

SCHOOL BUILDING COMMITTEE

Regular Meeting Minutes

Date: June 16, 2021

Via Public Online Video Conference (Zoom)

6:30 PM

**Minutes are not official until approved at the next regular meeting*

Member	Position	Present	Absent
Superintendent Stevens	Superintendent of Schools	x	
Erika Wiecenski	Board of Selectmen Representative	x	
Mike Makuch	Board of Finance Chairman		x
Erica Bushior	Board of Education Staff	arrived at 7:37	
Ann Grosjean	Board of Education Member	x	
Katherine Viveiros	Construction Industry Experience	x	
Gary Anderson	Member at large		x
Ralph Tulis	Member at large	x	
Peter Latincsics	Member at large	arrived at 6:36	
Justin Niderno	Member at large	x	
Briana Ross	Member at large	x	

CALL TO ORDER

Chairperson Viveiros called the meeting to order at 6:33 PM.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

First Selectwoman Erika Wiecenski MOVED to approve the minutes of May 19, 2021. Ann Grosjean SECONDED the motion.

DISCUSSION: None

VOTE: 6 Yes, 0 No

MOTION CARRIED

Member	Vote
Erika Wiecenski	y
Ann Grosjean	y
Katherine Viveiros	y
Ralph Tulis	y
Justin Niderno	y
Briana Ross	y

GUEST SPEAKER, MR. KOSTA DIAMANTIS

**OFFICE OF SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION GRANTS AND REVIEW DIRECTOR and DEPUTY
SECRETARY FOR THE OFFICE OF SCHOOL AND POLICY MANAGEMENT**

- a. Introduction**
- b. Committee Questions**

Chairperson Viveiros: After looking over the data we have provided and touring Hall Memorial School on May 17, 2021, what are your first thoughts?

Mr. Diamantis: Thank you for having me come visit your school. It is nice to be proactive when a town is thinking about renovating or building a school. The office wants to partner with towns, always, and they have a fiduciary responsibility to ensure that we utilize taxpayer dollars effectively and efficiently. Connecticut is a part of the National Council of School Facilities, which is an organization of about 32 states. It talks about school facility education specifications and the cost of maintaining buildings. Connecticut has a premier program that many states attempt to emulate. Part of our understanding from working with Superintendents is that there is always a critical mass at a school in order to have an effective learning environment to effectively teach children within the program. It has been consistently determined that the critical mass of 400 students is necessary for an educational program to be effective. The question becomes what do we do with schools with a lower population? At some point an investment into a school with only 200 students in it, for example, becomes difficult for us because it isn't an effective educational program. We posture that when we see schools with numbers below 400, we have to look at what we can do within that district, what the community can do within that district, and how we can assist them.

In your particular case, walking into your school, which was definitely dated and definitely needs some work, and looking at the size of the student body, the district is a prime candidate for consolidation. Both of your schools are aged. If you're talking about a Prek upward school you have to consider building codes like having young children at the ground level. Many districts have learned what we have been preaching for a long time is that air quality and circulation are tied together as well as the need for windows in classrooms. The walkout basement level of your school has classrooms without windows or in some cases, not enough. So, clearly it is a school that would be troublesome to renovate and for the district to renovate especially if we are talking about consolidation. I don't see that building being a consolidation candidate given the age group of the students we're talking about and my impression upon

leaving was that I think you would need a new school based on the needs and codes for the age group (Prek-8).

Chairperson Viveiros: If Willington continues to maintain the two school buildings, will the state reimbursement be impacted? Is there a maximum age of buildings or recommended age of buildings before deeming them not suitable for additional renovation reimbursement as a school?

Mr. Diamantis: No. It is based on the quality of the life left in the building, and the usefulness given what the intended future purpose is.

Peter Latincsics: The committee wants to look at all options. A number of projects your office is supervising are renovation expansions. Are we closed off to any particular option for reimbursement?

Mr. Diamantis: Nothing is off the table with respect to reimbursement if the town and the OSCGR feel it meets the use of building, educational, and code requirements. All of those factors come together. I have to sign off on the suitability and safety of the site. My team of architects and inspectors will make the ultimate decision whether there is still usefulness in a building. We try to renovate where we can. If the building is not useful, we're going to build new.

Mr. Diamantis: What is the plan for HMS?

Superintendent Stevens: The charge is to look at a Prek-8 building so we are looking to come together in one building.

Mr. Diamantis: HMS cannot house Pre K-1 due to many problems and code issues. That building is starting behind at that age group from a code issue.

Ann Grosjean: Have you also ruled out CES as a renovation?

Mr. Diamantis: Yes, based on the age, size of the footprint and what you are looking to accomplish.

Ralph Tulis: It is our understanding that a new school must be on a site of at least 20 acres based upon our population. How much is to be utilized for the building and the outdoor infrastructure (school, not septic or well for example) How much of 20 acres will we have to use for the building?

Mr. Diamantis: That depends on the design and it is based on the number of students.

Chairperson Viveiros: Our maximum reimbursement is around 65,000 square feet based on 400 students.

Ralph Tulis: Why are we chasing a 20 acre site?

Mr. Diamantis: There is a base number of acreage and then you add acreage based upon the number of students in a Prek-8 school. There are requirements for the school building as well as the fields.

Ralph Tulis: Does an urban or suburban school have the same site size requirement?

Mr. Diamantis: Yes, it applies to everybody, even in Hartford.

Ralph Tulis: Does anything prohibit a school building from sharing a site with an independent municipal building?

Mr. Diamantis: No, as long as you have a 20 year lease that ensures that students have primary use during normal school hours and school activity hours.

Ralph Tulis: Could we keep the original HMS building to use as an isolated municipal building, and then build the school around it? We could be creative with additions and renovations.

Mr. Diamantis: Maybe.

Ralph Tulis: Where do we stand with the grant money for the roof projects?

Mr. Diamantis: It is frozen because we are not funding roofs for buildings that may not be used as schools, meaning that they don't qualify as schools because they don't meet the educational specifications of the district as per the Superintendent or the BOE. If the buildings are kept as schools, then we will put roofs on them.

Chairperson Viveiros: Does the state have additional incentives to the district to build new vs renovating like tax benefits or energy rebates or special grants for future educational needs?

Mr. Diamantis: No, programs exist through energy providers though.

Ann Grosjean: When we have a final dollar amount, what percentage is reimbursed by the state?

Mr. Diamantis: If you build new, subtract ten points from Willington's reimbursement rate. What is your reimbursement rate?

Superintendent Stevens: The town's reimbursement rate is 55% for new builds and 65% for renovations.

Mr. Diamantis: Many things are not eligible for reimbursement when renovating. When you build new, most everything is reimbursable. The state decided the difference is ten points in the eligibility of a renovation project and a new project.

Peter Latincsics: Is there a potential for flexibility with HMS? Because there is a lot of space, could the original 1922 structure remain as office space to be renovated and then also add additional space that is more age appropriate?

Mr. Diamantis: If you want to do some renovations and an addition, it creates a space standard issue. If your space exceeds your allowable space based on your student population that additional space is not eligible for reimbursement. You will be renovating it at your own expense at 100%.

Peter Latincsics: Can we focus the reimbursement dollars on allowable square footage for renovation and expansion and then keep the wing of classrooms the same or modify them later at our own expense if the population increases?

Mr. Diamantis: Maybe, depending on the math. I don't know if it is reasonable or rational without seeing it. The hypothetical is unclear. Farmington High School has an old building from the 1920s so they are keeping it for BOE purposes and tying some of their alternative ed program to it. But they are building a new high school. The portion becoming BOE space is half of the reimbursement that would ordinarily be for a school by statute.

Peter Latinsics: Can there be a mixture of town and school use in that administrative type space?

Mr. Diamantis: No, there is no reimbursement for municipal purposes. For the BOE, yes at 50%.

First Selectwoman Erika Wiecenski: As Ralph Tulis said, if we keep the original structure for municipal purposes and build a new, separate, school structure, is there reimbursement for the demolition between the two buildings?

Mr. Diamantis: If you are demolishing something to replace it with school, it is reimbursable. It is not reimbursable if you are demolishing just to demolish it. We do not do municipal investment.

Chairperson Viveiros: If we kept the original structure at HMS, demolished wings and then replaced them with new build, would that be reimbursable?

Mr. Diamantis: Yes, but it has to be replaced with new construction within the new codes.

First Selectwoman Erika Wiecenski: Would the assumption be that the replacement would be connected to the old building? If we separate the two buildings, it would be the town's responsibility to demolish the portions we are not keeping. Portions added to a school structure would be reimbursed.

Chairperson Viveiros: What if they are connected? Does that include if the new construction is still touching the old part of the building?

Mr. Diamantis: If the new building is not touching, the town has to pay for demolition of the old parts. If the school and the town building are adjacent, the portion of the wall that belongs to the school is reimbursable. The side that is not part of the school is not reimbursable. This includes things like all sprinklers, HVAC, air circulation, and fire code requirements. This would then lead to school safety and security issues because there would not be connecting systems throughout the whole structure.

c. Questions from members of the public

Tanya Palloti: If we are turning HMS into a municipal building and then adding onto it, does the acreage requirement still come into play?

Mr. Diamantis: Yes, under all circumstances certain acreage is required for students.

Tanya Palloti: It sounds like we already don't have the needed space there, so it is already not a feasible thing to do.

Chairperson Viveiros: Yes. The acreage alone is already a conflict at HMS.

Herb Arico: HMS is close to 100 years old and well constructed but is it an appropriate building for the way things are in the world today? A new school offers the opportunity for up to date facilities such as labs, gyms, etc. Renovating HMS will not make it a modern school in the true sense of the word. Is it better to go with a new school vs renovating something older?

Mr. Diamantis: There are 100 year old buildings that lend themselves to renovation and updates for about 50 more years of use. Some buildings get to be 100 years old and then are at the end of their life. HMS is at that point as a school. Yes things have changed and some buildings are adaptable, but HMS is not easily adaptable for newer things like libraries, media centers, nor codes for the targeted age groups.

Herb Arico: The space is restricted at HMS as well as at CES. Do most schools today have provisions for athletic sports and outdoor activities?

Mr. Diamantis: Yes, and you need playscapes and security and safety elements like fences. You also need bathrooms in classrooms for PreK. There are many things that come into play.

Matt Clark: Why is 400 the minimum effective size?

Mr. Diamantis: The Superintendents' Association, the SCA, and others that have done research determined that the critical mass number for an effective educational program is 400.

Matt Clark: To get to 400 students we need all of the students together. Is it advisable to mix 5 year olds with teenagers?

Mr. Diamantis: There are districts with Prek-8, Prek-2 or 1 schools. It is whatever style districts can come up with and how and what they can afford to maintain including what taxpayers are willing to pay for. A Prek-8 school is a traditional style that some districts are going back to based on district consensus of what works for them and the costs associated.

Matt Clark: Regarding the roof project, money was already approved at town meeting so what happens when a town approves something and it doesn't get done? How do we move forward?

Mr. Diamantis: The legislative body said yes, put a roof on the buildings. But now OSCGR is no longer funding it, for now. So the town has to decide if they will finance the project themselves. If we pay for the roofs and then the buildings later become something other than a school, the town will be billed for the remainder of the loan. The OSCGR will not fund a new roof on a building when the town is looking to possibly build a new school.

John Blessington: We have had two town meetings to approve a lot of money for the roofs (most recently \$1.6 million). These buildings are ours so we have to care for them regardless of their purpose.

Sarah Baker: If there are expenses related to environmental hazards that are uncovered during a renovation or demolition, how are those handled? For example, what if remediation is needed?

Mr. Diamantis: If it is associated with the construction project, it is reimbursable. This includes demolition that will be replaced with the school. But temporary space is not reimbursable.

Donna Cook: We were able to respond so well to the COVID situation because we do have extra space. Will there be new space standard guidelines for such circumstances?

Mr. Diamantis: No, but it is important for districts to maintain heating and air conditioning systems to be appropriately ventilated, and to build and renovate schools with appropriate air circulation to ensure the safety of everyone. Space standards will not change as a result of this pandemic.

Donna Cook: Is there a class size requirement based on the critical mass of 400?

Mr. Diamantis: Yes. There are standards for that. Superintendents determine it. The square footage per child is based on the age of the students that are within the guidelines for architects and school districts to use. There is an online tool used to calculate space standards.

Donna Cook: HMS is currently a fallout/emergency shelter for the community. How does that factor into a new school building assuming that HMS and CES are no longer used?

Mr. Diamantis: Present day codes have to be followed. If the school is designated for a particular purpose or use in communities, and part of that is reimbursable, we will do our best to assist in that.

Donna Cook: Could we renovate HMS for grades 5-8 only?

Mr. Diamantis: No. The number of students is the problem because it becomes an excessive per pupil cost. Enrollment is a key factor to determine if we are going to build schools, if consolidation is important, or even if regionalization can occur.

Corey Brennan: How many acres is HMS?

Superintendent Stevens: 14.9 acres

Corey Brennan: So that's a flat no to putting any additions on because it is not 20 acres? I'm just trying to clarify, as Tanya said, that the idea is nixed because HMS doesn't meet the 20 acre requirement so how is that even feasible?

Mr. Diamantis: It is hard to see how you could meet the necessary requirements on less than 20 acres.

Superintendent Stevens: You also currently don't have a baseball field at HMS because you lack land.

Peter Latincsics: Ellington is delaying a school building project because the population fell below 400 and that impacted their reimbursements. Is that a real concern for us? What if we have 380 students post COVID?

Mr. Diamantis: I said around 400, so 380-390 is ok. But 200-250 is problematic.

The Committee thanked Mr. Diamantis for taking the time to speak with us this evening.

COMMUNICATIONS

None

COMMITTEE REPORT

- a. Communications Committee

OLD BUSINESS

- a. Approval of SBC Communication Plan

First Selectwoman Erika Wieceński MOVED to approve the Communication Plan. Ann Grosjean SECONDED the motion.

DISCUSSION:

Emails will be shared with Chairperson Viveiros and then with the committee as part of the communications part of the agenda. Questions will be responded to on the FAQ document. The town is looking for software that can leave automated messages or texts to get important information out to the townspeople. There are some concerns about folks without internet accessing information. For example, older townspeople may not be informed on the process due to a lack of internet. These voters are uninformed. Mailers however are costly and only minimal information can be included on a postcard or in a document to send.

The communication committee will put this issue on a future agenda to define what funding is needed and for what to increase communication to the public. Then the SBC committee will present it to the Board Of Finance. The subcommittee will report back at the next SBC meeting.

Ralph Tulis wants all emails shared under "communication" of the agenda to keep our finger on the pulse of the town folks. Chairperson Viveiros and First Selectwoman Erika Wieceński noted that members can't have email information prior to meetings because work must be done in public.

VOTE: 7 Yes, 1 No

MOTION CARRIED

Member	Vote
Erika Wieceński	y
Erica Bushior	y
Ann Grosjean	y
Katherine Viveiros	y
Ralph Tulis	y
Peter Latincsics	n
Justin Niderno	y
Briana Ross	y

b. Approval of SBC *Frequently Asked Questions* Document

The committee held discussion about the document including suggested edits. It was determined that the subcommittee can update and add more FAQs with the approval of the committee. The date of committee approval is also the most recent date of revision.

Peter Latincsics made a MOTION to table this approval until the next meeting on July 7, 2021. First Selectwoman Erika Wiecenski SECONDED the motion.

DISCUSSION:

Prior to 06/23/21, committee members will send feedback, concerns and suggestions to the Communication Committee Members, Ann Grosjean and Superintendent Stevens, for consideration.

VOTE: 7 Yes, 1 No

MOTION CARRIED

Member	Vote
Erika Wiecenski	y
Erica Bushior	y
Ann Grosjean	n
Katherine Viveiros	y
Ralph Tulis	y
Peter Latincsics	y
Justin Niderno	y
Briana Ross	y

NEW BUSINESS

a. Board comments, school building tours

Superintendent Stevens took committee members on tours of both buildings to better understand building use and school programs.

First Selectwoman Erika Wiecenski said that she is looking through different lenses as a parent, a BOE member and now an SBC member. She noted that there is unused space in HMS because they're not big enough to be used for classrooms

Ralph Tulis observed that at HMS there was a lack of foresight on how additions were planned and trying to recognize future needs. It was disappointing to see the hodgepodge of spaces around the original school, but it is representative of the SBCs over the years. There is a scheme with HMS he will work on to present to the committee because Mr. Diamantis said that it is possible to work with HMS. He does not think the acreage is needed

Ann Grosjean said that she can't envision any future at HMS. She couldn't see how we could take that space and make it a state of the art prek-8 school.

Briana Ross stated that after listening to Mr. Diamantis's comments about the school buildings and state requirements and having reviewed various plans Superintendent Stevens has provided over the years, it is becoming clearer what is best for the students of Willington. Briana shared concerns about safety and security if renovations were to be made while the students were present on campus. She also offered to detail examples of how a school with students in grades PreK-8 can work including the use of shared space.

Peter Latincsics thanked Superintendent Stevens and staff for the tour and the adaptation of the space inside. He disagreed with Ralph Tulis in regards to a lack of foresight of previous SBCs because there is an abundance of space.

- b. Suggestions for future agenda items
 - i. Request for Proposals: Owner's Project Manager
 - ii. Invite members of the Hall Foundation to a meeting

PRESENT TO SPEAK

Matt Clark stated that FAQs are typically ones that lots of people ask so the land acquisition one may not be appropriate for a FAQ document.

Tanya Pallotti responded saying that it may not be a FAQ, but people may not be aware that land can be donated or how it can be acquired.

The next meeting will be on July 7, 2021. Committee members will email Chairperson Viveiros if they are unable to attend to ensure that there is a quorum. The Selectman's Office will soon send information about whether meetings will be held in person or hybrid. .

ADJOURNMENT

First Selectwoman Erika Wiecewski MOVED to adjourn the meeting at 8:56 PM. Justin Niderno SECONDED the motion.

DISCUSSION: None

VOTE: 8 Yes, 0 No

MOTION CARRIED

Member	Vote
Erika Wiecewski	y
Erica Bushior	y
Ann Grosjean	y

Katherine Viveiros	y
Ralph Tulis	y
Peter Latincsics	y
Justin Niderno	y
Briana Ross	y

Respectfully Submitted,

Briana Ross

School Building Committee Member and Recording Secretary

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WILLINGTON, CT.

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TOWN CLERK