

School Facilities Review Committee Special Meeting Minutes
July 10th 2019, 6pm
Central Office 90 Town Street Norwich CT

Mark Bettencourt called the meeting to order at 6:02PM

Committee Meeting Members Present: Chair Mark Bettencourt, Vice Chair Tricia Staley, Board of Education Representative Yvette Jacaruso. Council Representatives Alderman Joe DeLucia and Stacy Gould. Community/Parent Representatives Cynthia (Cindy) Beauregard (Staff Member), Charles (Chuck) Cottle, John Levangie, and Ryan Telford. Ex-Officio Members ~~Kristen~~ Stringfellow (School Superintendent) and Athenea Nagel (School Business Admin.).

Committee Members Absent: Community/ Parent Representatives Susan Blinderman (Staff Member) and Paula Rosenberg Bell. Ex-Officio Members Michael Driscoll (Corp. Counsel), Mayor Peter Nystrom, Comptroller Josh Pothier, and City Manager John Salmone.

Others Present: Claire Bessette, reporter from the Day (Newspaper).

Determination of Quorum: It was determined a quorum was present.

Prior Meeting Minutes: On a motion from Cindy Beauregard, seconded by Stacy Gould, the meeting minutes of June 5th, 2019 were unanimously approved as presented.

Citizen Comment: None

Old Business: None

New Business:

Discussion on options for Veterans School led by Ryan Telford:

Ryan passed out notes he had typed out at the start of the meeting. He began the discussion by reviewing his ***attached notes**. The information about the cost of land is from Zillow. He believes that the committee may be overestimating the amount of students each school building can hold and they need a plan B, backup plan. Joe responded by saying the committee should take Stacy's first draft and use Ryan's notes to refine the list. Mark requested the committee discuss an estimate of the amount of students before deciding other issues.

Superintendent ~~Dr. Kristen~~ Stringfellow asked if an enrollment forecast has been conducted and if so, when? Ms. Staley indicated that as a part of the NESDEC

Superintendent search NESDEC provides an enrollment projection free of charge to the Norwich Public Schools. The timeline may be in the fall. Dr. Stringfellow explained the difference between a projection and a forecast and indicated that both would be ideal. CSDOE will require this as a part of the application package. It will be important to have accurate enrollment data to ensure that the facilities built will be adequate for the life of the bonds (approximately 20 years). Committee members indicated that the last report (2016) indicated that enrollment was stable and perhaps declining but that does not align with recent numbers.

~~wants to know when the last enrollment forecast is, Athenea says it was 2017 and the next one is in the fall. Kristin wants another enrollment forecast to be very current but mark says that comes under the building committee. She says that everything she has read says they enrollment is declining in Connecticut Schools but everything she is seeing today shows that enrollment is increasing each year.~~

John Leverage discussed how Connecticut schools have seen decreasing enrollment but Norwich is bucking the trend and facing an increase. He wants the committee to prepare for 3000 students instead of 2300-2500.

Dr. Stringfellow asked if a programmatic forecast had been completed. It will be important to design facilities for the planned programs that will occur in the next 20 years. The committee indicated it had not been done. Kristian wants to know what internal podiatric forecast to ask what people believe education will look like in 20 years. She asked if there has there been an operational savings forecast conducted (one that would show approximate operational savings in taking certain buildings offline. The forecast would include planned capital savings, personnel, utilities and deferred maintenance costs). savings plan, what are their savings in taking certain schools offline, what schools are the most costly for repairs The committee indicated that had not been done. Dr. Stringfellow asked if the committee had brought in commercial realtors to estimate the retail value of buildings being considered for closure. The committee indicated that had not been done. Ms. Staley offered to reach out to a commercial realtor. and has a realtor come in and say how much a school would be worth if they decided to sell it. Joe says that the properties taken off line will go back to the community and bring back tax revenue to the city. Mark says that would need to be discussed with the building committee and requests that the committee work on planning and staying focused. Stacy says the realtor information should be part of the draft in their final recommendations so that it will give the next committee a starting point.

Once the committee creates a plan, Mark says they will need an engineer for the next step. The state will want proof that they are leveling the demographics. Any of the schools that are still left afterwards, will all need to be renovated. Athenea wants to stay focused and create a plan. She says they need to get the plan to the city council by November to get it done in a timely manner.

Joe reminded the committee that the council and the board are up for reelection this year. The new council and board will be seated by November. Athenea asks if they should present it to a committee when it will be a different committee by December.

Joe Delucia left the meeting at 645 pm to attend the Public Safety Committee.

Finalization of Draft Proposal:

Tricia offered to write up a draft proposal when they decide on a plan. Mark wants to work on determining a capacity of the students for whom they are building schools. Athenea says they can only give a range when a building committee has been created. Mark believes it needs to be a stated rule that the schools are an integral part of the community. Now that Kelly has been renovated, the committee will focus on renovating teachers to make more room and add additional space. The minimum capacity they are planning for is 2700. Stacy asked if the committee upped their figures to bring our enrollment up to, 3000 is it enough. ~~Kristian says it is a great starting point.~~ Dr. Stringfellow indicated that an enrollment forecast would be best but that the committees intentions serve as a good starting point.

Stacy updated her reconfiguration suggestions, only the student body numbers as attached ***attached notes**. Ryan asks Dr. Stringfellow if 850 is a typical size of an efficient school. Dr. Stringfellow indicated that there is no crystal clear number for a prototypical elementary school that is both effective and efficient in the research. There is research that speaks to schools being too small and too large to be both fiscally efficient and educationally effective. It is typically wise to gauge the size that the community will support. but Kristian says there is no such thing as a perfect number. Stacy says they need a plan b in case the state does not accept plan, Mark says first they need to create a plan a, before there can be a plan b. Stacy says as they plan, plan a, they need to be productive and make a plan b.

~~Kristian says the community's feedback is more important than the states. Ryan says the person with the most experience should give input about what they need to do tonight, next meeting and in between, which is Kristin. She then talked about how it is necessary for the school to provide info about school savings, the committee needs to meet with a realtor to find out what the offset would be, and that they need to account for the enrollment you didn't and put it in plan a. The school department offered to bring operational savings estimates to the August meeting. Kristen cautioned the committee with regard to enrollment that sometimes when brand new schools are built or renovated to new schools can see an uptick in enrollment. In the communities that Kristen works in, she says that with new buildings there is always an enrollment increase.~~ Tricia agreed saying she has seen enrollment drop at tech school when Plainfield built a new public school.

The Committee then discussed building a new school to replace veterans. They are looking for a new spot to build the new school. They are planning for 600-800 capacity depending on need.

Plan B is not closing Veterans and Wequonnoc but to renovate them. For Pre-k - 5 they are planning a capacity of 3000 for Norwich Public Schools plus the middle schools (Teachers and Kelly). This may allow us to bring some students back and cut outplacement costs.

If Veterans is closing, the new school needs to be across the river in the eastside to add geographic distribution to the plan. Mark asked Tricia to add that to the draft report.

The committee will not discuss keeping Mahan because it would likely be a hot realty property and there have been countless bussing issues related to traffic problems at the site.

Plan A

Expand and renovate to new Moriarty, Stanton and Uncas.

Build new school to meet the capacity of approximately 3000, preferably on East Side

Close Veterans, Wequonnoc and Mahan

Teacher's renovated with an addition to address space needs

Kelly, recently renovated, remains the same

Huntington and Bishop will likely be repurposed as Central Office with ancillary uses
TBD

Plan B

Expand and renovate to new Moriarty, Stanton, Uncas, Veterans and Wequonnoc.

Teacher's renovated with an addition to address space needs

Kelly, recently renovated, remains the same

Huntington and Bishop will likely be repurposed as Central Office with ancillary uses
TBD

On a motion from Tricia, seconded by Dr. Yvette plans A & B were unanimously approved as presented.

In the August meeting, the committee will discuss the Early Learning Center/DTZ at Case Street and address potential uses for the other buildings that may save operational costs. Tricia will try to touch-base with a realtor to ask if they can give us a ballpark estimate of what the properties they are trying to sell will go for.

The committee wants to get the operational and capital savings estimates for the sites they are taking off line.

~~Kristian Kristen~~ will check in with education director to see if they want a special sheltered site for special needs or spread them out in many different schools so they can socialize more. The administrative team will tour the sites scheduled to close to see which offer more flexibility for administration and planned programmatic special needs sites.

Tricia will work on the proposal, she can write a shell of a first draft that they can review and edit.

Adjournment: On a motion from Ryan Telford, seconded by Yvette Jacaruso, the meeting adjourned at 7:42PM.

The next meeting will be 7 August 2019, at 6pm at Central Office.