning standpoint and the input that the Committee would like to obtain is about the configurations. The survey will hopefully provide a general feel of the public's opinion on the two configurations which will allow the Board to make a more informed decision.

Mr. Augur pointed out that the survey should read \$2.2, not \$2.0. Mr. Moore asked if everyone thought the sentence about choice was clear enough for the public and Dr. Taylor did not feel it was. There was then some discussion of how to portray the element of the single program, but including choice.

Dr. Veronesi wasn't sure that it should be called a challenge of determining the boundaries of the two schools and felt that that decision should be made beforehand. Mr. Augur felt that the challenge would be the ongoing maintenance of the boundaries. Dr. Veronesi wondered if they were talking about a vertical or a horizontal boundary. A horizontal boundary would create a Durham school and a Middlefield school. Per the bus company, all of Middlefield would go to Memorial as well as a couple of

neighborhoods from Durham. Using a different boundary, students would be from both towns. Dr. Taylor did agree that it would not be the most efficient for busing to have students from both towns at each school. Dr. Friedrich felt that this issue was a red herring and they would not want people to vote no because the neighborhood question is too confusing. Dr. Veronesi reiterated that people will have questions about this issue and it will determine their preference for a K-5 school. She also felt it was counter to the reasons for going to a one-approach design. Dr. Taylor felt that these issues would be true to almost every school district in the state.

Mrs. Geraci asked about special ed in the preK-5 schools and if students would be separated by boundaries. Dr. Veronesi explained that all special ed students are not currently housed in one school, but people do have that observation. For quality of service, it would be better to have them housed in one building. She also pointed out that transitions are a big problem for special needs students.

Dr. Friedrich wondered if the phrase “broader Region 13 community” would be a mystery to most people. Dr. Veronesi suggested that a few people in Central Office look at the document for a different perspective. She asked what the Utilization Committee would want the presentation to be at the December Board of Education meeting. She had hoped it would be a compilation of Student Achievement, Utilization and Strategic Visioning. Dr. Veronesi asked what the Board would do with the feedback from the community. She also asked if there will definitely be a vote on January 9th in order to make a June deadline.

Mr. Augur felt that the January vote could happen as it would not be that difficult to compile the responses. Mr. Moore suggested that survey be presented at the December Board meeting and then send it out immediately after with a response date of December 30th or January 5th. It was generally agreed to allow a few days in January. Dr. Taylor did not feel he would be in a position to vote on supporting the recommendation from the Strategic Visioning Committee to move to a single program, but Dr. Friedrich felt it would be a good idea to vote on that. Dr. Taylor felt it was important to recognize that if the Board voted to go with a single program and the referendum for building reconfiguration failed, they would then have to figure out how to accomplish that in the existing configuration and that Brewster and Lyman would become programmatically the same.

Public Comment

Carl Stoup felt that they needed to give a scenario of what would happen if a critical system failed so that people can fully understand the consequences.

Adjournment

Dr. Friedrich made a motion, seconded by Dr. Taylor, to adjourn the meeting.

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

The meeting ended at 6:30 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz
Alwaz First