

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education Utilization Committee met in Special Session on Wednesday, August 14, 2019 at 6:00 PM in the Library at Coginchaug Regional High School, Durham, Connecticut.

Committee members present: Dr. Friedrich (by phone), Mrs. Geraci, Mr. Giammatteo (arrived late), Mr. Moore, Dr. Taylor and Mr. Yamartino (arrived late).

Committee members absent: Mr. Hicks

Administration present: Dr. Veronesi, Superintendent of Schools and Kim Neubig, Director of Finance

Dr. Taylor called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Public Comment

None.

Approval of Agenda

Mrs. Geraci made a motion, seconded by Mr. Moore, to approve the agenda, as presented.

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

Approval of Minutes - May 30, 2019

Mrs. Geraci made a motion, seconded by Mr. Moore, to approve the minutes of the May 30, 2019 meeting, as presented.

In favor of approving the minutes of the May 30, 2019, as presented: Dr. Friedrich, Mrs. Geraci, Mr. Moore and Dr. Taylor. Motion passed unanimously.

Korn School

Dr. Veronesi explained that she had talked to the Town Planner who had worked on closing the elementary school in Higganum and got some information on their process. They surveyed the community and found it to be quite helpful. He shared that the use of a building as a community center has changed over time and it isn't as popular as it had been in the past. He also mentioned the use of a commercial kitchen and how there is quite a bit of interest in that. She has also had conversations with Laura Francis about Korn School and Mrs. Francis said that she didn't know when it would be advisable for the town to go back to referendum on Korn School. Mrs. Francis reiterated that she would like to work with the district, but the town will not be taking over the Korn School building.

Dr. Taylor asked about establishing a timeline and Mrs. Neubig felt that the only issue is the municipal bond that is on the building through 2023 and with that, there are restrictions on how the building can be used. The total payment amount is \$222,000 and an option would be to pay it off early to remove any

restrictions. Mrs. Neubig also explained that even once those restrictions are removed, the building use would still need to have some element of education. Dr. Veronesi reviewed that they didn't think that would be hard criteria to meet. Dr. Taylor asked if every part of the building had to be educational or if it could be mixed use. Mrs. Neubig felt that mixed use would be fine, just as long as there is an educational component in there.

Mr. Moore felt that if the district paid the bond earlier, that would free up the building for a different use, if it were available. Dr. Taylor asked what the current restrictions are and Mrs. Neubig reviewed that certain parts of the building cannot be used by other than the municipalities and educational in purpose. Mrs. Geraci summarized that if the bond remained on the building, the district could not lease out the building for any use. Dr. Veronesi reminded everyone that they budget roughly \$60,000 to keep the building shut. Dr. Taylor also asked if there was any chance of any waiver on the bond and Mrs. Neubig stated that there would not be as it is through investors.

Mrs. Geraci felt that they should pay off the bond through the budget process and would like to see a decision by the end of the school year. Dr. Taylor agreed that it should be part of the budget process. Mr. Moore added that it would also free up debt to invest more money into the building. Mrs. Geraci suggested having a discussion with the full board in January.

Dr. Veronesi reviewed that Central Office did not really want to be a landlord, however there may be another way to manage the building. Mr. Moore added that a survey could be done to ascertain interest in the building. Dr. Taylor agreed with a survey and felt that it will all depend on community interest. He also felt that they would need to know what the public would be willing to pay to use the building. Mrs. Geraci mentioned the life span of the equipment in the building and what money would be required. Dr. Taylor reviewed that, while it would be \$1 million to raze the building, it would also require \$1 million to get the building back up and running. He also mentioned that there would be \$6 million in capital investments in the next five to 10 years. He felt that they needed to come up with an accurate plan.

Dr. Veronesi asked if there was any benefit to the board to bring in expertise, such as Silver Petrucelli or the Town Planner, to have a think-tank to get some new ideas. She felt that the three original possibilities, selling it to Durham, razing the building or commercial real estate, are all off the table at this point. Dr. Veronesi did feel that the district doesn't want to carry a building with capital costs without some benefit to the community.

Mrs. Geraci felt that it would certainly help to get some new ideas and felt that Silver Petrucelli could help since they work with so many school districts. Dr. Veronesi also felt that Doug Gillette, bond counsel, may also be helpful. Mrs. Geraci would also like to hear from people from other towns that run this type of facility. She mentioned that she goes to Wallingford Park and Rec because of their programming.

Dr. Taylor asked if Silver Petrucelli could provide accurate figures on the capital improvements and Mr. Moore reminded everyone that they had done the report for the town. Mr. Moore would not want to recreate the town report, but would be more interested in looking for revenue. Dr. Taylor asked if it would even be tenable if they do not have a viable plan that breaks even. Mr. Moore felt it could be tenable if the educational use of the building was paramount, suggesting something like a daycare or a preschool. He also suggested that adult education courses could generate enough money to pay for the building. Dr. Taylor asked how they would be able to gauge that and felt that the district's oversight would be pretty significant.

Dr. Taylor also asked if selling the building is even going to be considered and stated that he would personally like to not have that as an option. He felt that the board should make a statement that they would not sell the building to an outside organization. Mrs. Geraci thought that the Utilization Committee had already stated that that was not something they could consider. Mr. Moore felt that the only option for that would be if someone wanted to come in with a private school or daycare. Dr. Taylor felt that once the property is sold, the district would have no control over it.

Mr. Yamartino and Mr. Giammatteo arrived at the meeting at this point and Dr. Taylor reviewed what had been discussed. Mr. Yamartino asked what part of the bonding the state has forgiven and Mrs. Neubig explained that the state has forgiven the grant for the building, but the tax-exempt bond is what is restricting the use of the building. Mr. Yamartino stated that the bond could also be refinanced as a non-tax-exempt bond as well as being paid off. Mr. Giammatteo noted that the cost of moth-balling the building is about the same cost per year as the demolition would be. Dr. Veronesi felt that if the board decided to continue to use the building, it would be helpful to get advice from an architect about whether it would be advantageous to keep it as is.

Dr. Taylor felt it would be very important to keep the community informed about how the district is handling this issue. Mrs. Geraci felt that the only thing that needs to be decided in January is whether or not to budget to pay off the bond. She felt the informational session should be put off until all of the information is obtained. Mr. Yamartino felt that the district would have to pay off the bond, regardless of what decision is made about the building. He also mentioned declining interest rates and that it is a favorable time to pay off anything that's of a higher interest rate.

Mr. Yamartino recalled that the biggest issue was that there was no A-1 survey, etc. in the event of a sale. Mr. Moore stated that that was all discussed in the town report, but also mentioned that the committee had also talked about whether a sale is desirable or not and the consensus was that the district should not talk about selling the building. Mr. Yamartino mentioned that deed restrictions could be put on the property to prohibit certain uses.

Mr. Yamartino also felt that the district would be better off signing a management contract with an agency to manage the property. Those types of companies will also be able to provide greater insight.

It was agreed to do the survey after school starts and they will work to develop that. Dr. Veronesi noted that Thought Exchange would allow the district to ask a single question and have people respond to other people's responses. Dr. Taylor felt that that would be helpful for the second survey, but would want to see an organizational name and dollar figure for rental consideration before that.

Mrs. Geraci assumed that there were no nonprofits in either town that have a plethora of money to use to rent space. She is a CFO of a large nonprofit and felt that most nonprofits want to keep their money in-house to do the work of their agency. She thought that it may be more of the two towns leasing space. Dr. Taylor agreed, but felt that it would be to cover the criticism that would come from not doing that.

Brewster/Memorial School Alteration Project

Dr. Veronesi stated that she talked to Doug Gillette about advocacy by the Board of Education and he shared that there would be an entirely different timeline because the referendum is in conjunction with an election. Rather than 30 days out from the referendum, it would now be 60 days which means that the

board will need to meet next week and again on September 4th. Dr. Veronesi would like to schedule a meeting for August 20th to vote on the resolution to go to bonding and set the date of September 4th for the district meeting, hopefully having Silver Petrucelli present as well. She also suggested that board members attend some of the PTO meetings as well. Mrs. Neubig noted that the total amount could go up if the district were to include financing costs and there would be one opportunity to change the amount. Mr. Moore felt that additional costs could be added to the bonding, but not submitted for state grant.

Mr. Yamartino wondered if the numbers needed to be refreshed since it has been a while since they were obtained. He also asked if the contingency was at an appropriate level and whether financing costs were included. Mrs. Neubig added that they did include the cost of the vestibules in the submission to the state. Mr. Yamartino suggested that those be separate questions on the ballot in November.

Dr. Veronesi stated that they will get information out to the board members tomorrow or Friday and will talk to Dean Petrucelli tomorrow about the accuracy of the numbers. Mr. Moore stated that the submission was made at the end of June, but Mr. Yamartino felt that the estimates were done well in advance of that. Mrs. Neubig did reach out to Silver Petrucelli who confirmed that they were all good numbers at that time.

Mr. Yamartino stated that the board had received a note from a parent last Fall expressing concern about the recreational opportunities for students at Memorial, with the hope of some playground equipment being moved there. He stated that the tennis courts there are in very poor shape. The Town of Middlefield was looking to pursue installation of pickle ball courts at Peckham Park as the basketball court there needs to be redone and could hopefully be striped for both, but it is now felt that that type of dual use will create conflict. This shifts the attention back to Memorial School and he felt that the Town of Middlefield may be able to put up half of the cost of the renovations.

Mr. Yamartino explained that pickle ball is one of the fastest growing sports in the country and the target audience is 11-16 and 50-70. He believes that there can be two pickle ball courts per tennis court, which would present an opportunity for up to eight pickle ball courts. He noted that light posts are already in place for nighttime lighting. He had tried to get the lights replaced with the LED project being done in Middlefield, but was unable to do that.

In addition to the tennis courts, there are also basketball courts at Memorial which are also in pretty rough shape. Mr. Yamartino stated that the Town of Durham did approve the renovation of two tennis courts in Durham, but have rejected two quotes thus far. One quote was \$48,000 to \$75,000 for two courts and the high bidder was \$150,000 for two courts. Mr. Yamartino estimated anywhere from \$150,000 to \$300,000 to do the tennis courts at Memorial. The Town of Middlefield just received quotes for redoing the basketball courts at \$80,000.

Mr. Moore asked if Mr. Yamartino wanted to pursue this through the capital budget this year or if it would be short-term. Mr. Yamartino thought there was money available for improvements and repairs on school equipment outside of capital, but wasn't sure what would be available. He also mentioned that the Town of Middlefield has a pretty good surplus this year and thought there may be an opportunity to piggy-back on Durham's renovation of their tennis courts.

Mr. Moore thought that the district got quotes on the tennis courts in 2018 and Mrs. Neubig explained that the high end was about \$75,000 to \$90,000 per court and another one lower than that. Mr. Yamartino also added that the US Tennis Association does offer some grants, but the courts would probably not be eligible if they are striped for pickle ball as well. He added that Laura Francis stated that Durham would be looking to stripe their courts for pickle ball and four square as well and thought that might work at Memorial as well.

Dr. Veronesi added that Silver Petrucelli may, in fact, suggest that new tennis courts be built vs. refurbishing the existing courts.

Public Comment

A member of the public thanked the committee for looking at Korn School holistically. He does have issues about going to bonding for an addition on schools when a building sits empty.

Lainey Melvin hoped that Korn School would be saved so that everyone in the community can use it. She felt it would be a disgrace to tear it down.

Sherry Hill, the recreation director for Durham, wished that the bond be paid so that they can move along and find out exactly what can be done with the building. She hoped that it would give Durham another opportunity. She felt that waiting the three years would be too long and the building is getting sadder and sadder every day.

Carl Stoup, from Durham, added that the American Tennis Association had expressed an interest in leasing or using part of Korn School.

Adjournment

Dr. Taylor adjourned the meeting at 7:00 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

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Alwaz First