

**MANCHESTER BOARD OF EDUCATION
SMARTR COMMITTEE MEETING
WEDNESDAY, August 14, 2013
Axis 901, Main Street**

MINUTES

PRESENT: M. Crockett, J. Doucette, S. Gates, D. Hagenow, J. Topping, B. Murphy, C. Pattacini, C. Pelletier, A. Strong, M. Tweedie

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

ABSENT: M. Flick, L. Stewart

The meeting was called to order at 6:38 p.m.

Mr. Shanley explained that the Historical Preservation Commission meeting was held recently at Great Path and was well attended. Director Pelletier gave a strong presentation arguing that the design of the Cheney District included not just buildings, but small houses on postage stamp lots with parks and that it was that social feel that was the crux of the district. Because of this, keeping the green space/recreation space at Washington is a priority consistent with the Cheney vision for the neighborhood, even with creating a new school building. Dr. Kisiel also gave a presentation on the efficacy of new schools. He spoke about modern construction and sound insulation among other things.

The State Preservation Society (Mr. Farmer) gave a presentation and noted that in 1928 Washington was a "model" school.

The question asked of Director Pelletier after her presentation was – can the town build a new school elsewhere? The answer was yes. From that point on the meeting centered on parking issues with the opposition remarking that the parking area could be made smaller to preserve green space, and the teachers and staff of the school could park at the Cheney Mills and walk a few blocks to work. Mr. Shanley felt it was obvious that they will refer the matter on to the Attorney General who will then decide whether to pursue the issue or not. At this point they feel we have not made all prudent attempts to save the building and they feel this issue is all about the building, whereas the SMARTR Committee is looking at the whole picture of the neighborhood and what is best for the children.

It was noted that the Cheney Historic Society did seem more amenable to the possibility of gutting the Washington building and keeping the façade, which they were opposed to in the past. Mr. Crockett wondered, if we could come up with a design that keeps just the façade of the building, was the feeling that that plan could pass a referendum? Mr. Shanley got the impression that gutting it would be okay to the Cheney Historical Society, and they are the

ones that made the referral to the Historical Preservation Commission, so if they were okay with the plan, there would be no referral on the project.

Mr. Shanley turned the discussion to the upcoming November referendum. Previously it was discussed that monies for design plans for Washington and/or Robertson be added to the Cheney/Bennet referendum, along with other items, such as security. At this point, Mr. Shanley feels it may be prudent to remove reference to Washington from the referendum, as it is clear that the current plan will not be possible.

Mr. Doucette asked for clarity on what the \$1.3 million for design plans gets us. Mr. Shanley stated that is enough for complete bid documents for either building, "out the door". Mr. Shanley further reviewed that our town charter specifically says that we must name a project for a referendum, and calling it simply "elementary school design" is too vague. He notes we can either change the question to "design plans for Robertson" or eliminate the \$1.3 million entirely from the referendum. The reason for keeping it on is that it saves approximately a year in the project timing.

Mr. Gates is impressed with the Cheney/Bennet project and senses that the \$1.3 million for Washington/Robertson puts the referendum question at risk. He sees turmoil around the Washington issue. Mr. Gates wondered if we could take that part of the question out entirely, or make it a separate question, not tying it to the Bennet/Cheney project on the ballot. Mr. Gates also notes that the longer we put off dealing with the disrepair at Washington, the closer we get to a "Nathan Hale" situation and he wants the community to realize we are acting with a sense of urgency regarding Washington, because even if a project was in the works now, it takes years for completion.

Mr. Tweedie feels Washington puts the project at risk because of specific interest groups. Mr. Topping added that any organized opposition will cause the referendum to fail.

Mr. Shanley wondered if moving forward just with Robertson could help Washington. Dr. Kisiel felt it could help as it would provide some flex space for Washington. Ms. Hagenow pointed out that the Cheney/Bennet project also helps Washington, in that it moves out the 5th grade, giving back some much needed space.

Mr. Topping asked for clarity on the Robertson project, wondering if the Central Office part of the building would remain. It would. He pointed out that the North End also is part of a historical district and they might rally as well, if tearing down that part of the building were in the plan. It is not.

Mr. Strong brought the conversation back to Washington, pointing out that the 1912 building simply does not work for a school. Mr. Shanley pointed out that the Commission does not care what the building is used for, to them it doesn't matter if Washington remains a school; they simply want the building to remain. They feel we could build a new school elsewhere and leave that building alone, make it into offices, or something else. As long as the building remains, that is their goal.

Mr. Strong felt we should cut our losses and look into moving the Washington School to another site. Ms. Hagenow agreed.

Dr. Kisiel pointed out that the plan that was previously looked at to renovate the 1912 Washington building and put an addition could not accommodate the 500+ student plan that was ultimately agreed on, as that renovation plan was geared towards a 350-380 student school. Dr. Kisiel has asked the consultant to take a look at the possibility of Verplanck for a larger school. There is plenty of property there and adding on to that school would seem to work.

The discussion moved back to the referendum question and whether reference to Washington should be removed. Director Pelletier stated that the bonding for Washington is confusing to the voters and she agrees with removing that reference and leaving Robertson. Dr. Kisiel agreed, not wanting to jeopardize the Bennet/Cheney project. Ms. Pelletier pointed out there are also other items on the referendum that are important that would be in jeopardy, including security, and she does not want people to vote against the referendum simply because they have questions about the Washington project.

Mr. Murphy wondered, if we ask JCJ to look into plans to gut Washington and use the façade, and possibly to look at Verplanck to enlarge that school, who pays for this? Mr. Shanley pointed out there are funds available that are currently earmarked for the schematic plans at Washington that are not being used at this point, however it would then deplete that fund.

Mr. Murphy feels that we need to do whatever we can to move Bennet/Cheney forward and if that means leaving just Robertson on the referendum he is okay with that. He feels in the meantime, we can continue to look at alternatives for Washington and explore Verplanck as well.

Mr. Till noted that last year bond money was earmarked for SMARTR and wondered if that could happen again this year, rather than earmarking the money for a specific project. Mr. Shanley didn't feel that would work. Mr. Murphy pointed out that someone was recently quoted as saying SMARTR decided on the Washington project in two weeks with no thought, which is completely untrue, but he wouldn't want someone like that to torpedo the referendum because money was earmarked for SMARTR as opposed to a specific project.

Ms. Pelletier stated the historic society/commission members have a narrow scope; their goal is to prevent the building from being demolished. Previously they had no interest in a plan that saved just the shell of the 1912 building. Now they are saying they will consider that type of plan.

Mr. Shanley noted that both sides have their roles and the best of intentions, and eventually that will mean the best answer will be found.

Mr. Pattacini wondered if it might be time to discontinue the use of Washington as a school and turn it over to the town, though the community may say we can't ignore Washington.

Ms. Pelletier stated this is a process and it is necessary to look at all options. She feels people are confused over the issue.

Mr. Pattacini pointed out that in the meantime, there are some items that need to be taken care of at Washington while the project is on hold.

Mr. Strong felt we need to focus on long-term goals and Mr. Tweedie agreed. Mr. Gates felt we still need to look at the building. Mr. Shanley concurred, stating that SMARTR needs to demonstrate they are putting forth effort on the Washington project.

Mr. Strong felt showing both design plans, for the like-new and the new building at Washington, would be sufficient to show why the new build was chosen. Ms. Pelletier stated we need to talk about the money for the options, and discuss how much a plan to gut the building and keep the shell would be. At that point, if the cost shows it is not prudent to keep Washington as a school, what happens to the building would fall to the Board of Directors and not SMARTR to discuss.

Mr. Till pointed out that one test the architect needs to meet for a renovation scheme per the state is the state must see that it is cheaper than new to renovate, so a complete gut renovation would have to come in cheaper than a new build, which may not happen.

Mr. Pattacini pointed out that some people feel the decisions for Washington were rushed and we need to explore all options.

Mr. Shanley stated that we feel the Cheney's had in mind the community as a whole, while the historic commission/society people feel it is all about the buildings.

Ms. Hagenow pointed out that one of the main reasons Washington was chosen for a project is that there are many critical repair needs there and the people need to understand that. She feels there needs to be clarity on why decisions are made.

Ms. Pelletier pointed out that we cannot battle the Attorney General for years on an issue like this, it is simply not feasible.

Mr. Murphy moved for the SMARTR Committee to recommend to the Board of Directors to remove Washington from consideration for the fall referendum and approve funding for the Cheney/Bennet project and design for Robertson, and in the meantime the SMARTR Committee will continue their lengthy and thoughtful discussions, as we have done for many months, and look for alternatives for Washington School. Mr. Doucette seconded the motion.

10/0 – Voted in favor.

Mr. Shanley reviewed that Mr. Till will work with the architects to discuss the possibility of gutting Washington.

Mr. Pattacini asked about the number of students that plan might accommodate, and it was noted that the renovate plan was for approximately 350 students, not the 530 that the new build could accommodate. Dr. Kisiel felt that it might work for Robertson to be a larger building with some of the other elementary schools remaining smaller.

Mr. Strong asked for clarity on the referendum, wondering if the questions would be under one referendum or separate questions. It was clarified by Ms. Pelletier that dividing the questions would not work, and one question will be presented.

Mr. Pattacini wondered if we should look at a plan to renovate all of the remaining elementary schools as an option, which might show that this current plan is much less expensive. Mr. Shanley pointed out that there are some people that think the \$20 million critical repair list is all that is needed to solve the problems, which is not true.

The next meeting was tentatively set for September 11th, but an email will go out once Mr. Till is able to speak with the architects and firm up a date.

Motion to adjourn. Pattacini/Tweedie 10/0

Meeting adjourned 7:47 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

J. Doucette, Secretary
SMARTR Committee