

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education Building Committee met in regular session on Wednesday, March 29, 2023 at 5:00 PM in the library at Coginchaug Regional High School.

Committee members present: Mr. Cross, Mr. Faiella, Mr. Giammatteo, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mr. Overton and Mr. Weissberg.

Committee members absent: Mr. Patel.

Administration present: Mrs. Neubig, Mr. Proia, Mrs. Smith and Dr. Schuch

Board members present: Mrs. Petrella

Mr. Weissberg called the meeting to order at 5:00 PM.

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Approval of Agenda

Mr. Faiella made a motion, seconded by Mr. Giammatteo, to approve the agenda, as presented.

In favor of approving the agenda, as presented: Mr. Cross, Mr. Faiella, Mr. Giammatteo, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mr. Overton and Mr. Weissberg.

Public Comment

None.

Approval of Minutes - February 1, 2023

Mr. Faiella made a motion, seconded by Mr. Giammatteo, to approve the minutes of February 1, 2023, as presented.

In favor of approving the minutes of February 1, 2023, as presented: Mr. Cross, Mr. Faiella, Mr. Giammatteo, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore and Mr. Overton. Mr. Weissberg abstained.

Facility Planning Updates

Mrs. Neubig introduced Michelle Miller from Silver Petrucelli and Andrew Woodward from Benesch. They were present at tonight's meeting to review the plans and go over any questions that the Building Committee might have.

Michelle Miller reviewed that they updated their programming based on information received from the principals and met to talk about the goals of the project. They explored the maximum size the school could be at 720 students and built a program with the educators based on that. The program ended up being just under 112,000 sq. ft. which is over the state's base standards, so reimbursement would not be maximized. At that point, they talked about trying to squeeze that down. The reimbursement rate is 52.14 percent. The plan that was presented to the meets the state's standard size.

Ms. Miller reviewed that a new wing would house kindergarten and first grade, with a media center addition, and a stage as well as adding on to the kitchen and cafeteria to provide for two cafeterias. This is all sized based on the projections and how many classrooms would be needed.

Andrew Woodward reviewed that they tried to incorporate all of the asks for the property. They added the property owned by the church to be used as the main parking lot. Another goal was to keep the newly-renovated court area. There would be separate entrances for bus and vehicular traffic. He pointed out the location of the main entrance and loading area for the kitchen. They propose turning the existing roundabout area in front of the building into a playscape area, adding another basketball court, Four Square, swings and play sets. He then reviewed the location of the various existing fields and proposed areas. They have also incorporated a nature walk, sensory paths, a greenhouse/garden area, a large outdoor classroom and lunch space as well as sensory play equipment all based on staff input.

Mr. Weissberg asked if this was being designed for the worst case of student capacity and if that is the norm. He felt that would be imprudent to design it that way. He asked if there have been any thoughts into consolidating the five separate additions, using a different building method or even two stories. He felt that it seems like a lot of fluff and waste.

Ms. Miller agreed that it is multiple additions and she would ideally like to do one. One concept was to add to the back of the building and connect it all there. Unfortunately, they couldn't get that down to the correct square footage. She felt that they were trying to do a lot of things in different areas. She agreed that an addition in one location would be cheaper, construction-wise. Ms. Miller stated that the state guides them to use the maximum number of students. They did use the high projections which was requested at the beginning of the process, but they typically use medium projections which she thought was in the high 600s.

Mr. Weissberg summarized that it just seems like a lot of students, a lot of additions and a lot of change. Ms. Miller explained that this isn't necessarily the design, but the district will marry into a square footage number and therefore a cost number that the architect will design to. Mr. Woodward added that the cost estimate has a \$1.5 million DEEP septic system in it if the number of students is over 680. Their design fees would be over \$200,000 with a lot more hoops to jump through. Ms. Miller added that, looking at the medium projections, the high for K-5 would be 656. The gross square footage is 105,000, but the interior meets the space standards.

Mr. Overton asked how they estimated the flow numbers were and Mr. Woodward explained that the numbers are just over 11 gallons/day per student and 3 gallons/ day for kitchen waste for each student as well. They would be allowed a total of 7,500 gallons/day before having to go to the DEEP system. These numbers are based on public health code.

Andrew Woodward also looked at the 1995 plans and the only septic system updates that were made was replacing the 8" sewer line to the septic tank and reconstruction of the siphon chamber. The entire leaching system was not touched. They felt it would be best to include \$500,000 for a new DPH septic system that would last 60-plus years. Mr. Moore asked if they did any soil tests and Mr. Woodward explained that that would be done later.

Mr. Overton asked for Ms. Miller's opinion on the estimated \$798/sq. ft. for renovate-as-new. She felt that that is the number these days, with the escalations that have occurred. Recent renovations haven't

been this high, but that is where it's going. Mr. Woodward added that there is a definite issue with cost per square foot, though the state is approving projects at these prices. Ms. Miller added that they have been including 15 percent per year for escalation and are now seeing that taper down and they have been carrying 6 percent. Mr. Overton noted that he worked on a renovate-as-new project and the final estimates can in at about \$650/sq. ft. He would like to see the estimates tied to recent projects that were bid, but sees no point in that if the district is not comfortable with the number. Ms. Miller commented that she went a little lower with the project because of the new HVAC systems and the roof. They are also not proposing huge modifications to the floor plan.

Mr. Overton asked if they felt it was the appropriate square footage to meet OSCGR standards with really no flexibility to go smaller. Ms. Miller agreed, but the square footage could come down if the number of students does. Mr. Overton felt that they would want to move forward with appropriate numbers in order to not oversize the building, but have options. He liked the idea of the three wings, but thought they could leave the SPED rooms off the end which would provide for expansion in the future. Ms. Miller noted that they did get a request to have special ed rooms located close to classrooms, but that could be changed. She added that that would provide for expansion in the future. She also noted that they will need to relocate some wells in the back.

Ms. Miller also explained that the state does want them to include higher numbers as they don't want anyone coming back asking for more. Mr. Cross felt it would be worth meeting with the state to discuss pricing before the project moves too much further. The other option would be to delay the project a year. Mr. Moore added that the new director of the department at the state has resigned.

Another question was asked about the large size of the new parking lot and Mr. Woodward explained that that was based on the requested number of parking spaces for all employees (147) and they carried an extra 50 spaces for visitors. It was also made to fit all 16 buses in one single queue. Mrs. Neubig asked if anything would change if the number of buses was a little lower and Mr. Woodward noted that they could shrink it a few spaces. Ms. Miller explained that parents typically drop kids off and get walked into school, but it is definitely important to separate the buses and the parents. Mrs. Neubig added that they like the valet system, with school staff greeting the kids. Dr. Schuch stated that parents are never prohibited from walking their child into school, but that is typically done when parents are coming to the school for something. They highly discourage that because it tends to create a traffic jam. Mr. Overton felt that less parking might be necessary if they do the drop-off that way.

Mr. Weissberg summarized that the board needs a number that they feel comfortable with to bring to the community. He asked if there is any value to factoring in other building or contracting methods. Ms. Miller stated that prefab is happening a lot more, but she has not seen it in a school project. Mr. Cross felt that public bid makes it very difficult, but a construction manager could help with that. Ms. Miller noted that they do recommend a CM for the project.

Mrs. Dahlheimer noted that the public would have to vote on the project before a CM was hired. She felt that they need to consider a bare bones addition because of what has happened in the past. Mr. Cross agreed and felt that talking about cutting parking spots, etc. doesn't come until much later in the process. He felt that the best they can do at this point is to be within the size standards and use the correct number of students. He reiterated that it is important to discuss this with the state before going to referendum.

Mr. Weissberg asked about the financial impact analysis and cost/benefit study. Mr. Overton spoke to Mike Zuba for recommendations, but it would have been more of a facilities analysis which staff has already been doing. Mr. Overton did send a consultant's name to Mrs. Neubig who could validate the numbers. That analysis could evaluate the current facilities and the cost of operating and maintaining them on a yearly basis as well as projecting out that cost vs. a new building with high-efficiency energy standards.

Mr. Overton does believe that the district is behind on renovation of the buildings and improvement of the schools compared to other towns. He has seen many other towns taking advantage of the state program which would cover about half the cost for this district. He felt that people have moved into the community here because of the school system, but the buildings are aging and need renovation. Declining enrollment may change at some point. He worries that the towns will lose that value if they don't address the building issues. Mr. Overton felt that spending \$60 million to renovate a school and consolidate makes a lot of sense, but he realizes that they would have to prove that to the taxpayers which won't be easy.

Mr. Cross reminded everyone that they will get 52 percent reimbursement and Mr. Overton noted that that may go away someday. Mr. Cross added that there has been a lot of discussion about lowering that number. Everyone agreed that the public needs to have all the information. They reviewed that the district will save an estimated \$1.5 million per year for both Lyman and Brewster and Mrs. Neubig noted that that can go directly to debt service.

Mr. Overton felt that a lot of this analysis has already been done, but they could validate the numbers with another opinion which may not cost that much. If the district were to sell Brewster or Lyman or work with an Economic Development Commission to market them for other development, there could be additional value. Mike Zuba directed him to just look at the facilities and the cost savings going forward.

Mr. Weissberg felt that it would be a better optic to have an independent third-party present something and Mrs. Neubig agreed.

Dr. Schuch summarized that everyone felt that this is the best educational design concept and the most cost effective as well. He acknowledged that it will still be a big ask of the community. Dr. Schuch felt that other options need to be considered that may not be ideal. He did want to meet the June 30th deadline and get to referendum, but added that it just didn't feel right at this point. If the project doesn't pass referendum, they will need to look at other options anyway.

Mr. Weissberg asked if a cost estimate has been done on 656 students rather than 720. Ms. Miller has not done that, but it could be easily done. Mr. Cross felt that they will be hard-pressed to make major reductions with the cost per square foot. He did not feel they were realistic numbers, but the student number is what could get them to an acceptable point. Dr. Schuch stated that they may have to think about four schools rather than three schools.

Mr. Overton explained that they understand the numbers and could work with Ms. Miller to refine them. He thought that they had number for a four-school plan and possibly even the five schools. He asked if costs were available for all three scenarios projected out 20 years. Mrs. Neubig explained that Silver Petrucelli has done feasibility studies and she has included an 8 percent escalation which may be low at this point. Mr. Overton felt that the cost is the cost, but it would be about the most effective plan to

upgrade the schools. If the district is going to pay \$62 million to renovate the schools as they stand vs. paying \$65 million for a newly-renovated school, Mr. Overton felt it would be a no-brainer. Mr. Weissberg would like to see 10-, 15- and 20-year projections for the three different scenarios. He felt it was important for the community to know that they have to choose an option. Mrs. Neubig had that information, but would also like to see a third party evaluate it as well.

Mr. Mennone felt it was important that the community know they can't just keep putting a Band-Aid on things and wasting money. Mrs. Dahlheimer felt that every scenario needs to be analyzed and then brought down to a level where the least informed person can understand. Mr. Overton added that they are on the clock with aging buildings that need work and a decision has to be made. Mr. Cross stated that they do have to pick one project to submit to the state. Mr. Mennone felt that they would be doing a total disservice if they don't put something out and do that soon.

Mr. Overton reviewed that the current numbers could be brought down a little bit by bringing down the number of students. He did not feel there were many other options to bring the numbers down. Mr. Overton asked how long it would take to provide a comparison of that with the numbers for the other scenarios. Mrs. Neubig felt that it wouldn't be long if she did it herself, but she would need at least a month to have an independent party review it. Mr. Overton asked, if those numbers were put together and Ms. Miller prepared an application or two to OSCGR, would it be realistic to have that happen by June to meet the deadline. Everyone agreed that would be very tight. Mrs. Dahlheimer felt it would be repeating mistakes that the district has done before by not informing the public before a decision is made. Ms. Miller noted that the most successful projects she has been on have been those where the town and school have agreed beforehand.

Mr. Overton felt that they need to either make a commitment tonight to push this forward for June or they step back and put it off for a year, trying to better organize and better promote whatever they decide. Another member felt that the communities need to buy into the process and felt that would be an uphill battle. He felt that the smartest thing would be to delay the project to see where the numbers go and continue to develop the best options.

Mr. Weissberg summarized that they would continue to line everything up and sold to the public before going to the state. Mr. Overton asked what school improvements would have to be made if they delay the project. Mr. Moore reviewed that the town voted not to spend any money at Lyman, so that creates a barrier. He felt that they need to do the economic analysis in order to make comparisons. Mr. Moore added that there are legal issues with sale of the land and some with Brewster that seem to be resolved. There will be people who oppose closing Brewster and those who will not want their kids on the bus for a long time. Mr. Overton felt that people who have opposed the different scenarios don't understand the situation. It has to be carefully vetted and marketed to the public. Mr. Moore reviewed that if this project came in at \$30 million, they would be going directly to referendum because the debt service would not change. Mrs. Dahlheimer felt that any marketing needs to be a plan that is an honest answer. Mr. Overton also suggested preparing a list of how many schools have been built-as-new or renovated-as-new in different towns over the last 10 years. He agreed with Mr. Cross that it would probably be best to delay this.

Mrs. Petrella added that this discussion started back in 2013 and one of the first results was to close Korn School. This current project has only been being discussed for a few months. She felt that it was important to have options, with one being the status quo. Mrs. Petrella felt that they need to inform the

public over and over again so that the information gets out there and it may take six to eight months to get a decision. Mr. Overton hates to delay the project, but felt like they do need the time. He felt that there needs to be a public relations person to follow through on everything and provide information to the public. Mrs. Dahlheimer felt it would be important for that to be someone internal because the PR firm that was hired the last time was viewed as negative. Mrs. Petrella explained that the board has a Communications Committee that can brainstorm and research on this. Mr. Overton suggested inviting the public to those meetings and answering questions. Ms. Miller suggested having those meetings in buildings that are not doing so well.

Mrs. Dahlheimer added that she felt it was really disheartening to know that they need to wait. Mrs. Petrella explained that it was her goal to have this resolved by June, but didn't want anyone to feel disheartened. Dr. Schuch agreed that it is very disheartening, but the worst thing to do would be to take their foot off the gas pedal. He admitted that he is disappointed.

Mr. Cross reviewed that there are options. They could put a number in and hope it gets approved, then go to referendum. They would have two years to start the project, so the leg work could still be done. He added that that does lock in the reimbursement rate. Mr. Moore noted that they would still have to have the referendum approved by November and that would require that the board can't talk about it for 60 days before. Mrs. Petrella felt that they could possibly have enough information and public input by November, but that means that they have to stop talking about it by Labor Day because of the general election. Mr. Cross felt that it might be better to have the voters send the board back to the drawing board rather than delaying the project themselves.

Mr. Overton asked Ms. Miller if she has seen a project where the number gets approved and then goes to referendum for something less. Ms. Miller stated that every project she has done has been with the approved number and Mrs. Neubig agreed. They need to go to referendum with the approved number, but don't necessarily have to spend it all. OSCGR would expect that the district goes to referendum with the full number. Ms. Miller added that they do allow you to approve the town's share plus 10 to 15 percent. Mr. Cross agreed that they now allow towns to post just their portion plus a contingency. He reiterated that that would be why it's important to meet with the state.

Mr. Weissberg summarized that they are just not there yet for June, but would want to see a cost analysis. Mrs. Neubig stated she could pull those numbers together in less than a month. Ms. Miller will assist by looking at the capital plan. Mrs. Neubig explained that they can always pull the project if it is submitted to the state or revise it downward.

Dr. Schuch explained that they will ask the board next week to authorize Mrs. Neubig to do the analysis and bring in a third party for review and preparation. Mr. Overton asked if everyone felt that they should file an application for June with the state and Mrs. Neubig felt that was a good idea. The application can always be pulled or revised. Mr. Weissberg asked if they wanted Silver Petrucelli to revise anything or if that even matters. Mr. Cross reiterated that it would be a good idea to meet with the state.

Mrs. Petrella asked what options the committee wants Mrs. Neubig to look at. It was suggested to do five schools (status quo), four schools (Brewster, Memorial, Strong and Cuginchaug) and three schools (this current proposal).

Memorial Roofs**A. Vote to accept Memorial School Roof Project #213-0050RR as complete**

Mr. Proia reported that the roofs have been done since the end of October. He had the O&M and warranty information.

Mr. Weissberg made a motion, seconded by Mr. Cross, to vote to accept the Memorial School Roof Project #213-0050RR as complete.

In favor of accepting the Memorial School Roof Project #213-0050RR as complete: Mr. Cross, Mr. Faiella, Mr. Giammatteo, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mr. Overton and Mr. Weissberg.

B. Vote to authorize payment of Memorial School Roof Project #213-0050RR, including retainage

Mr. Giammatteo made a motion, seconded by Mr. Cross, to vote to authorize payment of Memorial School Roof Project #213-0050RR, including retainage.

In favor of authorizing payment of the Memorial School Roof Project #213-0050RR, including retainage: Mr. Cross, Mr. Faiella, Mr. Giammatteo, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mr. Overton and Mr. Weissberg.

Pickett Lane Paving Phase 2 RFP

Mr. Weissberg reported that the RFP has been submitted. Both proposals were decent proposals and the costs were fairly similar at \$450,000 to \$600,000. Nathan Jacobson has declined to participate any further in the project. VBH has agreed to participate and will act as a CM on the project. He will discuss the proposals more with the team. One company included a final road surface and was priced at about \$100,000 per inch of pavement. They can also go out to bid for the final paving. Drainage is completely independent of these bids. Mr. Overton will reach out to Nathan Jacobson again.

Mr. Weissberg reviewed that the next phase includes traffic calming, sidewalks and bike lanes and noted that Community Connectivity grants have just been released and this may be a good use for that. Mrs. Dahlheimer felt that the Town of Durham may be willing to help with that.

Mr. Weissberg would like to have VHB take a look at the proposals. Mr. Moore noted that they can't sign a contract until the budget is approved. Mrs. Neubig stated that she can issue a purchase order as soon as the budget is approved. If it doesn't pass, they would not have the full amount available. They cannot award the contract if the funding is not available. Mr. Weissberg noted that VBH would just want to know that they will be getting the work in order to put it into their schedule. Mrs. Neubig stated that if the budget is approved in May, the total amount would be available for the project.

Mr. Weissberg added that the sample colors for the field house are on the electrical box at the field. A contract has been signed for the engineering drawings and there will be three cupolas. Once it is approved, there is a four-week lead time. They hope to have it completed by graduation.

Public Comment

Carl Stoup, from Durham, agreed that something needs to happen with the school buildings and felt that one of the issues is the decline in enrollment which has created excess space in the current buildings. He does not feel that that space has not been efficiently used. He felt that they need to take a serious look at available space and work that into the plan. Mr. Stoup thought that the deed on Brewster School is restricted and can only be used for education.

Adjournment

Mr. Faiella made a motion, seconded by Mr. Mennone, to adjourn the meeting.

In favor of adjourning the March 29, 2023 meeting: Mr. Cross, Mr. Faiella, Mr. Giammatteo, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mr. Overton and Mr. Weissberg.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:40 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Debi Waz
Alwaz First