

SCHOOL BUILDING COMMITTEE

Date: January 18, 2023 6:30PM

Regular Meeting Minutes

In person TOB Common Room & Public Online Video Conference (Zoom): Recording

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

Member	Position	Present via Zoom	Present in person	Absent
Katherine Viveiros	Construction Industry Experience	X		
Phil Stevens	Superintendent of Schools		X	
Mike Makuch	Board of Selectmen Representative/Chairman		X	
VACANT	Board of Finance Chairman			
Ann Grosjean	Board of Education Member/Secretary	X		
Gary Anderson	Member at large	X		
Ralph Tulis	Member at large/Vice Chairman	X		
Peter Latincsics	Member at large		X	
Justin Niderno	Member at large		X	
Briana Ross	Member at large	X		
Christopher Tillona	Board of Education employee	X		
Erika Wiecenski	Member of Ex Office (non-voting)		X	

Also present: Scott Pellman, Owner's Project Manager from Colliers and residents

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chairperson Makuch called the meeting to order at 6:35 PM.

2. PRESENT TO SPEAK- Comments may be limited in time to allow all present to speak

John Blessington, 29 Mason Road, discussed how he and many other people that he has talked to would like the Hall School option chosen. He felt it was only the School Building Committee that wanted the new school option. He explained that he felt the only way a citizen could communicate with this committee was through their surveys. He did in fact complete a survey and asked committee members what they thought of his remarks and the committee members stated they never saw them. He expressed his frustration with submitting a survey that was never even looked at by the committee. He then read his remarks that he had included in his survey. He also stated that he felt the School Building Committee has not been following their charge or mission. He suggested dismissing the School Building Committee, void its findings and appoint a new committee, ensuring none of them had a conflict of interest.

James Marshall, 46 Fisher Hill Road, wanted to acknowledge and thank QA+M Architecture for

their efforts and work they put into the concept plans. He discussed how he felt the concept plans showed him how difficult some of the options would be. He also suggested that the final plans with any of these options will most likely look very different from the concept plans that are being shared now. These concept plans are at a very early stage. He also stated that if QA+M were on the call it would be helpful if they could discuss some of the community's concerns.

Chuck Kearns, Tolland Turnpike, discussed that he was uncomfortable with the two proposals that are being offered. He felt it was going to be a burden to the taxpayer of the town and that there were alternatives that have not been looked at. He suggested postponing the referendum since many community members are not up to date with the information regarding the options. He did agree with the suggestion from another community member to maybe have this committee dismissed. Then create a committee that includes; town residents that know how things work around the community and include a more variety of ideas.

Nick Tella, 49 Mirtl Rd, strongly agreed with Mr. Blessington's comments. He stated how he is in hopes that the town votes no to both options and instead agrees to the upgrades. He also understood the School Building Committee refused to allow anyone to look into the upgrades choice.

Carl Pearson inquired if the renovation of Hall School and phasing it in over several years could be an option. He felt this might help with the costs but would possibly be a timing issue.

3. CHAIRPERSON REPORT

Chairperson Makuch discussed public engagement and how important it is. He explained that there are various ways to communicate with the committee, not just through surveys. He discussed how this is a community decision that will affect Willington for many years ahead. He also discussed the inaccurate information that is circulating. He suggested that if information seemed upsetting to residents, to ask questions and find answers, using the correct process. He asked for people to not keep passing along second-hand information, especially with social media. He also addressed the emails that have been sent to the School Building Committee and that they have all been read and addressed. They have also been shared with all the committee members. He then discussed concerns and questions, especially after seeing the QA+M presentation. He reassured the community that once they reach the design process all the safety and concerns will be addressed.

P. Latincsics inquired where the surveys were being held and if he could have access to them.

It was stated this would be discussed later in the meeting.

4. OLD BUSINESS

a. Concept plans

QA+M Architecture were back to present updated information. They discussed that they received many emails and questions and that they would be addressing them in this updated presentation. They started with the project goals and discussed safety and security for each option. They discussed the details that are normally included in concept plans. As they proceed

with the project the plans become more detailed. They then discussed how they use a project selection criteria to assist with choosing which project best meets the selection criteria. They shared a chart that compared the selection criteria for the three options.

The committee asked questions and discussed with QA+M about; the parking, what each concept means/represents, terminology within the different options, the effect enrollment may have within the different options, site evaluation, updated roads or road construction needed, the schedule and budget changes using the new concept plans for all options, if there will need to be items added to the projects budget, construction contingencies and ed specs including flex space. The committee wanted to thank QA+M for their hard work on these plans and felt they have been so helpful.

5. APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES

a. SBC regular meeting minutes of 1-4-23

Motion by Ralph Tulis to APPROVE the minutes from the SBC regular meeting of January 4, 2023. Ann Grosjean SECONDED the motion.

Discussion:

All in favor, the motion carried unanimously.

b. SBC finance committee meeting minutes of 12-21-22

Motion by Peter Latincsics to APPROVE the minutes from the SBC finance committee meeting of December 21, 2022. Justin Niderno SECONDED the motion.

All in favor, the motion carried unanimously.

6. COMMUNICATIONS

Chairperson Makuch explained everything had been shared with the committee including all emails.

R. Tulis expressed his concern regarding the fact that he had not seen any of the comments that were being shared on the surveys.

It was stated that this would be discussed later in the meeting.

7. SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS

a. Communications

i. Survey results to date

Superintendent Stevens shared there were 112 digital responses so far. He had not collected the paper surveys around town. He explained that he thought the committee had decided to not read all the survey comments until the end. He stated the survey was open until January 30th.

Chairperson Makuch discussed needing to have these surveys read and prepared between January 30th and the SBC's meeting on February 1st.

Superintendent Stevens explained he would organize the findings in time for the February 1st meeting.

The committee discussed; if there was a way to access the comments of the surveys and if they should look before the survey concludes, keeping the feedback from the survey valid and the various ways the community can communicate with the committee.

ii. January 26 Public Forum

Superintendent Stevens discussed how he felt this should not be a presentation as he has presented the information many times. Instead he thought the forum should include a 2-slide presentation with; 1. the overall cost and 2. the tax increase. Then the committee needs to decide if this is a Q&A or just feedback.

The committee discussed the format of the forum such as; having the forum include a Q&A and the importance of it, having the questions answered after everyone in the community has had a chance to ask their questions, who should answer the questions, the flexibility of asking the questions, the structure of who records the questions, ensuring all the community members are heard, being respectful, ensuring clarification of factual information, opinions vs questions, having surveys available at the forum, restating the committee's charge, sending out another round of postcards (if the turnaround time is quick enough) and having Superintendent Stevens presentation available to actually show the details, facts and plans. There was a discussion of the numerous ways the presentation has been shared with the community. Also there was some concern about the communication regarding this forum. It was currently not listed online on any of the calendars or the websites for the school or committee. But it was shared using; an informational mailer, digital backpack and email.

iii. Communications Plan

Superintendent Stevens wanted to update the plan stating the chairperson of this committee will be sharing any received emails with the committee members.

Superintendent Stevens also wanted to share that they will be at the Transfer Station sharing the school project information. It will be this weekend; Saturday, January 21st from 1pm-3pm and Sunday, January 22nd from 12pm-2pm.

b. Land assessment

i. Phase II results (private site)

Chairperson Makuch discussed some questions that had been brought up regarding the evaluations of the properties. He clarified there was a spreadsheet of over 120 properties that S. Pellman still had. He stated that the subcommittee agreed that their process needed to be documented and it does exist. He explained that the phase II environmental survey had been going on for the private property for the new school build. He discussed the draft of the partial results. He explained where they are in the process now.

The committee inquired with S. Pellman about this process and if the committee was going about it correctly.

S. Pellman discussed the process and that they were doing all the right steps. He explained in detail these steps and results.

c. Finance

P. Latinsics discussed the meeting that the subcommittee had and their expenditure report.

K. Viveiros suggested having the expenditure report sent to the chairperson or somehow be able to share it electronically for those that are on the Zoom. She inquired for this report to be revisited at the next meeting when everyone would be able to review it.

It was stated it would be emailed to the committee ASAP as the finance subcommittee meeting had just occurred earlier in the day.

R. Rulis shared some finance questions that the community had been asking him.

The committee discussed how some of the questions are within the committee's charge but some are not. They discussed how they can share; the mill rate information in a more simple way, the ending mill rate and how it compares to other towns, the bonding costs and the change in the town budget. It was discussed that the new mailer included the charts with the estimated project costs. Within this estimated project costs there were suggestions in making the title of each column larger, rewording it and possibly changing the years listed. There was some frustration regarding the finance information, what was being shared at this time and when it would be ready to accurately share with the community.

8. OLD BUSINESS

b. Owner's Project Manager update- Colliers

S. Pellman discussed how he has been working with the architects, QA+M. He stated how he is waiting on an update on the phase II environmental survey. He also explained the next process that will need to take place and the form that goes with it. He discussed how he did update the timeline but is waiting to share until the referendum time/date is decided. He also shared with the committee that he would be away next week but would try to dial in if necessary. He felt the committee was well prepared for the forum and had plenty of information from Colliers that they could share.

The committee inquired with S. Pellman about; the auditorium and the equipment that would be included in the plan, the form that S. Pellman mentioned wondering if it was for both plans/ sites and if the work that S. Pellman is doing with the forms and grants are included in his fee.

9. NEW BUSINESS

a. Recommend date for the referendum

First Selectwoman Wiecenski explained the tentative schedule following the committee's recommendation on Wednesday, February 1, 2023. She then discussed the timeline from there. She stated that the items are very specific to the process.

The committee discussed; the “blackout” period and how the dates are coordinated, choosing a date remembering it is winter and possible bad weather, the many meetings that go along with the referendum and they all agreed to suggest March 28, 2023 for the referendum.

b. Potential Planning and Zoning Commission CGS 8-24 review

Chairperson Makuch discussed that he put this on the agenda more for timeline purposes. He then discussed what this means, for everyone to realize it’s coming but not right now.

R. Tulis discussed what they will need for this review and what happens from there. He also stated that no matter what project they choose it will need to take place.

S. Pellman explained why this will need to happen before the referendum.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski shared the approval process to move the project forward.

c. Finance subcommittee opening

P. Latinsics discussed how the subcommittee and himself felt that R. Tulis would be a great asset to the subcommittee, as he attends all the meetings already.

R. Tulis agreed to this.

The committee agreed to have R. Tulis become a member of the finance subcommittee.

10. FUTURE BUSINESS- ITEMS FOR FUTURE AGENDA

First Selectwoman Wiecenski discussed having a more focused agenda on February 1st; this way it will give the committee a chance to dive deeper into the items that are listed.

The committee suggested focusing on the survey and narrowing down the discussion to making a decision in which project they want to recommend.

The committee discussed that there was still an open seat for the Board of Finance and that it was an agenda item at the next Board of Finance meeting. There was also specifics on who could be the new chairperson of the Board of Finance for the SBC.

11. PRESENT TO SPEAK- Comments may be limited in time to allow all present to speak

Stef Summers thanked the committee. She also wanted to address some comments that were concerning to her regarding people presuming controversy and conspiracy over the land for the new school build. She felt it was unsubstantiated. She explained how she felt it was unfair that people are going on the attack with presumptions that are totally unsubstantiated. She has seen this happening throughout the offices in the town and she feels it’s troubling and not appropriate especially with how dedicated and hardworking the SBC committee has been working. She then

gave suggestions on how to set up the microphones and visuals for the forum on January 26th. She was pleased that the committee was working on fine tuning this. Lastly, she inquired about where the numbers for the tax impact discussed earlier could be found.

Nick Tella, 49 Mirtl Rd, explained how he had reached out to the state regarding the property. He stated that the two agencies he contacted told him that if what was going on within the SBC was happening in their agencies they would be throwing up red flags. That it seemed shady. Regarding what was shared earlier in the meeting he was wondering if numbers would be shared with the updated costs. He explained he felt it would be best to have community members ask questions and then have them answered immediately at the January 26th forum. He did agree at times folks can feel like they are being talked down to during meetings. He did feel that this specific committee actually did a great job being respectful. He also suggested for the committee to be open minded during the meetings since not everyone in the town feels comfortable talking in front of the public. He inquired what or how the SBC could change their charge. He also wanted to know if the list of properties that were an option could be listed online for the public to see. Lastly, he discussed mill rates and what should be included on the fliers.

Allen Ayers wanted to thank the committee and for answering questions over and over again. He explained how people can find their own mill rate online. He stated that he accepted they will have to pay money to help the kids and make a good future for them.

James Marshall, 46 Fisher Hill Road, had a few suggestions for the January 26th forum such as; having many microphones available, answering questions as they are asked, not just written down then revisited. He also thanked the committee for their hard work.

12. ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Justin Niderno to ADJOURN the meeting.

First Selectwoman Wiczenski SECONDED the motion.

All in favor, motion carried unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 9:43PM

Next special meeting: January 26, 2023

Next regular meeting: February 1, 2023

Nicole Fusco
School Building Committee Recording Secretary

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TOWN CLERK