

**MANCHESTER BOARD OF EDUCATION
SMARTR COMMITTEE MEETING
THURSDAY, MAY 9, 2013
Manchester Room, Town Hall**

MINUTES

PRESENT: M. Crockett, J. Doucette, M. Flick, S. Gates, B. Murphy, C. Pelletier, L. Stewart, J. Topping

ALSO PRESENT: S. Shanley, C. Till

ABSENT: D. Hagenow, N. Leon, A. Strong, M. Tweedie, S. Walton

The meeting was called to order at 6:36 p.m. by Chairperson Crockett.

**Motion to accept the April 17, 2013 minutes of the SMARTR
Committee. Murphy/Gates**

6/0/1 (Flick abstained, Pelletier not yet present)

Randal Luther, from Tai Soo Kim Partners, reviewed that he had met with the Bureau of School Facilities, along with town representatives, recently. He had explained the scope of the project and their strategy is to treat this project as an extension of the Bennet project, which has not yet been closed out.

They gave helpful suggestions on how to improve some reimbursement issues. Specifically, they noted that the Bennet project was penalized due to the unused space in the lower level of the Rec building (the old pool/bowling alley) and suggested that the school "carve that out" as Board of Education space, which would reduce the square footage of the project for reimbursement purposes. It was unknown why they did not suggest this years ago, when the project was originally on their table.

It was noted that special legislation will be required for the project, but overall it was a positive meeting. Mr. Luther reminded the committee that special legislation was already part of the plan anyway, due to the timing issues, so this would all be incorporated at once.

Tai Soo Kim Partners continues to develop the design. They have realized that one year, 2017, the enrollment numbers peak for fifth grade, requiring more than the current 21 classrooms planned for at Cheney. The solution that they are looking at is to make a special

education classroom planned for at Cheney larger than originally designed. For that one particular year when enrollment peaks and an additional classroom is needed, the special education classroom can be relocated and another 5th grade class can be put in the same building as the rest of the grade. Dr. Kisiel agreed with that plan.

Mr. Luther had met with the State Historic Preservation people and they are willing to work with us. After looking at the design ideas, they liked the idea of keeping the boiler building. Mr. Luther then informed them that the decision had been made to drop the project if the boiler building could not be torn down. They in turn suggested keeping part of the façade of the boiler building to preserve some historic value. Mr. Luther presented a drawing of that idea, using the front elevation of the boiler building as a false façade on the new addition, and between this “wall” and the new addition there would be a handicapped accessible ramp. This area would be covered to add stability to the false wall. The entrance area would have several stairs, allowing for the lobby to be raised up and thereby on the same level as the classroom addition and not require stairs between them inside. This actually helps define the new entrance as well.

At the end of the month, Mr. Luther felt he would have more cost estimates and be tighter on the numbers.

Mr. Shanley reviewed that the special legislation is very important to this project. Mr. Crockett wondered how long that would take, and would it delay things? Mr. Shanley felt it may take until May 2014, but they can sequence it to include language needed to get us in line for next summer, which was the original plan. Mr. Luther notes he is on track to submit plans by June 30th to the state. He notes the state submits their priority list of schools by the end of the year. Mr. Shanley felt they might consider not requiring special legislation, but there was no promise of that.

Mr. Jim Hoagland was present to represent JCJ on Robertson and Washington Elementary Schools. He notes his team has been busy writing Ed Specs for the two schools. He stated they will need to meet with Dr. Kisiel and the principals to finalize those soon. He reviewed that a 3-D model is progressing. At the next meeting he may have the 3-D and character presentation ready.

The concern he is focused on now is how to reduce the square footage. This is easier to do at Washington, as it is a new building.

Mr. Hoagland notes that Director Pelletier had recently met with the Historic District and the meeting went fairly well. His team will go to the next meeting to talk to them.

Mr. Hoagland reviewed classroom sizes. He noted the Board policy is to have 20-25 students per class. Union contracts state no more than 25 (28 for up to 30 days). Ideal size is 20

students. Currently at Washington the average is 20 students and at Robertson the average is 18. Both of these schools do have some rooms with 23 students, but some with fewer as well. In looking at these numbers, it makes less sense to put 16-18 students in a 900 square foot classroom.

Mr. Crockett read an email from Dr. Kisiel noting that 900 square feet is ideal, but 850 is more realistic. He also stated in his email that 760-780 square feet, which is currently some of the classrooms at Highland Park, is a bit small for 5th graders. Mr. Luther noted that 6 of the new classrooms at Cheney are about 760 square feet, but the rest are about 850 square feet.

Mr. Hoagland showed a chart that explained the "sweet spot" that he is looking for in terms of enrollment and building size. He reviewed that if we bump up enrollment to allow for 20 students per class and 4 rooms per grade that was closer to the sweet spot. He noted that the original plan called for 17 classrooms, with 3 rooms per grade and 2 rooms to "flex" for whichever grades might need 4 rooms. He reviewed where he cut square footage a little here and there.

Mr. Murphy wondered, instead of trying to find where to cut space, does JCJ have direction from the Board of Education as to the number of students to plan for. Mr. Hoagland reported that Dr. Kisiel had provided the enrollment projections of 357 and 380 students and that was what they were basing this on.

Mr. Topping stated at the start of the SMARTR meetings there was some talk about reducing the number of elementary schools and making new schools a larger capacity to accommodate that. He wondered why we wouldn't build Washington larger and as a committee recommend that we put more students in the school. Mr. Doucette felt that suggestion previously had received "blow-back". Mr. Crockett stated he would ask the Board for their feedback. Mr. Topping suggested we should have a minimum of 500 students in a new building. Mr. Murphy agreed.

Mr. Hoagland noted that Washington, as a new building, could easily accommodate more rooms, but reminded the group we have to justify the enrollment projections to the state.

Mr. Stewart stated we had tabled that discussion earlier, because of time constraints in trying to get to a November referendum.

Ms. Pelletier noted that if we are only looking at putting Cheney on the ballot that gives us more time to look closer at this suggestion. Mr. Shanley suggested finding the "sweet spot" and then asking the Board of Education.

Mr. Stewart asked for clarity, noting it had been approved by both Boards to spend about \$200,000 on the schematic plans for the three schools. It was confirmed that was approved. Mr. Stewart wondered, if we get these plans done and then decide in the future that we want

500 students at the school, would the schematic plans have to be totally redone at more cost? Mr. Hoagland stated it was not a huge problem, but some of the work would have to be redone.

Mr. Murphy wondered about the historic preservation piece, what if legal action is taken by some group, then what? We need some more questions answered and a long-term plan on the number of students. He noted that if Cheney fails referendum, then we might be looking at a K-5 school instead of K-4.

Mr. Stewart noted that he had heard talk of just putting Cheney on the ballot in November. If that is the idea, then why not table the other two schools for now? Mr. Shanley stated that this committee had made a decision to move this along to the Boards and try for a November referendum. If that is no longer the case we can slow things down and make a recommendation to only move Cheney along towards referendum.

Mr. Topping felt that SMARTR guidelines allow us to make recommendations. He wondered why we cannot recommend x number of schools and each at x capacity, then the Board of Education can either accept or reject those recommendations.

Mr. Crockett noted that earlier in this process SMARTR had asked the Board of Education for some guidance. They had suggested planning for approximately 400 students per school and provided a priority list of schools, among other suggestions.

Mr. Stewart made a motion to move forward with the schematic design for Cheney to target a November 2013 referendum, and for the other two schools (Robertson & Washington) to be targeted for a future referendum, to give time to answer outstanding questions. Doucette seconded the motion.

DISCUSSION:

Ms. Flick felt the discussion was reflective of other agreements made consistently in the past in this committee.

Mr. Doucette stated we haven't really had discussion on the number of students per school or consolidating schools.

Mr. Hoagland noted that with Highland Park already renovated and with adding Washington and Robertson to the list of re-done schools, that would make one-third of the elementary schools in town new or like-new. He heard the notion in past meetings that the Washington neighborhood "deserves" a new school. He feels moving ahead with Robertson and

Washington makes sense and then looking at the other schools for a longer-term plan over the next ten years. He feels the size at Washington makes sense.

Mr. Shanley noted, according to Mr. Hoagland's chart, that there is a "sweet spot" at about 425-450 students and then again at 550-600.

THE QUESTION WAS CALLED:

8/0 – Voted in favor.

Mr. Stewart wondered if we could recommend any future remodels meet a specific number of student capacity, such as 450. Mr. Topping wondered how many students were in elementary school in town currently. Mr. Hoagland stated that number, including 5th grade, is currently 3,683.

Mr. Crockett stated he would bring this discussion to the Board of Education.

Ms. Pelletier stated she liked Ms. Walton's idea from the last meeting, to have enrollment from the neighborhood, but then add a number of choice spots for families to opt in from other areas of town. Ms. Pelletier notes that parents are often willing to transport their children to magnets and they are drawn to new facilities.

Ms. Pelletier feels this is a Board of Education decision and they should be given time to discuss it. However, she feels the schematics should move forward in a timely manner. She noted, from her meeting with the Historic Commission, that their role is to protect the Historic District and they are not in favor of demolishing Washington. Ms. Pelletier had informed them that the schematics being done are only based on a new building. She does not want the process bogged down by them. She notes if the commission wants to rally against a new school so be it. Ms. Pelletier did some research into the landmark designation and found that Washington was not a key feature in that designation at all. That makes this safer ground. She noted the commission was given the option to fix the museum located on the corner of the property and they showed little interest, even though that is an older building than Washington. Ms. Pelletier feels the schematics should still be done in a timely manner, even if the decision is made to put them on a later referendum, it will give more time to show the plan to the community and not rush it. She notes the commission won't prevent demolition of the building, it may just slow it down. She points out the Board of Directors are conscious of the numbers and careful of what they put on a referendum.

Mr. Stewart notes that completing Cheney first gives us more swing space and he notes the magnet school plan is still in the wings for next year. He reviewed the questions needing answers are the classroom size and if we should recommend closing a school/schools.

Mr. Hoagland stated the ideal classroom size for maximum reimbursement can be applied to all schools and he showed a chart that illustrated how a slightly smaller gym and cafeteria allows for larger classrooms all within the same square footage/reimbursement. He did note that at Robertson there is less flexibility because, for example, the gym already exists so they cannot "cut" square footage there as they can from a plan at a new building.

Mr. Murphy wondered at what enrollment figure does it start to impact the size of the gym and other areas. Mr. Hoagland felt that staying under 600 students was important because more than that becomes a scheduling issue and requires more art/music space, too many lunch waves, etc. Mr. Murphy noted that makes a good argument for a school of about 500 students.

Ms. Pelletier notes increasing enrollment can move our reimbursement rate from about 51% to about 65%. Mr. Hoagland wondered where the kids would come from. He noted there has to be a solid plan in place for the state. Mr. Murphy wanted a meeting set for talking about this so we can give JCJ direction. Mr. Shanley stated it would be good to have more Board of Education SMARTR members present, along with Dr. Kisiel, for that discussion.

Mr. Stewart wondered if we could also talk about adding the critical repairs list to the discussion. Mr. Gates wondered if that was part of the scope of SMARTR. Mr. Shanley noted that if SMARTR had been talking about that from the start we would have been stuck in all the details and gotten nowhere. But it could be addressed as part of the big picture.

Mr. Shanley reviewed that JCJ provided information on the "sweet spot" and the maximum reimbursement rate school size for discussion. Mr. Shanley asked if this item could be on the agenda for Monday's Board of Education meeting. Mr. Crockett felt there was time. He also noted that the mayor was on board with a plan for going forward with no more than one school for this November's referendum. Mr. Crockett reviewed we would be looking for validation of the motion passed tonight from the Board of Education. He added that if Cheney doesn't pass referendum, we would be back to the drawing board.

Next, Mr. Hoagland talked about classroom layouts and flexibility. He noted that when a school is wireless it allows for smaller classrooms because there doesn't have to be dedicated space for computers; students have wireless devices at their desks. Ms. Pelletier wondered if it is more expensive to provide the electrical capacity for wireless. Mr. Hoagland stated it is not much different. Mr. Shanley noted that Highland Park is both wireless and hardwired as the wireless concept was too fresh to fully integrate during planning.

The next two meetings are set for Wednesday, May 22 and Wednesday, June 5 at 6:30 pm in the Manchester Room at Town Hall. Mr. Shanley noted that any questions should be emailed to him or Mr. Till as soon as possible.

Motion to adjourn. Murphy/Stewart

7/0 (Gates had left prior to the vote)

Meeting adjourned 7:52 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

J. Doucette, Secretary
SMARTR Committee