

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education met in special session with the Building Committee on Wednesday, March 20, 2024 at 5:00 PM in the library at Coginchaug Regional High School.

Board members present: Ms. Betty (remote), Mrs. Caramanello (remote), Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Darcy (remote), Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Mr. Stone

Board members absent: Mr. DeVecchio

Administration present: Dr. Schuch, Superintendent of Schools, Mrs. Smith, Operations Manager and Mr. Proia, Supervisor of Facilities and Grounds

Mrs. Dahlheimer called the special joint work session to order at 5:00 PM.

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Approval of Agenda

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

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

Joint Work Session with Building Committee

A. Discussion of Facility Planning Designs for Operation of Three Schools in RSD 13

Mrs. Neubig explained that Mr. Malik and Mr. Collier made revisions including the enlargement of the second floor. The price increased to \$12 million for option C1A due to the extra square footage. Pricing remained the same for options C2 and C3. Dr. Schuch reminded everyone that picking any of the options does not commit the district to a specific design.

Mr. Malik reviewed that the main difference between C1 and C1A was a full two-story addition to get to the maximum allowable square footage without having an impact on reimbursement rate. They expanded the second story and moved third grade to that level. That allowed more space for special education on the lower level. There is also more room for the preK drop-off. These changes increased the overall square footage by about 3,700 square feet which resulted in the additional cost. Mr. Cross added that it is much more ideal to go for the maximum allowable square footage. Mr. Weissberg felt that it also makes it an easier sell as there will be some flexible space. Mr. Malik added that the increased square footage is represented as additional rooms, but existing rooms could also be expanded.

Option C2A has the kindergarten rooms moved toward the back of the building. That change brought service rooms to the front and still allowed for a separate preK drop-off area. Mr. Weissberg felt it was a much cleaner design.

No change made to option C3. The comparison numbers changed in option C1 where the net costs went up to \$12,427,894. Mr. Malik also noted that legislation was passed requiring charging stations at 20 percent of parking spaces. Eversource does provide incentives for that. Mrs. Dahlheimer felt that they can't really be sure until July 1st. Mr. Roraback was surprised he hadn't heard about this on the news. Mr. Cross felt there may be a moratorium on this for another year. Mr. Overton suggested that they include an overflow parking area as well. Mr. Cross felt that this should show as a separate line item with all of the costs shown.

Mr. Overton asked if the cost increase was just a function of having more square footage and Mr. Malik confirmed that was the case. Mr. Overton did not understand why the cost per square foot was lower under option C1 vs. C1A. He felt that the building is more efficient by building out the second floor and having less footprint. Mr. Malik explained that the estimate is just per square foot, but not detailed down to savings. Mr. Overton then summarized that that means there is not a discernable difference in cost between C1 and C1A. Mr. Malik agreed, other than the additional square footage.

Mrs. Dahlheimer had an issue in C1A of putting second grade in their own area. Dr. Schuch reviewed that the decision really is do they want to go for more square footage and gain more flexibility or be more conservative financially. Mrs. Dahlheimer asked if anyone wanted to eliminate any options at this point.

Mr. Weissberg recommended eliminating options C2 and C3. He added that Mr. Faiella felt the same. Mr. Cross would also recommend option C1A, but only based on the fact that the existing building is in decent shape structurally. As a contractor, Mr. Cross would prefer to build new, but he would strongly recommend option C1A as it gives the district the best bang for the buck. Mr. Giammatteo agreed. Mr. Overton added that he questioned if there would be an overriding benefit to options C2 and C3 that would warrant the additional cost and he didn't see one. Mr. Weissberg agreed and added that the best location for the site is where the building is and the plans developed by the architect show that the site can be effectively reused. He recommended C1A over C1 because the cost difference is almost negligible. Mr. Overton also felt that there were more options for expansion of the building in C1A. Mrs. Dahlheimer felt that was an important factor.

Mrs. Dahlheimer's reservations on C1A were the location of the second grade and if the money would be worth it to the community. She believes it will be worth it. Mr. Weissberg felt the current C1 configuration makes sense and keeping the additional space as flexible space. Mr. Giammatteo felt that C1A provides a lot of options to configure it as needed. Mr. Stone agreed that keeping the C1 configuration makes sense.

Since there was no vote scheduled on the agenda, Dr. Schuch recommended they put a vote on the agenda for the April 3rd meeting. Mr. Malik added that there is a requirement that the existing portion of the renovated building must be at least 55 percent of the overall building. In this case, the percentages do not meet that criteria. Mr. Malik felt that could be reviewed with the state and be taken care of as the intent of the regulation is to not have people demolish large portions of a building and build new square footage. Mr. Cross agreed. Mr. Malik noted that the square footage in this option is at 49.8 percent.

Mr. Weissberg then reported that the Building Committee was unanimously recommending option C1A as he has heard from all members. Mrs. Dahlheimer felt that the board was feeling the same. Mr. Moore stated that he looked at the current budget, increased it by 3 percent per year to 2027/2028 when this would be built. In 2027/2028, the budget would be about \$46 to \$47 million. The budget would drop by an estimated 2.9 million with closing two schools, bringing it back to around \$43 million. Adding the debt service would bring it back up to about \$45 million. He summarized that the budget impact of building this vs. not fixing anything is less. Mr. Moore felt it was important to show the budget impact to the communities. Mr. Overton noted that nothing tells a story better than a colorful 10-year graph. Mr. Roraback added that they also need to tell the story of better educational quality, better collaboration of teachers, and children being together. Mr. Stone added that if they were to get a quote on fixing John Lyman School, it would probably be about \$12 million. Mrs. Dahlheimer felt that they lose a lot of people when they start throwing numbers out and debt service with complicated graphs. She felt they need to get the story out.

Mr. Roraback added that the do-nothing option would have a lot of unknowns as well. Mrs. Dahlheimer then summarized that the recommendation from both the Building Committee and the full board would be to go with option C1A. Mrs. Neubig would like to work with board members on the presentation to the communities. Mrs. Dahlheimer had talked to a family who wanted to know how it will affect them personally, what the cost savings will be to the family, what the cost savings will be to the towns and what it will do to improve the kids' education. Mr. Moore also felt it was important to convince people that they will not be just voting for \$75 million or \$35 million. Mrs. Neubig will work with the towns' finance directors to get a mill rate estimate once a decision is made.

Mrs. Dahlheimer asked if the board wanted to call a special meeting before the April 3rd meeting and it was agreed to schedule a special remote meeting.

Dr. Schuch felt that another important thing to support this option would be some of the recent work that's been done on the campus. Another important part of the story is what will happen to the children while the site is unoccupied and those children who will never reap the benefits.

Mr. Weissberg noted that all children will benefit because the high school would suffer when Lyman needs a new furnace as there is one budget. More money will be available to invest in all of the programs when they are spending less money on repairing infrastructure.

Public Comment

A. In-Person public comment

None.

B. Remote public comment

None.

Adjournment

Mr. Mennone made a motion, seconded by Mr. Moore, 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: Ms. Betty, Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Darcy, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Mr. Stone. Motion carried.

Meeting was adjourned at 5:39 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz
Alwaz First