

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education met in special session on Wednesday, January 5, 2022 at 8:00 PM via Zoom.

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. Neubig, Director of Finance and Mr. Pietrasko, Director of Infrastructure and Security Technology

Guests: Matthew Ritter, Partner, Shipman & Goodwin and Michelle Miller, Architect, Silver Petrucelli

Mrs. Petrella called the meeting to order at 8:04 PM.

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Approval of Agenda

Mr. Mennone made a motion, seconded by Mr. Stone, to approve the agenda, as presented.

In favor of approving the agenda, as presented: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Mr. Stone. Motion carried.

Public Comment

Jim Irish, from Middlefield, asked if someone could explain how the debt service on the \$7.5 million bond would impact the budget over the next five years. He felt that because other debt service will be retired, the debt service from this bond might actually be very affordable. Mrs. Neubig noted that the first payment is an estimated .75 percent increase on a \$37 million budget. In the 2024-2025 year, some significant bonds will be retired which will reduce the debt service by an estimated 1 percent, or about a \$386,000 decrease. If the bonding were to be done in the 2022-2023 school year, the first payment would not be due until the 2023-2024 year and the first debt service reduction would be in 2025-2026. Mrs. Neubig explained that once the former debt service is retired, the year-to-year debt service could be less than what it is now. However, Mrs. Neubig noted as time goes on, there are items nearing the end of their useful life at Cuginchaug and Strong and these numbers do not include any bonding for those.

Carol Kleeman, from Durham, asked where and when the RFP was posted for this project. Mrs. Neubig explained that there will be an RFP for contractors if the referendum is approved. Silver Petrucelli has studied the district in the past and performed the study on Lyman and has a longstanding relationship with and an in-depth knowledge of the district. Mrs. Kleeman felt that there should be an RFP should have been issued as that firm may not be the best nor have the best price. She suggested that the board put on an RFP to get more opinions and prices. Mrs. Neubig explained that the architects are really just providing estimates for items that need to be addressed and those actual prices could be more or less when RFPs go out. Mrs. Kleeman wholeheartedly disagreed and felt that an RFP should be issued for the project.

Carol Kleeman also wanted to know what the board's plans were for Brewster School and if the work had been previously proposed will be done there since they have decided to bond for \$7.5 million, regardless of State reimbursement, at John Lyman. Mrs. Petrella first explained that they have yet to decide on the

\$7.5 million bonding number and it was proposed to receive feedback from the public. As far as Brewster School, some bonding was already done for Brewster and Mrs. Petrella did not feel the board was considering any additions to Brewster if John Lyman is open. Mrs. Neubig explained that there were some items for Brewster in the \$6.9 million bonding that was passed but they have not been completed because the status of that building was unknown. As far as any additions to Brewster, that has yet to be determined but many end-of-life systems as of the 2019 bonding were addressed in the \$6.9 million bonding. Mrs. Neubig also explained that the \$7.5 million bonding is the maximum amount and any State reimbursement would be deducted from that.

Carol Kleeman asked specifically what the \$250,000 for priority 1 items would address. Mrs. Petrella noted that it was \$284,000 and would include immediate safety items. Priority 2 items include the end-of-life systems, such as the boilers. Mrs. Neubig stated that she, the board and the superintendent consider priority 1 and 2 items to be at the same level. Mrs. Kleeman asked if the board determines the priority levels and Mrs. Petrella explained that that needs to be done on a professional level. Mrs. Kleeman reiterated that this is just the opinion of Silver Petrucelli and should go to RFP. She, once again, asked the board to consider putting this out as an RFP.

Mrs. Petrella then asked everyone to keep their comments to three minutes.

Caitlin D'Amato, from Middlefield, asked what an RFP is. Mrs. Neubig explained that it is a Request For Proposal. Mrs. Neubig stated if another firm studied Lyman, the list of items to be addressed would not be much different. Items may have been placed into different priority brackets, however, most things are end of life or safety issues that are not discretionary. Specific items in the project will be bid out through an RFP to multiple vendors. Mrs. D'Amato asked when John Lyman was last studied.

Michelle Miller, from Silver Petrucelli, added that the previous study on John Lyman was in 2013 by a different firm than Silver Petrucelli. Silver Petrucelli just completed this most recent study on Lyman last month, so the numbers are as current as possible. She also explained that these are just planning numbers and the district will go out to bid for an architect, an engineer and specific items and contractors.

Mrs. D'Amato then asked if John Lyman will stay as a K-4 school and Mrs. Petrella explained that that has not been determined yet. Mrs. D'Amato asked if the price of the project would be impacted by having different grade levels in the school and Mrs. Petrella felt that the repairs basically just need to be made to the building and grade should not impact that.

Donna Reed, from Durham, asked what the fee was for Silver Petrucelli to do the study and Mrs. Neubig explained that it was \$12,000. Ms. Reed also asked how long they have worked with the district and Michelle Miller stated that it has been about six years. Ms. Miller added that the district will put out an RFP for an architect on the project for the design work and drawings which Mrs. Neubig confirmed.

Carol Kleeman, from Durham, asked if this project is based off the 2013 study and Mrs. Neubig stated that that was the last time John Lyman was studied for capital needs, but this project is based off the study done last month. Mrs. Kleeman asked if anyone on the board was familiar with Silver Petrucelli and Mrs. Petrella stated that she, Mr. Moore and Mrs. Booth have worked with them before with regard to demographics and population growth/decline. Mrs. Kleeman felt that that is just another reason to go to RFP for the architect. Mr. Moore explained that this is just a list of all the equipment that needs to be replaced or repaired and does not include any drawings.

Mrs. Dahlheimer confirmed that the 2013 study was not done by Silver Petrucelli, but by DRA. Mrs. Neubig added that the items identified by Silver Petrucelli in this most recent study are very much in line with the DRA study. Silver Petrucelli studied all of the schools in the district, except for John Lyman, in 2016.

Mr. Mennone stated that people have been contacting him as well and the confusion seems to be that no one knows what items were on the 2013 study and if items were identified, why they weren't dealt with. Mrs. Neubig stated that a lot of items were on the 2013 study. She felt that a lot of it wasn't completed either because of funding or the potential to close Lyman and spending funds fixing a building that could potentially be closed. Mr. Mennone felt that the people in both towns should know what items were identified back in 2013 and still exist today. He doesn't blame people for questioning the \$7.5 million when this work could have been done over the years.

Mrs. Neubig reviewed that the \$4.2 million that was needed for capital at Lyman was based off of the 2013 DRA study and those were the numbers she had given to the public. When Silver Petrucelli did their study in the last month, they came in at the \$6.6 million. Mrs. Neubig will put the 2013 DRA study on the website. Mr. Mennone reiterated that he was not trying to blame anyone, but felt that the vote to close the school may have been different if people knew the information. He also wondered what the board will do if this referendum doesn't pass.

Jennifer Tolmer, from Durham, asked when the construction would start if the referendum passes. Mrs. Neubig explained that Silver Petrucelli has estimated a year for planning and a year for construction. Ms. Tolmer asked where the John Lyman students would go if they cannot be in the building and Mrs. Petrella did not believe that would be an issue as the construction would be designed to minimize any interruption. Mrs. Neubig explained that the work will be planned to be done during school breaks or night shifts and much of the work will be done in boiler rooms and roofs, areas where there are no students.

Mrs. Petrella stated that she had received an email from Janet Morganti, from Durham, who doesn't believe it is fiscally responsible to move forward with \$7.5 million in renovations on a school that was on the brink of closing. She has read studies on declining enrollment from 2012 and 2014, both predicting that enrollment would be down 55 percent by 2024. While she is usually in support of plans to enhance and support the educational system, she cannot support this huge expense and items should be prioritized by urgency and do enough to make it safe for the next few years when enrollment can be reassessed.

Caitlin Brady, from Middlefield, then asked what the approximate proposed impact is to the individual taxpayer per year. Mrs. Petrella explained that if the \$7.5 million bonding was approved, it would be approximately \$279,000 for the first debt service payment which is .75 percent of the \$37 million budget. Mrs. Neubig added that that would be split between each town's individual allocation (64.5 percent for Durham and 35.5 percent for Middlefield), but she is not able to state the exact number per taxpayer without speaking to the towns, as other factors are involved. Ms. Brady also agreed with Mr. Mennone about why nothing has been done since 2013 and thanked everyone for their time. She hoped that the board keeps John Lyman as a K-4 school which would be very important to the town and to the students.

Susan Michael explained that she has been both a parent and a teacher in the district for a long time and was curious about the portable classrooms that they were always told were temporary. She believes that

the public needs to remember that some of the things that had been proposed at Brewster and Memorial will not need to be done if Lyman is kept open. Ms. Michael also felt that the district should look for energy savings and to be as environmentally sustainable as possible. She does appreciate all the hard work that the board does. Ms. Michael then asked how many years back the district would have to look to see enrollment numbers comparable to today's. Mrs. Petrella was sure that data exists, but did not have access to that now. Ms. Michael felt that more information needs to be provided to gain better perspective about these numbers.

Next Board Meeting - January 12, 2022 at 7:00 PM

Resolution to appropriate \$7,500,000 for renovations and improvements to John Lyman Elementary School and to authorize the issuance of bonds, notes or temporary notes in an amount not to exceed \$7,500,000 to finance the appropriation.

Mrs. Booth made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Caramanello, to make a resolution to appropriate \$7,500,000 for renovations and improvements to John Lyman Elementary School and to authorize the issuance of bonds, notes or temporary notes in an amount not to exceed \$7,500,000 to finance the appropriation.

Mr. Mennone reiterated that he didn't feel that \$7.5 million will sit well with people because most people believe the school should be closed. He understands the demographics between the two towns, but felt that it will be a tough sell to the taxpayers of Durham. Mrs. Petrella clarified that John Lyman has been maintained over the years, but noted that they have been discussing closing that school since at least 2015 and that would be why larger items were not addressed. She also felt that COVID added to the delay.

Mr. Moore stated that the board had discussed renovations at all of the schools and the grade configuration which resulted in the most cost-effective way being a single K-5 school, but that would have been \$35 to \$40 million. At that point, the board decided that was not feasible. They then looked at a variety of options and decided on closing Lyman. A motion was made at a board meeting in 2016 to close Lyman which resulted in almost 300 people attending the meeting to object to that. The motion was overturned at that point and they began looking at a long-term study of needs. In around 2018, it was decided to go to a single program and the decision was made to close Lyman in January, 2019. Improvements were needed at Brewster and Memorial which needed to go to bonding. When the bond counsel saw the referendum scheduled for the fall of 2019, he indicated that a plan amendment was necessary. The plan amendment was defeated in January, 2020. It was brought up again last spring, a lot of workshops were held and the referendum to amend the plan was held. Equipment at John Lyman School has continued to be maintained and one or two of the portable classrooms have been closed.

Mrs. Caramanello added that this issue has been being discussed for years and no one should be surprised or unsure that money was being put into Lyman for major renovations. Mrs. Booth stated that, even before she joined the board, people wanted to keep a zero increase in the budget. Any time the budget needed to be decreased, capital needs for Lyman were pulled because it wasn't going to stay open. The district is also only allowed to save 2 percent of the budget for capital needs and was only 1 percent prior. Mrs. Petrella added that they have saved the maximum amount allowed over the past few years.

Mrs. Petrella reviewed that the resolution is for a \$7.5 million appropriation for renovations and asked what the board wants to do moving forward. She asked if they wanted to put that number forward, modify the number or go through the facility and pick and choose items.

Mrs. Booth felt that they need to at least cover priority 1 and 2 items. Mrs. Caramanello agreed. Mrs. Dahlheimer would like to see it reduced to priority 1 and 2 items. Mr. Mennone asked if any of the priority 1 and 2 items may potentially overlap with priority 3 items. Ms. Miller gave an example that they wouldn't need to caulk windows if they were going to put in new windows, so there would be some savings. She did explain that new windows are a priority 3, but she felt that they should be included in priority 2 as most of them are from 1966. The district would also get reimbursement for windows and doors as an energy conservation project. The roof would also be reimbursed as would any ADA code corrections. Mechanical and plumbing would not be reimbursed.

Mrs. Petrella noted that the total amount for priority 1 and 2 items is approximately \$4,795,500 and they would add 15 percent to that. Mrs. Neubig stated that they would be looking to bond approximately \$5.5 million.

Mr. Mennone again asked what 3s or 4s would potentially be affected by 1s and 2s. He wondered if it would be smarter to do it all at once to avoid disruption and going back into the same area to do something. Ms. Miller noted that there are only two mechanical items in priority 3 that total \$7,000, but nothing else is apparent right now.

Attorney Ritter cautioned the board that he has to research whether they can amend the appropriation and bond authorization after warning a special district meeting and holding a public hearing. He thought that that might create a risk that taxpayers would object to the fact that that isn't what the warning stated. He knows that they are not allowed to increase the amount, but wasn't sure if they can decrease it. He cautioned that they may have to redo the district meeting and re-send it to referendum. Mr. Roraback felt that they had said not to exceed \$7.5 million and asked if that would cover that. Attorney Ritter agreed, but there may be people who want \$7.5 million.

Mrs. Caramanello recalled that they put the not to exceed language in because they wanted to get feedback before agreeing on a set number. Dr. Schuch asked if the board decided to change the number, would they be back at square one in terms of a time line. Dr. Schuch also asked if the board goes with the \$7.5 million and the voters approve it, would the board be obligated to spend it all. Attorney Ritter felt that he would have to research that, but felt that they would have to redo all of the publications and meetings. The time crunch is that the state statute requires 30 days' notice to the towns for a referendum. As far as the bonding, the board is not obligated to spend the entire appropriation.

Mr. Moore felt that they didn't hear anyone say to do just priority 1 and 2 items, but just objected to the total amount. He was not sure that lowering it would have any effect, positive or negative. He personally would like to do priority 1 and 2 items, but wasn't sure that changing the bonding amount would make a big difference.

Mrs. Caramanello asked what the alternatives would be if the \$7.5 million or even the \$5 million do not pass. She felt that most people want to put zero into that school. Attorney Ritter didn't have an answer other than they would need to continue to try to put something forward, either through a plan amendment

or a bond referendum. He acknowledged that it is a very difficult situation, especially with the voting thresholds for the plan amendment vs. a bonding referendum.

Mrs. Petrella was concerned that the \$7.5 million will not pass and they will need to start the process over. If they want to lower the number, they have to start over and if that doesn't pass they will be that much further out. She felt that some improvements need to be made because it is going to be open for at least the near future. She thought it might possibly work to take care of the urgent issues as part of the budget, without a bonding referendum. Mrs. Petrella felt that might buy them some time to see what happens with enrollment.

Mrs. Dahlheimer thought that that would add to the budget and they would have harder time trying to cut anything. She also felt that soft costs were not included in the facilities study. Mrs. Petrella noted that Mrs. Neubig had said that 15 percent would be added. Ms. Miller reminded the board that they will be getting some reimbursement, so the \$7.5 million is a pretty safe number. Without reimbursement, it would be closer to \$9 million with soft costs. Ms. Miller did agree that state reimbursement is not guaranteed, but a lot of these are typical items. Right now, District 13 has a 52.86 percent reimbursement rate, but that will be downgraded based on enrollment of the school. Ms. Miller reminded everyone that these are rough planning numbers.

Mrs. Booth stated that someone had asked her why they can't go back and ask to close the school again. She noted that they had already asked twice, but added that someone had also asked why the potential costs for renovation were not included in the referendum for the plan amendment. Attorney Ritter explained that you can't have a referendum question to modify the plan and, if no, bonds will need to be authorized. The statute requires a shall, yes/no question. There also cannot be two questions on a referendum, mostly because they would be different votes with the plan amendment requiring a majority in each town and bonding requiring a majority vote in the district. Mrs. Caramanello added that they had discussed that several times at board meetings.

Dr. Schuch stated that this has been a hot topic since he came to the district and he has heard that they have asked the voters twice to close the school, but haven't asked them yet if they are willing to invest what needs to be invested to keep it open for 20 years. He felt that the question really is if the community want to invest substantial monies in John Lyman, not whether it was \$4.5 or \$7.5 million. He personally would not want to speculate about that and would have never dreamed a Board of Education would be in this position. Dr. Schuch felt that the board should put the \$7.5 million forward on February 8th to get the answer to the question.

Mr. Moore agreed with Dr. Schuch and felt that they should move ahead with the \$7.5 million. Mrs. Booth agreed as well, especially with other debt starting to fall off. She does have a concern that if they don't do most of the items, they will be back in this position in a couple of years. Mrs. Caramanello preferred to do what is mostly needed to keep the school functioning, but agreed with Dr. Schuch about getting the ball rolling. Mrs. Booth explained that once the board votes to send this to referendum, they can no longer use district funds to advocate for it. Attorney Ritter explained that the board members can communicate personally, but cannot use the district email or the district photocopier, etc.

In favor of making a resolution to appropriate \$7,500,000 for renovations and improvements to John Lyman Elementary School and to authorize the issuance of bonds, notes or temporary notes in an amount

not to exceed \$7,500,000 to finance the appropriation: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Mr. Stone. Motion carried.

Resolution to submit to referendum the resolution to appropriate \$7,500,000 for renovations and improvements to John Lyman Elementary School and to authorize the issuance of bonds, notes or temporary notes in an amount not to exceed \$7,500,000 to finance the appropriation.

Mrs. Dahlheimer made a motion, seconded by Mr. Moore, to make a resolution to submit to referendum the resolution to appropriate \$7,500,000 for renovations and improvements to John Lyman Elementary School and to authorize the issuance of bonds, notes or temporary notes in an amount not to exceed \$7,500,000 to finance the appropriation.

Mr. Moore asked if Attorney Ritter would write the explanatory text to explain the referendum and Attorney Ritter stated text was authorized in what was just done. That text can go on the district's website and distributed to people in both towns. He did offer to help prepare the text as well.

In favor of approving a resolution to submit to referendum the resolution to appropriate \$7,500,000 for renovations and improvements to John Lyman Elementary School and to authorize the issuance of bonds, notes or temporary notes in an amount not to exceed \$7,500,000 to finance the appropriation: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Mr. Stone. Motion carried.

Public Comment

Mrs. Booth asked if the board will be answering questions or if this will be strictly public comment and Mrs. Petrella explained it is strictly for public comment, limited to three minutes.

Bruce Eiding, from Middlefield, felt that people are having a hard time understanding the scope of the spending. He asked that the board communicate a per capita estimate of what the \$7.5 million would look like in the two towns. He also felt that something was going to need to be spent to accommodate the students of John Lyman, no matter what. If Lyman was closed, the district would have had to spend money to put the kids at Brewster, albeit less money though not insignificant. He thought it might help to remind people that this is an incremental spend.

Jennifer Tolmer, from Durham, asked what the next step would be if the referendum doesn't pass and hoped that that could be made clear to everyone.

Ryan Walsh, from Middlefield, thanked the board for getting to this point and echoed Mr. Eiding's comment. He added that doing the priority 1 and 2 items makes a lot of sense and hoped they could also provide different examples of phasing the work in to spread the cost over a number of years.

Adjournment

Mrs. Dahlheimer made a motion, seconded by Mr. Stone, to adjourn the special meeting of the Board of Education.

*In favor of adjourning the special meeting of the Board of Education: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Mr. Stone.
Motion carried.*

Meeting was adjourned at 9:45 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Debi Waz
Alwaz First