

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education Educational Resources Committee met in regular session on Wednesday, February 10, 2021 at 6:00 PM remotely.

Committee members present: Dr. Friedrich, Mrs. Geraci, Mr. Moore, Mr. Roraback and Mr. Yamartino

Committee members absent:

Board members present: Mrs. Booth and Dr. Taylor

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

Mrs. Geraci called the meeting to order at 6:00 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, as presented.

In favor of approving the agenda, as presented: Dr. Friedrich, Mrs. Geraci, Mr. Moore, Mr. Roraback and Mr. Yamartino.

Approval of Minutes - December 9, 2020 and December 16, 2020

Dr. Friedrich made a motion, seconded by Mr. Yamartino, to approve the minutes of the December 9, 2020 meeting, as presented.

In favor of approving the minutes of the December 9, 2020 meeting, as presented: Dr. Friedrich, Mrs. Geraci, Mr. Moore, Mr. Roraback and Mr. Yamartino.

Dr. Friedrich made a motion, seconded by Mr. Moore, to approve the minutes of the December 16, 2020 meeting, as presented.

In favor of approving the minutes of the December 16, 2020 meeting, as presented: Dr. Friedrich, Mr. Moore, Mr. Roraback and Mr. Yamartino, with Mrs. Geraci abstaining.

Budget process/timeline

Mr. Moore reviewed the timeline for the budget process this year, including the introduction to the budget at tonight's full board meeting. There will be full board meetings on February 24th, March 10th, March 24th and March 31st, if needed. The public hearing will be on April 7th and the district meeting will be on May 3rd, with the referendum on May 4th.

Mr. Moore explained that, in the past, they have focused each meeting on a specific portion of the budget. The budget presentation will be tonight and the budget books will be online, with a hard copy available in

the office. Hard copies will also be at the Town Halls and the libraries. Mrs. Geraci, Mr. Moore, Dr. Friedrich and Mr. Yamartino would all like hard copies.

Dr. Schuch is willing to follow whatever procedure was done in the past and would like to start with any areas of specific interest to board members. Mr. Moore added that the general public usually has specific questions as well. Mrs. Geraci felt that it has been helpful to categorize the items. Dr. Schuch asked everyone to forward any questions or comments from the public to him and Mrs. Neubig.

Mr. Yamartino added that the Middlefield Board of Selectmen and Board of Finance are meeting with Dr. Schuch and he felt that they would hear a lot about the budget at that meeting. Dr. Taylor did not know this meeting was taking place tomorrow night and wondered why they needed to veer from their previous meeting structure of those boards meeting with the Board of Education. Mr. Yamartino explained that Dr. Schuch has been reaching out to the communities and it is basically to introduce themselves and discuss long-term goals. Dr. Taylor was concerned because there have been meetings in the past where budget items were discussed by the Board of Selectmen and the Superintendent without the full Board of Education being apprised of those discussions. He felt that this meeting should really be just introductory and there should be no requests asked of the Superintendent. Dr. Schuch felt that the timing was unfortunate, but he does not feel it was intentional. He explained that he had the same type of meeting with the boards in Durham and it was a five-minute meet and greet. Dr. Schuch added that he is still learning about the budget and won't be able to provide details. He will refer the boards to the Finance Committee meeting to get further details.

Mrs. Geraci is calling a Finance Committee meeting on February 22nd at 6:00 PM.

Utilization 10-year expenditures

Mrs. Neubig thanked everyone for looking through the details she had provided. There are now scenarios 1, 2, 2c, 3a, 3b and 3c.

Scenario 1 is operating as is, but bonding for capital improvements at the full \$4 million. Emergent capital needs are now \$2.8 million.

Scenario 2 would be closing Lyman and adding on to Brewster in the simple configuration of six classrooms with nothing more and a small renovation at Memorial. The cafeteria and kitchen at Brewster were brought up, but a formal quote was not requested from the architect for that scenario.

Scenario 2c arose from scenario 3c and include moth-balling Lyman School if necessary. \$100,000 for sale of the building was figured in to the scenario, however Mrs. Neubig stated that is a guess at best and is not a figure to rely on.

Scenario 3a and 3b were to change the configuration and 3a would not include construction at Brewster or Memorial. Scenario 3b is the same, however some bathroom renovation would be necessary at the high school with the move of preK. The cost of the additional bathrooms would be roughly \$100,000 and there will also be a need for some playground equipment. The playground equipment at Korn can be used, but cannot be moved.

There had been a question about reduction in staff and Mrs. Neubig highlighted some numbers to show what staff members would potentially not move if Lyman was closed. The first estimate would be to potentially eliminate three certified staff, an admin and three non-certified staff members. Further discussion is needed regarding other certified staff members that could be reduced due to moving classes and class sizes, but may also be needed for increased student capacity at other buildings. Health insurance reductions are in line with staff reductions and the potential reduction of two buses.

Some engineering and legal fees were included for the construction at Brewster and Memorial. For scenarios 2c and 3c, she added the cost to mothball which she estimated around \$80,000. Bonds were structured so that there would be declining debt service resulting in the opportunity for the district to bond for other improvements or capital needs, however some of the up-front principal payments are no longer available due to the timing of the current projects. Mr. Yamartino thought that the district typically did flat payments and Mrs. Neubig stated that came from the financial advisor so that they could borrow without raising the debt service. Mr. Yamartino felt that using creative financing that they haven't done before would make it look less expensive, but he preferred they use a straight 20-year bond. Mrs. Geraci felt that this was too much into the weeds for now and would like to discuss the timeline for this. She would want to work out the details once they decide the plan.

Mr. Yamartino felt that all of the scenarios will be compared to scenario 1, keeping John Lyman open and the real question then becomes what is the cost of keeping it open. That is why he was asking for a traditional amortization of the mortgage so that it is a fixed fee for each year. It would also make the calculations easier as they look at other items. Mrs. Neubig also pointed out that if they take tax-exempt bonding for this, they would restrict the ability to use it and would not be allowed to sell the building until it is paid off. She noted that they would be tied to keeping Lyman for the 20 years of the bonding.

Dr. Taylor felt that two issues need to be addressed, one being the issue of investing in a cafeteria/assembly place for Brewster within the next 10 years and the other around an increase in the number of students and any possible expansions that would be needed. He noted that Milone and MacBroom had projected that the numbers will potentially go back up around 2028. Dr. Taylor felt that asking to expand at a later time would send the wrong message to the communities. He felt that that shows lack of foresight and budgetary consideration. He does feel that the numbers are strongly in favor of scenario 1, but wants to be sure they acknowledge all the possibilities. Mr. Yamartino questioned which scenario and Dr. Taylor apologized as he meant scenario 2.

Mr. Yamartino liked scenario 3a where the eighth grade is moved to the high school and asked if preK and eighth grade could both move to the high school. Dr. Schuch explained that that is scenario 3b and would probably require an investment for the bathrooms. Dr. Schuch also reviewed that the administrators made good arguments for the preK being in both sites, but felt that there was more energy around doing it at the high school than he had anticipated. Mr. Yamartino stated that he heard from a couple of parents who supported both the preK and eighth grade at the high school. Mr. Yamartino added that even if you take preK out of Brewster, there is still a crunch for space in the cafeteria. He felt that if they don't do something to utilize space at the high school, they may not get state grant money for any expansion at Brewster. He added that it might be a good idea to have the architects give some suggestions on how to provide an assembly area without spending \$3 million.

Mr. Moore asked how they will explain this chart to the general public. He thought that it looks like they would save about \$1.5 million per year, but it's not clear how that will be explained. Mrs. Geraci felt that

the majority of public comment will have to do with eighth grade, no matter what the cost is. She would want to simplify it to go to the public because while it is about money, people are concerned about the configuration. Mr. Moore felt that this should go back to Utilization for them to deal with the optics.

Mr. Yamartino explained that he had asked for this information so that the board can make an informed decision that includes the finances. He thought that the Finance Committee should also review the projections. Utilization should look at the scenarios and the full board should as well, looking at the educational perspective as well. He does not feel that the board should bring five scenarios to the public and felt that they should present one or two at most. He wants to be sure that the public understands that it's not all about the money and is about the best education for the students.

Mr. Moore explained that the current budget is \$37 million and when you look at the chart, today's cost is not reflected and people will say it doesn't cost \$49 million for year one. He wondered how they get from \$37 million to show a \$10 million, 10-year cost of keeping Lyman open. Dr. Taylor agreed and felt that people would get confused. He felt that people would want to know how much they would save on their taxes each year. Dr. Taylor felt that the unfortunate part is that there are no options for the referendum and it will have to be a yes/no.

Mr. Roraback thought that the people wanted the district to just make a decision and present it. Dr. Schuch has repeatedly heard exactly what Mr. Roraback just said. They are not happy with the uncertainty. He would present it as the budget with Lyman and the budget without Lyman and not confuse everyone with all the different scenarios. Dr. Schuch has found that a 5- to 10-minute video with some simple graphics and an interview would be an asset to explain the issue to people. He felt that the part that probably hasn't happened is to stress the investment that is needed at Lyman if it is to stay open.

Mr. Yamartino totally agreed, but didn't know where to start. He agrees about the two budget options, but felt that the problem is that there are a lot of one-time costs with Lyman, both keeping it open and closing it. He thought maybe it should be proposed as an average over the next 10 years. He would love the Finance committee to review the finances and sign off on it and maybe have one of the Finance committee members weigh in on the video. Mr. Yamartino added that they will also need to handle social media and the press and would like to have someone from a public relations firm help with that.

Dr. Friedrich felt that they are faced with selling two different decisions at the same time, one is comparing scenario 1 to all of the possible scenarios and he would like to look for authority to close Lyman without committing to any particular grade configuration. He felt that people get all tangled up when they are offered two separate decisions. Mr. Roraback felt that people believe that scenario 2 is where the district was last at. Dr. Friedrich felt that it should be decided as two separate issues.

Mrs. Geraci felt that this issue should move back to Utilization at this point.

Public Comment

None.

Adjournment

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

In favor of adjourning the meeting: Dr. Friedrich, Mrs. Geraci, Mr. Moore, Mr. Roraback and Mr. Yamartino.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:55 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Debi Waz
Alwaz First