

**MANCHESTER BOARD OF EDUCATION
SMARTR COMMITTEE MEETING
WEDNESDAY, JULY 10, 2013
Manchester Room, Town Hall**

MINUTES

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

ALSO PRESENT: S. Shanley, C. Till, R. Kisiel

ABSENT: J. Doucette, C. Pattacini

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

Mr. Christopher Till noted that JCJ had played a part in the design of schools in Waterford, where they had dropped from five elementary schools to three. Mr. Craig Powers, Assistant Superintendent for Waterford, was present this evening to discuss their project. Mr. Powers was a principal for many years in Waterford before becoming Assistant Superintendent.

Mr. Powers reviewed some of the reasons Waterford felt the need to redistrict into three larger schools instead of five smaller ones:

- Lowering enrollment
- Cost savings including cost avoidance; reducing teaching staff from 72 to 58 through attrition; reduction from five administrators to three
- Building quality
- Enhanced educational benefits – more space for support services; ability to host full-day Kindergarten

Mr. Powers noted that their Board of Education held meetings at each location that would be affected to be able to hear and record public comment on the issues, which was reviewed and addressed.

Mr. Powers also noted that one school in their town is a magnet school – Friendship Magnet, which was opened in 2003, which hosts half New London and half Waterford.

In addition to the three new buildings for elementary schools, Waterford renovated their middle school like new and built a new high school. The cost of the projects was \$212 million over the past ten years.

Mr. Powers' full power point presentation is available on the website.

Mr. Murphy wondered about the cost base. Mr. Powers explained cost containment and how each year the budget does rise, however some of those costs are contained a bit.

Mr. Powers noted that originally a different site was planned for the third elementary school, however due to public input, that site was moved, which necessitated building \$750,000 worth of portables to house the students while the desired site was built upon.

Dr. Kisiel noted that there has been talk in the state about preschool recently and wondered if Waterford considered that in their plans. Mr. Powers stated they do not have a need for Pre-K in Waterford because of the Friendship Magnet, as that school has a preschool for ages 3-5. Historically, Waterford has been able to use all the slots, so they do not have a need for additional pre-K. The need in their town was for full day Kindergarten, which they were able to accomplish with the project.

Dr. Kisiel wondered if there were any historical building issues during the project. Mr. Powers noted that the town clerk had tried to get one of the buildings designated as a registered landmark, but that did not happen in the end.

Mr. Gates wondered if the entire 10 year, \$200 million project was drawn up prior to the first school starting. Mr. Powers noted the sell was for cost containment and full day Kindergarten. They renovated the middle school first and wanted to do the high school first, but there were issues that made that impossible. Then they moved on to redistricting the elementary schools and ended with the new high school. Mr. Gates stated it sounded like they had a vision, but it changed along the way. Mr. Powers agreed the plan evolved.

Mr. Gates wondered if they asked for funding every 2-3 years. Mr. Powers noted that four years prior to breaking ground they put \$2 million in an account to build short-term bonds.

Ms. Flick wondered if they had stop points in the plan, or drew up the full plan at once. Mr. Powers stated the full plan was drawn up, but new approvals were required along the way.

Mr. Crockett wondered what happened to the two schools that were no longer being used for elementary schools. Mr. Powers reviewed that one was put for sale and recently received a grant to raze it and sell the land; the other is being rented by the Regional Area Service Center (RASC) for a magnet school. That school was renovated by the magnet. The town receives approximately \$40-50,000 a year in rent. In the past another vacant school was made into town hall.

Discussion turned to redistricting. Ms. Walton wondered if the full redistricting plan was in place before the town voted. Mr. Powers stated that it was settled, however changed a bit regarding the timeline. He noted that some students were moved more than once over the course of the multi-year plan.

Ms. Pelletier asked about classroom sizes. Mr. Powers stated they are at about 19 per class. He reviewed that the five schools had approximately 225 kids each and the new schools have

about 400 kids each. The grades K-2 now have 17/18 kids per class and the grades 3-5 have 18-22 kids per class.

Ms. Pelletier wondered what the community response to increased school sizes were. Mr. Powers stated that they are like all new communities and everyone likes it now, although they weren't sure at the start. Dr. Kisiel noted that the entire town "got something" with everyone ending up in either a new or renovated school.

Ms. Flick wondered if racial balance was an issue in Waterford. Mr. Powers noted one area has a slight issue, but there were no compliance issues in the forefront.

Mr. Stewart wanted to know the square footage of the classrooms. Al Jacunski, from the architecture firm that did the work in Waterford, noted the rooms are about 750-800 square feet, however they share a 10 x 14 foot breakout room between classrooms so small groups, speech and language, and computers can be held there instead of hallways or other locations. Having these rooms join two classrooms fosters teamwork between the classroom teachers as well.

Dr. Kisiel asked about the teacher contract limits on classroom size in Waterford. Mr. Powers stated in grades K-2 25 is the maximum; however, they can go to 30 before needing to address the issue. Dr. Kisiel added he was surprised that 750 square feet classrooms would be acceptable in the case of classrooms going up to the 25 maximum.

Next, Christine O'Hare and James Hoagland from JCJ discussed their recent meeting with the historic society architect. They noted they had walked through the Washington building. On August 7th at MCC at 10:00 a.m. there is a Historic Society Meeting being held where both sides can present their case on the issue. It is a three hour meeting. Each side is given 20 minutes to present and the rest is for public comment. The Cheney Historic District had asked for an evaluation of whether the building can be demolished. Ms. Pelletier will represent Manchester at the meeting. This meeting will decide whether this issue is sent on to the Attorney General. At that point, the Attorney General will decide whether to pick up the issue. Ms. Walton wondered how quickly a decision will be made. Mr. Shanley meets next week with them to talk about a timeline.

Discussion revolved around what information will be sent for the meeting in advance, and what will be presented during the 20 minutes.

Ms. O'Hare revealed that the Cheney Brothers Historic District have stated they question whether this project has been thought out and why Washington is one of the first projects. They feel this has been rushed.

Ms. Walton expressed discomfort at being fully ready with good answers for a meeting such as this. Mr. Shanley stated that is why the Board of Directors decided they did not want to move forward with Washington for the November referendum.

There was discussion about the desire to reduce the number of elementary schools from 9 to 6. Some members of SMARTR had this idea many months ago, but until recently many others were not on board with that plan. Ms. Pelletier pointed out that Waterford's original plan was to simply renovate their five schools. Once they saw the costs involved with that and the costs of building three new schools, that is when they decided to reduce to three schools instead. Over the past 8 months the members of SMARTR are seeing things they didn't see at first.

There was discussion on what the plan will be if Washington cannot be built new. It was determined we would have to wait for the outcome from the August 7th meeting to talk about the next steps.

There was also talk about the demographer and how six schools would be redistricted. Ms. Walton feels the voters will not vote for the plan without knowing the full redistricting plan. Mr. Gates stated that is unreal as over the next ten years plans will evolve and we cannot wait for a full redistricting plan to get started.

Ms. Pelletier stated the voters need to know we are aiming for newer buildings, cost containment, and some redistricting. She agreed with Mr. Gates that a full redistricting plan was not necessary at this point.

Mr. Gates stated that Washington is a high priority or it will be the "next Nathan Hale" closed for disrepair. He has to believe we can use that site. Ms. Pelletier added that Washington has dealt with the redistricting of the Nathan Hale students, however the facility is inadequate at this point and she wonders how long they can keep that going. Ms. Walton agrees it is the right school to do, however she notes that some people will wonder if they vote for the plan, will their school be the one to close eventually?

Dr. Kisiel pointed out that the demographer's initial report will be ready in about six weeks and we will be able to see the impact of two larger schools on the district at that point.

Ms. Walton wants to see the details on savings in closing schools. Mr. Murphy stated he can get those numbers. Mr. Murphy also pointed out that the state pays 50% to renovate a closed school into a Central Office.

Ms. Walton thought it would make sense to put together a committee to get the message out to the public. Ms. Pelletier noted the first message is to get both Boards together on the same page. She feels projects pass when leaders get behind them unanimously.

It was decided that there should be a SMARTR representative at the August 7th meeting along with Ms. Pelletier. Ms. Flick will attend. The ladies will also meet with Ms. O'Hare over

the next week to review the materials that will be submitted in advance. There will also be a rehearsal meeting soon, possibly July 16th.

Discussion of a joint meeting of the boards found that with summer vacations it was impossible to get all members together for a joint meeting. It was discussed that there were several dates that $\frac{3}{4}$ of the members could be available.

Mr. Till had several invoices from JCJ that required approval.

Mr. Murphy moved to authorize Chris Till to manage the invoices up to \$100,000 as long as they are in accordance with the contract. Mr. Stewart seconded the motion.

10/0 – Voted in favor.

Motion to accept the May 22, 2013 minutes of the SMARTR Committee. Stewart/Pelletier

9/0/1 (Crockett abstained)

The next meeting was discussed. It was decided that updates will be emailed and another meeting will be held after the August 7th historic district meeting or when the demographer's report is ready.

Mr. Topping wondered if there was a concrete decision about Pre-K. Mr. Stewart felt we decided no to Pre-K because there is no reimbursement for it. Mr. Shanley noted that we will consider it in the future, but it is clear that is not the reason for these projects.

Motion to adjourn. Murphy/Pelletier 10/0

Meeting adjourned 8:53 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

J. Doucette, Secretary
SMARTR Committee