

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education met in special session with the Building Committee on Thursday, March 16, 2023 at 5:00 PM in the library at Coginchaug Regional High School.

Board members present: Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Darcy, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella and Mrs. Roy (by phone).

Board members absent: Ms. Betty, Mr. Roraback and Mr. Stone

Building Committee members present: Mr. Cross, Mr. Faiella, Mr. Overton and Mr. Weissberg

Administration present: Dr. Schuch, Superintendent of Schools, Mrs. Neubig, Director of Finance and Eric Proia, Supervisor of Facilities and Grounds

Mrs. Petrella called the special work session and joint meeting to order at 5:04 PM.

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Approval of Agenda

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

In favor of approving the agenda, as presented: Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Darcy, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore and Mrs. Petrella. Motion carried.

Memorial Project

Mrs. Petrella explained that they are gathered today to discuss the proposal from Silver Petrucelli on the expansion at Memorial School which not only includes needs, but also wants and wishes. Mrs. Petrella felt that the cost of the current proposal is not affordable and hopes that they can come up with ways to make it more affordable, while keeping it educationally sound.

Mr. Faiella asked why the project wasn't compared to the project in North Branford and would also want to see the dates on the comparable that are listed. He also felt that \$800/square foot is at the higher end of construction costs.

Mr. Cross also felt the unit pricing is a little high, but recognized this is just in the early stages and he would expect that to come down a bit. There's 15,000+ square footage that is over what the state would allow and he felt that that is quite a bit and should be looked at closer. He also felt that phasing needs to be looked at, whether the school will be occupied or not during construction, which will also drive the cost. Mr. Cross does not believe that the site acquisition costs are reimbursable. Mrs. Neubig thought that it was reimbursable and will confirm with Silver Petrucelli. Mr. Cross would recommend that some of the Building Committee members meet with Silver Petrucelli to zero in on certain items.

Mr. Overton was also curious about the extra square footage and wondered where the number of 720 students came from. OSCGR usually requires that designs are made to a 10-year project and when Mr. Overton looked at the projections, it was about 682 students. Mr. Overton had looked at the summary which included a high of 714, including preK. He did speak to the person who prepared the projections and their recommendation was 682.

Mrs. Petrella asked how many students are at Memorial right now and the numbers that are being added. Mr. Overton noted that the 2022-2023 projections showed 650 total with 32 preK, leaving the current number at 618 for K-5. Mr. Overton also believed that the property that is considered to be purchased is very important, not only for this project but for any future expansion. He strongly encouraged the board to consider locking up a purchase agreement on that property, regardless of how the project moves forward. The staff at Memorial does a great job managing the pick-up and drop-off process which is a very difficult situation. Any improvement that could be made to that will probably require more property.

Mrs. Dahlheimer added that, as of March 1, 2023, there were 235 students at Memorial.

Mr. Overton explained that the square footage cost is a big factor in the overall cost. Based on the square footage numbers and cost per student, the projections look a little high. He believed that if they want to bring the cost down, they need to look closely at the enrollment and square footage.

Dr. Schuch added that they would not want to invest a significant amount of money and then find out a few years later that the kids don't fit in the school. He felt it was more of a risk tolerance. He did feel that 720 is very high, but that was the recommendation. Mr. Overton felt that the OSCGR will vet the number anyway. Mrs. Petrella added that preK is not even included in these numbers and if this moves forward, she wondered where will preK end up and will extra money need to be spent to accommodate preK. Mr. Overton felt that they could task the architects to look at the expandability of the school in the future.

Mr. Mennone asked the Building Committee for their thoughts on shutting down the two schools. Mr. Overton felt that the decision really comes down to the teachers and faculty and how the program will be set up. He felt that less buildings is more efficient and more effective long-term as far as keeping costs down. He noted that he has worked on school projects in Manchester and they favor neighborhood elementary schools, but it is different in every town. If a building can be renovated to meet the high-efficiency building standards, energy costs will also go way down. Mr. Mennone wondered if there would be cost savings moving forward even though they will need to spend a tremendous amount of money to get the school where it needs to be. He felt that they would save money, but it will be tough to get the project passed.

Mr. Overton reminded everyone that they will also need to deal with the disposition of two other properties. They may see a benefit to project if the buildings can be sold, but there may also be a cost for demolition if not. Mr. Cross added that drop-off and pick-up will continue to be a problem at Memorial if nothing is done, especially if more kids are added. He felt that more and more parents will want to drop their kids off rather than busing.

Mr. Overton added that the drop-off area has been paramount on every school project he has worked on for both safety and operations. He added that, at most elementary schools, parents don't drop their kids off at the curb and typically park and walk their kids into the building. If there will be staff at the curb, that would be fine. Mrs. Caramanello noted that that is what happens at Brewster right now and that would probably be carried over.

Mr. Weissberg asked about the design options and how many were looked at. This is essentially five separate sections being added. He felt that this seems to be a very expensive way to go, with a lot of foundation work and land being taken up as opposed to something multilevel. Dr. Schuch stated that this

is not an actual design, but just what could be to be able to get the numbers for state funding. If the project were to go forward, they would request bids from architects. He added that people usually want to vote for something when they see the finished product, but that's not how this process works. Dr. Schuch noted that the actual project may look nothing like the proposed design. Mr. Cross agreed, noting that if Silver Petrucelli got the project, it would probably look like this but another architect's design wouldn't.

Mr. Weissberg summarized that the cost estimate is therefore not based on anything structural or the square footage, but just on number of students. He felt that a tighter design would result in a more efficient cost estimate. Mr. Cross felt that Silver Petrucelli did both, including how many students, basic programming and square footage. The problem is trying to get the square footage to align with the enrollment and not result in excess square footage. He does believe they could certainly lower the costs of the project, but the worst case would be to under-estimate it.

Mr. Weissberg agreed with Mr. Overton that designing something with future expansion space may not be a bad way to go. Mr. Overton felt that they could remove the additional ends that have been added to the existing wings, but leave room for expansion. He added that they would ideally want to do all the renovations at one time in an empty building. If children need to occupy the building and the work needs to be done in phases, that will extend the length and increase the cost of the project. Mr. Weissberg added that other schools have used temporary classrooms during construction.

Dr. Schuch asked if it would be possible to build the new part of the building without touching the old part, then move the current occupants over to the new part while the old part is being renovated. That would mean no additional students move until the entire project is done. Mr. Weissberg felt that would still increase the cost and time dramatically because of all the coordination efforts. Dr. Schuch asked if that was why there were large amounts of contingencies included in the proposal and Mr. Weissberg felt that it was. Mr. Cross added that he has done projects both ways, but his preference would be to have the building empty. It would not be impossible to do it with students in the building, but not preferable. Mr. Overton felt that OSCGR will look at all of that as part of their review. Mr. Cross stated that OSCGR has been presenting substantially higher number than they were a few years ago, and they are making an effort to budget enough money to complete these projects.

Dr. Schuch added that Michelle Miller had stated that once a number is approved, that is what they should expect to pay. He thought that bids could come in under the proposed number. Mr. Cross felt there were several options and a Construction Manager is probably the best bet. He respectfully disagreed with Ms. Miller's statement and felt that market value prevails. Architects are trying to guess what will happen in two or three years and tend to be very conservative. When the project goes to bid, you will pay what everybody else is paying. He added that there are not a lot of Construction Managers/General Contractors that do this type of work in Connecticut.

Mr. Overton agreed and noted that the OSCGR program has made a huge effort to control extras and tighten up the designs. There will be an RFP for the design and other architects can bid on the project. If the district goes the Construction Manager route, they will break up the project based on different design professions and bids will come in at a wide range. He added that most bids come in under budget.

Mr. Weissberg asked if the CM would be hired as an RFP or as a low bid and Mr. Cross said it would be an RFP. Mr. Proia asked if the district would need to pay a premium for a project of this size and Mr. Cross stated that their fee would be at risk if the project doesn't complete within the set parameters. The

CM fee is usually 5 percent of the entire project. Mr. Cross felt that a Construction Manager would offer a tremendous value to the project and they really would act as the district's agent. He also felt it was critical to hire the CM right after the architect is selected to allow them to work together. Architects are not usually great estimators, but CMs are. Mr. Overton described the normal process of a building project and noted that estimates are received several times along the way. Mr. Faiella noted that Silver Petrucelli's proposal showed a CM at 3 percent of the cost. He added that there is about \$18 million in the proposal that are not physically part of building the building and Mr. Cross was confident that those numbers would go down. He noted that he has never seen a project where there wasn't a contingency because things happen and he did not feel the contingency numbers were outrageous, but rather the students and square footage that sticks out in his mind as well as sequencing. He assumed that Silver Petrucelli took the worst-case scenario with a 24-month schedule which would be the right thing to do in this case.

Mr. Moore asked if the space available at Brewster would count against the district in this project and everyone agreed that it would not. Mr. Cross did think that it could affect the ultimate square footage that is built if not all the students move to Memorial as the state will not let you overbuild.

Mrs. Dahlheimer was horrified with the numbers as they were almost double what she thought they would be. She wanted to know the absolute cost savings involved with closing Lyman and Brewster individually and in combination. It will be hard to justify spending any money without being able to say what the savings will be. She was hoping to see the minimum that would be needed to get all the kids into one school.

Mr. Mennone agreed that it's important to know all the costs in order to present to the public and what the long-term reductions in operating costs would be as well as the per pupil cost. Mrs. Caramanella added that she'd want to know how long that would take as well. Mr. Mennone felt that was necessary to be able to explain how and why they are doing this. He was very appreciative of the Building Committee members. Mr. Overton felt that the best way to do that is to hire a professional to do a fiscal impact analysis. Mrs. Petrella would also want to know what the debt service will go up to as they may offset any savings.

Mr. Cross stated that they talked to Mrs. Neubig about getting an independent look at the numbers by hiring a CM to look at the proposed design and put a number on it. He felt it would be well worth the cost. He typically pays \$15,000 to \$20,000 for an estimate like that. Dr. Schuch asked how long he felt that would take and Mr. Cross felt it would take within two to three weeks. Mrs. Neubig asked if this would be like a second opinion and Mr. Cross agreed that it is, but is a smart thing to do. A professional estimator could also be hired.

Mrs. Petrella wondered if the numbers would still be too high because the design needs to be adjusted. She stated that they need to cut the costs down and \$83 million is not just doable. She asked if the Building Committee knew of a way the district could explore this project and see how low it could actually go and maybe even cut it in half. Mrs. Dahlheimer had wanted to see if it would be more cost effective to do an addition just to fit the kids at the school and not renovate-as-new. Mr. Cross felt that the board could set a certain number and ask Silver Petrucelli to design to that. Dr. Schuch stated that a committee had met and developed a wish list and this design was based on that. Mr. Weissberg reminded everyone that they will make money by getting reimbursement. Mr. Cross felt that the best thing the district can do is to renovate-as-new, but they should ask for three options from the architects, bare bones,

middle and everything included. Mr. Mennone stated that they did that and he assumes that the proposal is the middle ground. Mr. Cross reiterated that they can give a number to the architect, but \$40 million doesn't sound like it aligns with what is needed.

Mrs. Neubig reviewed that Memorial Middle School was originally constructed in 1954, with additions to the north and east in 1960. In 1996, two additional rooms were added along with the media center. Mr. Cross summarized that it has never been renovated-as-new, but he did feel the proposed number is a little on the high side. He would ask Silver Petrucelli for information on the bare bones option.

Mrs. Neubig added that Silver Petrucelli had actually presented two options, both of which were lower than this. They had asked them to price out the cheaper option and what was presented was double what they had expected due to the soft costs and contingencies. Mr. Cross suggested asking them how they are 15,000 sq. ft. over after looking at the programming. Dr. Schuch recognized the sense of urgency and asked if they could get Michelle Miller to attend the next Building Committee meeting on March 29th. He felt that it's a little premature to get another cost estimate.

Mrs. Dahlheimer thought they needed to go to referendum in the spring and Dr. Schuch explained that he just wouldn't want to make any decisions tonight and felt it would make sense to get these answers. Dr. Schuch did admit that this design is his favorite, both educationally and facility-wise, but he had a much lower number in his head as well. Mr. Mennone agreed that they don't need to make any decisions tonight and they all have many more questions. He would also like Ms. Miller to attend the Building Committee meeting. Mr. Mennone felt that if they don't tell the community exactly what they are thinking of doing to better the district, no one will vote for it.

Mrs. Neubig stated that they had previously estimated out 10 years of net present value for Lyman and had it audited. She has also done that for Brewster with some assumptions. She came out to just shy of \$1.5 million each year for each building. The savings from the first year of closing will be lower due to moving costs, etc. She reminded everyone that that does not include any increase to debt service. She also did a debt service graph with \$37 and \$26 million because that was what they thought the estimates would be. To level fund the debt service, the district can bond an estimated \$5 million which means they can authorize \$10 million. Anything more than \$10 million will increase the debt service, but that would be with having Lyman and Brewster open. If a school is closed, that provides an additional \$1.5 million in debt service capability without increasing the total budget specifically to that item.

Mrs. Neubig also explained that the per pupil expenditure will only move with big expenditures or savings. In order to move the per pupil down by \$1,000 per child, that would require an estimated \$1.5 million. Mr. Weissberg asked if there was a way to show the point at which the district breaks even. Mrs. Neubig does like the idea of the fiscal impact study. Mr. Mennone added that the board needs to be on the same page with this.

Mrs. Petrella added that they really need to think about what will happen with preschool. It wouldn't make sense to keep an entire school open just for preschool at Brewster, but she wondered what options there would be. Right now, Mrs. Neubig estimated under 40 children in preschool. Mrs. Dahlheimer added that many states, including Connecticut, are looking towards universal preK. Mrs. Petrella felt that other uses for Brewster need to be considered if it is to remain open, but that will also impact any potential savings. Dr. Schuch thought that there are four kindergarten classes at Brewster and two at Lyman. Mr. Overton stated that preK has 32 students and kindergarten has 107, based on the 2022-2023

projections. Mr. Weissberg summarized that the proposal for Memorial therefore includes six kindergarten classes, but they have not addressed the capacity at Brewster.

Mr. Overton noted that the projected enrollment at one of the priority list schools in Madison is 640 with a 78,500 sq. ft. building and a budget of \$61 million. He believed that was a two-story building without any land costs. He read the description of the project, noting that it seems to be very similar to what the district has gone through. He added that Wintergreen in Hamden was built in 1996 and is now in a renovation at \$20 million. That school is K-8, with 769 students. He felt that that means to renovate Memorial with the number of students projected, it will not be below \$20 million but could possibly be less than \$60 million.

Mr. Cross had \$68 million in his head and didn't feel that the \$80 million is accurate. They would be happy to look at the project and talk with Ms. Miller, but the board really has to make sure the programming is the way they envisioned it. He would assume preK would be at Memorial. Dr. Schuch reminded everyone that, at some point, they will either want to or will be mandated to expand preK. Mr. Overton added that he agreed that it is hard to understand the value of the total number without knowing potential cost savings over 20 years. Mr. Moore also felt that they should do some kind of fiscal analysis.

Mr. Overton would ideally like to see the kids in a state-of-the-art building that's highly energy efficient and will save money in the long run, but he questions what the district will do with the buildings they are closing. He also asked if they have completely abandoned the option of renovating Brewster and Memorial. Mrs. Neubig noted that the board had looked at adding eight or 10 classrooms to Brewster and minor adjustments at Memorial, while closing Lyman. Mrs. Petrella reviewed that that would have been preK-2 at Brewster and 3-5 at Memorial but the referendum to revise the regionalization plan, required under that scenario did not pass. Mr. Overton agreed that that might not be the ideal situation, but it is better than the current situation.

Mrs. Neubig asked if anyone had a contact to do a fiscal analysis and Mr. Overton stated that he has a few people that he has worked with. He felt that \$20,000 would be a reasonable number for that. There was then discussion about capital improvements that would be required at Brewster and Lyman.

Mrs. Petrella reviewed that they have been having this discussion for the last eight to 10 years and Korn School was the beginning of the result of that discussion. She believes that the board has done a good job in the last few months pushing what they feel is the best educational reconfiguration, but the cost needs to be looked at. She felt that all of the children consolidated in one school is the best option. Mrs. Dahlheimer acknowledged that they are getting there, but are not there yet. They need complete numbers in order to move forward.

Mrs. Petrella felt that there were two options, one would be getting a fiscal impact analysis and the other would be a meeting with Michelle Miller and the Building Committee. Ms. Roy was in support of the financial impact analysis and felt that it would hope gain trust from the community. She also felt it was important to think about preK with all of this. Ms. Roy also questioned ADA compliance at Memorial if the project does not move forward. Mr. Overton noted that the entire property would need to be ADA compliant if they renovate as new. Mr. Moore felt it would be helpful to move ahead with the fiscal analysis to help figure out what is affordable. Mrs. Dahlheimer agreed, but would like to see the Building Committee meet with Silver Petrucelli.

Mr. Overton felt that the consultant could also help with disposition of the properties. Mr. Moore noted that they had received an offer to purchase Lyman and Mr. Overton thought that Brewster has land use restrictions on the property. Mrs. Neubig stated that that is no longer the case.

It was then generally agreed to have the Building Committee meet with Michelle Miller before going any further with the project. Mrs. Neubig will forward any necessary information to the Building committee.

Adjournment

Mrs. Dahlheimer made a motion, seconded by Mr. Mennone, to adjourn the special joint workshop of the Board of Education and the Building Committee.

In favor of adjourning the special joint workshop of the Board of Education and the Building Committee: Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Darcy, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella and Mr. Roraback. Motion carried.

Meeting was adjourned at 6:36 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Debi Waz
Alwaz First