

**MANCHESTER BOARD OF EDUCATION
SMARTR COMMITTEE MEETING
WEDNESDAY, May 22, 2013
Manchester Room, Town Hall**

MINUTES

PRESENT: J. Doucette, S. Gates, D. Hagenow, B. Murphy, C. Pelletier, L. Stewart, A. Strong, M. Tweedie, S. Walton

ALSO PRESENT: S. Shanley, C. Till

ABSENT: M. Crockett, J. Topping, M. Flick,

The meeting was called to order at 6:36 p.m. by Secretary Doucette.

**Motion to accept the May 9, 2013 minutes of the SMARTR Committee.
Murphy/Stewart**

6/0/2 (Hagenow and Walton abstained)

Mr. Shanley reviewed that the Board of Education voted differently than the SMARTR recommendation and he felt some of their resistance was due to communication issues. He noted that Dr. Kisiel had enumerated the reasons for the SMARTR vote and the questions that needed answering, but Mr. Shanley felt that the SMARTR Committee needed to make a formal request to the Board of Education for the needed information.

Ms. Walton agreed that communication was part of the issue. She noted that the Board of Education had set priorities previously, which included Washington at the top of the list, and they would need good justification to not start the projects with Washington. One question she felt they had was why couldn't the plan start with Washington, building it for a K-5 school, then move on to Cheney.

Ms. Walton noted that adding on to the Bennet complex adds square feet and adding on to Robertson and Washington adds square feet, all of which raises operating costs. She would like SMARTR to come back with some ideas on how to mitigate these costs, including the possibility of closing a building if Robertson and Washington are built bigger.

Mr. Murphy felt it was a consistent theme at the meetings to build a school for 500+ students and give the most number of students access to a new building with the latest technology. He felt that doing Cheney first allowed for space in the elementary schools, which may be used for swing space, then build Washington and close a school.

Ms. Walton didn't think we made a recommendation to the Board of Education to close a school, and felt the SMARTR Committee has been split on that issue. If we recommend building Washington and Robertson bigger, we need a plan for operating costs to address the issue.

Mr. Murphy recalled Dr. Kisiel stating that Cheney would require another administrator, but he feels the Board of Education and the Superintendent should work out personnel issues. He feels it was always the plan to close another building in the long term.

Mr. Stewart reviewed that at the last meeting we stated we needed to define classroom size and increase the school population at Washington and Robertson with the intent of eventually closing another school.

Mr. Murphy felt that we need to start with Cheney, because of that doesn't fly, the whole plan is dead.

Ms. Walton again asked why we cannot do a K-5 at Washington and Robertson, then when we move on to Cheney and the 5th graders move there, there will be room at Washington and Robertson to absorb other K-4 students.

Mr. Shanley noted that we need to have a plan to the state by June 30th. He reviewed that we cannot "double count" the 5th graders, by counting them in both projects.

Ms. Walton feels the elementary schools are a priority and she wonders if Cheney is the right project to start with.

Ms. Pelletier reviewed that we cannot build new K-5 schools and a 5/6 academy, we will lose reimbursement dollars or the state could possibly deny reimbursement.

Mr. Murphy also reviewed that there are significant differences in building a school for lower grades, such as the space requirements for Kindergarten, smaller bathrooms, sinks, etc., than for 5th grade. Mr. Murphy also pointed out that Board of Education member Leon was recently quoted as saying Cheney is key. Mr. Murphy felt moving the 5th out of the elementary schools also freed up space to use as swing space.

Mr. Stewart reviewed that at the last meeting we slowed down the Washington and Robertson projects because we need answers on these questions.

Ms. Walton noted that the last major concern is the swing space plan. She feels the Board of Education will have a hard time with the notion of splitting up kids into several buildings for one year during construction.

Mr. Stewart wondered if we could use the old Washington for the Robertson kids before it is torn down. Mr. Shanley reminded him that the area where the building is now will be needed for the site for parking and cannot simply be left up for a year.

Ms. Walton also noted that some members of both boards are saying we need to do Washington “like new” and not a new building. We also need to work out alternatives for swing space.

Mr. Shanley states he does not care what order the projects are accomplished in, however something needs to be completed prior to 2017. If we do Washington and Robertson larger, we can redistrict and empty a school. Then, in future projects, we can use that empty school as swing space.

Mr. Stewart wondered if we need to relook at the K-4 model. Ms. Walton noted she is not against that model at all. She notes we need to address operating costs and swing space, and to firm up a plan to both boards and to the public.

Mr. Stewart wondered if we are formally going to recommend that a school be closed?

Mr. Tweedie noted that when SMARTR began, it was said that people will need to see efficiencies in the plan or they will not vote for it. He feels closing a school is an option.

Ms. Walton feels that is a long term response to operating costs.

Mr. Shanley notes that with Cheney, while there obviously would be costs associated with heating and electricity, the staff costs shouldn't change much. The same number of teachers will be needed as if they were still in the elementary schools and the administrator for that building will be one of the Bennet Assistant Principals.

Mr. Till presented several slides to the group. One of them looked at how much “extra” space would be in the elementary schools if the 5th grade was not there. The total of that extra space was 98,000 square feet. Mr. Shanley notes that if we optimize those schools we could have fewer schools.

Mr. Murphy feels, to sell this plan we have to say, “The plan is to close another school.”

Mr. Gates came up with a slogan of “fewer – newer – larger” schools. He notes cost avoidance is how you pay for some of the project, and maybe the plan should include closing more than one school.

Mr. Murphy noted that many families leave for magnet schools because they are newer and fancier. He feels it is better to make our schools more appealing and keep the kids here instead of paying CREC to educate them.

Mr. Gates would like to see the estimated operating costs of Cheney. Ms. Pelletier thought it was approximately \$1.3 million when they estimated the savings at Nathan Hale. Ms. Walton noted that was a different size building and included staff cuts as well.

Ms. Pelletier noted that Nathan Hale could be considered for swing space. Mr. Gates felt putting some money into Nathan Hale might be worth it for swing space. Mr. Shanley recalled that approximately \$600,000 was spent on swing space in the Highland Park project, some of which added classrooms to Martin. He noted that any swing space funds are not reimbursable though.

Mr. Doucette was a parent whose children were at Buckley and then Highland Park, and he didn't see the issue with relocating the students to several schools for a year of construction. Ms. Hagenow noted that with the need for racial balance, some students may need to be redistricted to other schools anyway.

Ms. Walton noted that each time a school is renovated the students are relocated for a year.

Mr. Murphy again brought up the idea that if we close a school, we can use that "closed" school as swing space to relocate an entire school during construction in future projects.

Mr. Doucette wondered what are alternatives for these ideas for swing space? Ms. Walton noted using Nathan Hale and purchasing swing space are two ideas.

The discussion moved on to the historical significance of Washington and Ms. Hagenow wondered, if we are not able to build a new building there, then what?

Mr. Gates noted that the committee had decided that was a battle worth fighting, to have an educationally sound building, preserve as much green space as possible, and have better traffic patterns. He wishes that the Historical Society would consider the fact that the park area is as much a part of the history of that neighborhood as the building is.

Mr. Till reviewed his other slides, which are available on the website.

Mr. Shanley noted that one of the new magnets, he believed it was Mary Hooker, had classroom sizes of about 840 square feet.

Mr. Stewart looked at the slides and stated he felt 450-480 students was the "sweet spot". Mr. Till noted that was one sweet spot, and 520-530 was another range.

Mr. Shanley noted 500-550 was a good range, depending upon the Board of Education altering the educational program a bit. Mr. Hoagland noted that they can also build in an extra classroom for added flexibility.

Mr. Murphy recalled that at a former meeting it was noted that until you reach about 600 students you really don't need more core space, for music, art, offices, etc. Mr. Hoagland and Mr. LaPosta agreed, noting that the cafeteria would need to be tweaked a bit, but the other spaces would be fine at the 500-550 level. Mr. LaPosta noted that at the 350-380

level, which is where the current projects put the project, there is a really low level of reimbursement and the educational plans need to be modified quite a bit.

Mr. Shanley noted that there is approximately a \$5 million difference in reimbursement between the plans. Mr. Till stated that in his charts he put the classrooms at about 830 square feet. Ms. Walton recalled the rooms at Highland Park were smaller, approximately 720 square feet, due to the age of the building.

Mr. Shanley stated the SMARTR Committee needs to ask the Board of Education to consider this information and SMARTR's recommendation to optimize reimbursement and consider how the district can be shuffled to accommodate two schools that size. Mr. Shanley reminded the group that the state will require a plan to back up these numbers.

Ms. Pelletier noted while we need to have the Board of Education redistricting plan, we do not necessarily need to discuss which school might close. Mr. Stewart felt that maybe more than one school could be closed, and wondered if we should recommend a future target of six or seven elementary schools? Mr. Tweedie noted that would be ideal, but that is not a firm recommendation.

Ms. Walton felt it would be good to recommend closing at least one elementary school for efficiency reasons and possibly consider more in the future. She would like Mr. Murphy and Mr. Till present this information to the Board of Education.

Ms. Hagenow wondered how we are spending money on the schematics if we haven't received the okay from the Historical Society or the state level? Mr. Stewart noted the voters will decide. Mr. Shanley recalls that when Bennet was in question, the Historical Society got the Attorney General involved. Mr. Gates felt we need to get the voters out there.

Mr. Tweedie wondered if the state would step in and stop us? Mr. Shanley didn't know the answer to that.

Ms. Pelletier notes we have a good argument for the state. Bennet was different, there were different designations. Cheney is a landmark district, not just one building. It is streets, intersections, etc. Washington has been added on to numerous times, which demeans its status as a historic building. She notes the Historical Society does not care if it's a hazard to the students, they still will try to preserve it.

Mr. Stewart wonders if we can say if we cannot build new then the other possibility is closing that building?

Ms. Pelletier states those members are conflicted. They understand the decision, but feel it was rushed and that they did not have a chance to have a say in it.

Ms. Walton pointed out that only one Board of Education member was not in support of a new building for Washington, while she has heard four Board of Director members were

opposed to a new building. She wondered if there might be any benefit to the SMARTR Committee meeting with the Historical Society? Ms. Pelletier felt they will not agree to any plan. Ms. Pelletier noted that even the Washington PTA has issues with the current building orientation, noting the school faces a one way street, with the entrance on the side. Ms. Pelletier wondered if we might design the new building to resemble the old one?

Mr. Shanley noted that the Historical Society had requested a meeting with the State Preservation Trust and the town. Ms. Pelletier notes that they interpret the state statutes differently.

Ms. Walton stated we have to get the Board of Education on board with doing Cheney first, and ask them to endorse Cheney first, with a plan for Washington to follow. Mr. Shanley noted that we could possibly include the design piece and building documents on the November ballot for Washington, so there will be confidence that the full intent of the Committee is to move on with that project, and not have to start over. Ms. Walton noted it could be presented in phases. Mr. Shanley noted it would be approximately \$1million to do the full design and building documents and they could be authorized in the November referendum, but not actually spent until Bennet/Cheney passes. He notes this would push the project off 18 months to 2 years, with a 5% inflation rate per year. He notes that \$1million would not be reimbursable because the project would not yet be approved.

Ms. Pelletier notes that the Washington PTA wanted to know why was Highland done before Washington? Why are they considering Cheney before Washington? They do not understand.

Ms. Walton notes that now that the facts are clearer to her, she is in support of Cheney first, followed by Washington. She notes that the Board of Education will balk at any plan to close Washington and if the Historical Society blocks a new building, even then the Board would not want to close it. Mr. Gates wondered if we clearly state that part of the plan is to not close Washington?

Ms. Pelletier notes we have moved away from the neighborhood model. Ms. Walton feels we need to be sure Washington gets done. Mr. Shanley noted an overwhelming number of Board of Education members want a new Washington. Ms. Walton noted the plan passed 8/1 for a new building and 9/0 putting Washington first in the priority list. Ms. Hagenow added that the Board would like all 3 projects put up at once.

Mr. Shanley feels we cannot make a fall referendum with all 3. Ms. Pelletier notes that if it fails, we will have lost a lot of money. Ms. Hagenow feels that we need to explain to the Board of Education that putting up all 3 at once may not be the best idea.

Mr. Shanley feels we need to get someone (possibly Milone & MacBroom) in to say how to redistrict and be able to show the state. If we move ahead now we have no choice but to use the current figures, which is about 357 students, and the reimbursement rate is only about 50%.

Ms. Pelletier notes this is driven by enrollment numbers and existing square footage, which exceeds the allowable.

Resolution Requesting Consideration and Review of Student Enrollment Numbers and District Assignments for Elementary Schools

WHEREAS, for the last 14 months, the SMARTR Committee has researched, discussed, debated and sought consensus on a number of necessary objectives, sometimes conflicting, that our elementary school facilities must meet and the challenges presented by our new environment of school choice in the region; and

WHEREAS, among the objectives is to embrace a Grade 5/6 and K-4 elementary education model, respect the Board of Education's class size and classroom size policies, and to find the right size for new or like new schools which, at the same time, optimizes State reimbursement for construction; and, given the current condition of facilities and the very long planning timeframes necessary; to provide the opportunity to have a maximum feasible number of students access to new and contemporary school facilities and appropriate technology as soon as possible; and

WHEREAS, using the attached planning graphics as guides (Attachment I) and the hypothetical "right sized" school (Attachment II) as a broad example for review and adjustment, larger elementary schools under a 5/6 grade model will provide a significant surplus of current space (Attachment III) to allow for swing space and the further decommissioning of outdated and obsolete elementary school space saving operating cost over the long term; and

WHEREAS, only the Board of Education has the authority to properly redistrict to achieve these objectives as part of a submission to the State of Connecticut for school project approval.

BE IT RESOLVED, that the SMARTR Committee requests the Board of Education conduct the appropriate demographic study work and a subsequent districting plan to enable consideration of new/like new plans at Robertson and Washington that allows for maximum feasible amount of students access to modern space and technology as quickly as practical, reflecting the Board's class size requirements, education plan and optimizes State reimbursement.

Murphy/Walton 9/0 – Voted in favor.

Mr. Strong restated the basics of the plan, that to maximize State reimbursement -

- Ideal school has 500-550 students
- 5 Classrooms per Grade (K through 4), no pre-K, not reimbursed
- 65,000 square feet
- 20-22 students per Classroom
- State reimbursement rate - max achievable is 65.71%
- will allow 1 or 2 current schools to close or be used as swing space (+/- 98,000 square feet)

Mr. Shanley noted we need to ask the Board of Education to consider and create a redistricting plan considering the three schools under consideration.

Ms. Walton asked if we could discuss swing space options at the next meeting. She notes that we need to understand, if the Board of Education approves Cheney first, it is NOT for the purpose of using space in the other schools as swing space.

Mr. Murphy noted we need to ask the Board of Education what they feel is acceptable for swing space. Mr. Shanley noted the use of Nathan Hale as swing space was rejected.

Mr. Doucette read an email from the SMARTR Chair, Mr. Crockett, which Mr. Crockett asked to be made part of the minutes. The full email follows:

From: "Michael W.Crockett"
Date: May 21, 2013 3:07:06 PM EDT
Subject: Fwd: update part 2

Call me

For the purpose of an update

I am not able to attend tonight as I am in going to Boston to see my daughter and my cousin from Seattle. This is the 2nd meeting I missed and I am sorry I can not be here. This is a committee of 13 and I think every member is valuable but not so valuable that we don't meet if someone can't make it. Especially me. Ms Flick is in Florida.

As you are aware Mr. Neal Leon has resigned from the committee. He has been very vocal via emails and at the last Board of Education meeting he blamed the Chairman (me) for having meetings on Wednesday nights, nights he says he told me he could not make. For the record I was aware in December 2012 he could not make meeting but with our timelines and the holiday it was conscientious to meet on Wednesday. I was not aware that his Wednesday conflict is again a problem until he resigned. Remember the last two meetings were held on Thursday.

You can accuse me of many things which I might be guilty of as the Chairman, but I end every meeting asking people when they want to meet and try to make the meeting at the most advantageous dates. If we were to find a perfect time for all 13 members I think we would have had 3 meetings if that. This group has respectfully stayed off Monday and Tuesday as BOE meets on the 2 and 4 Monday. Tuesday the BOD meets on 1 and 3 as well as on off weeks they have policy meeting on Tuesday. I personally think everyone has made a great effort to make meeting and I feel everyone brings value to this table.

I am disappointed as to Mr. Leon remarks and I wanted you to hear my side. I have no ill feeling for Mr. Leon and I wish him well and thank him for his time on the committee.

You might be aware the BOE did not support SMARTR recommendation to only place Cheney on the ballot for referendum this fall with Washington/Robertson at a future date. It was their feelings' Washintgon was a priority and they wanted all three on. I met with Mr. Shanley, Mayor Diana, Cheri, Steve, Sarah, Chris Till and Chris Pattacinni in a small session to discuss this issue. I am not certain anything came out but you will be asked tonight to write up a more detailed explanation and Mr. Pattcinni wants it presented to the BOE by the public members of SMARTR.

Some concerns expressed was how did Cheney and the 5th grade academy become a priority over Washington? Where did the 5th grade academy come from.? Why are we adding a new school and new expense (administrative etc.) and one person actually said the BOE would then close Washington. If we look back to our first request to the BOE I believe we asked for a education model and it was the BOE that wanted a 5th grade Cheney Academy . This was formulated by reports thati addition to education values, we are at 95% capacity and by creating the new academy it would ease classroom space, racial balance, and potentially a Pre K. I again believe that this is what spawned our entire plans. I think were are all aware that the priority of the BOE was to fix Washington first, then Robertson but what happens if Cheney were to fail referendum and the other pass? Our plans are for a K-4 not K-5 school. What about the swing space issues? Also if we have learned anything from the 1999 All school plan and the 2004? new high school plan is that this community has not supported big ticket referendum. However small idividual referendum such as Bennet, Head Start, Freshman wing, and Highland Park have passed.

We have to prioritize the priority in order tomake this plan work. That is why the public, the BOD, and BOE are working together.

Good luck tonight. I beleive this group is doing a good job in spite of me and I think we are fairly represnting the long term educational needs of this community. Again thank you all for donating your time and fighting through this process.

Mike

The next meeting was previously set for June 5, 2013 at 6:30 pm in the Manchester Room at Town Hall.

Motion to adjourn. Gates/Tweedie 9/0

Meeting adjourned 8:17 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

J. Doucette, Secretary
SMARTR Committee