

**TOWN OF WILLINGTON
SCHOOL BUILDING COMMITTEE**

Regular Meeting Minutes
Hybrid; TOB, Common Room & Virtual Meeting

April 5th, 2023
6:30 PM

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

Member	Position	Present in Person	Present via Zoom	Absent
Phil Stevens	Superintendent of Schools	X		
Mike Makuch	Board of Selectmen Representative (Chairman)	X		
James Marshall	Board of Finance Representative	X		
Christopher Tillona	Board of Education Staff		X	
Ann Grosjean	Board of Education Member		X	
Katherine Viveiros	Construction Industry Experience		X	
Peter Latinsics	Member at large	X		
Justin Niderno	Member at large		X	
Briana Ross	Member at large	X		
Ralph Tulis	Member at large (Vice Chairman)	X		
Erika Wiczenski	Member ExOfficio (non-voting)	X		

CALL TO ORDER

Chairperson Makuch called the meeting to order at 6:36 PM.

PRESENT TO SPEAK

Nick Tella, 49 Mirtl Road: Mr. Tella voiced his displeasure with the SBC and an inability to get a grant for necessary repairs.

Matthew Clark, 42 Burt Latham Road: Mr. Clark asked that the SBC communicate better with the town. He asked that the SBC have an open discussion on why the proposal for new schools failed.

Pete Tanka, 125 Mason Road: Mr. Tonacka suggested the committee find out why the town voted the way they did. He noted that he believed the SBC should dissolve. He said due to the result of the vote, it should be considered to not pursue building new schools and find a new solution.

Laurie Semprebon, thanked the SBC for all of their hard work. She said she believed it was shortsighted of people who want to dissolve the SBC. She said that the town should move forward with repairing the schools.

John Blessington, 1029 Mason Road: Mr. Blessing said that he believed the SBC would be disbanded and a new one put together with the town more involved. He said that he believed there should be a public hearing on referendum issues so residents have a better chance to voice their opinions.

Lisa Eaton, 38 Timber Lane: Ms. Eaton said she strongly supported the SBC and wants them to continue to work and assess their potential options. She also noted she thought a school consolidation project should be considered. She also said that efforts should be considered to get younger voters involved.

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Arthur Christenson, 14 Birch Meadow Lane: Mr. Christenson criticized the SBC for often responding to questions by saying "that's not my charge." He spoke of the rejection of the SBC's plan for a new school and said that the SBC should be disbanded and that a School Repair Committee should be formed. Mr. Christenson said that this should not have anything to do with politics, but it should be about the kids.

Christina Milos: Ms. Milos thanked the members of the SBC for their work over the last couple weeks. She stated she was disappointed that the roof project was not on the meeting's agenda. She said that the grant request for the roof repairs should be re-submitted.

Samantha Sperry, 73 Luchon Road: Ms. Sperry said she agreed that the SBC has filled its charge. She said that an option that should be considered is having a Town Building Committee because there are a lot of buildings around town that need help.

Jen Goodale: Ms. Goodale thanked the SBC for their work over the last two years to find the best plan for the town and the students. She said that there needs to be a plan for the long term repairs of the schools because repairs need to be made.

Nick Tella, 49 Mirtl Road: Mr. Tella said that going forward a huge asset that needs to be utilized for the schools is the janitors, because they have the best knowledge of the buildings.

Samantha Sperry, 73 Luchon Road: Ms. Sperry added that if there is a new committee that assets we are already paying for should be used like from custodians and building officials. She said that they should talk to the people out in the field.

CHAIRPERSON REPORT

Chairman Makuch stated that the referendum results send a clear message. Makuch said that this is how the system is supposed to work, the SBC makes a recommendation and then residents choose to agree with that or not. He acknowledged requests for the SBC to disband and a motion to disband the SBC at a selectmen's meeting earlier in the week had failed. Makuch said the idea of disbanding the SBC is preposterous and punitive. He noted that at least in the short term, there is work to wrap up including setting up projects that may be needed in the future and analyzing the referendum vote. Makuch said that the accusation that they did not look into recommendations into repairing HMS is not true. He also noted that no one on the committee is blaming the voters and that he respects what the voters said. Makuch said that they could not jump into a roof project without some sort of direction from the Superintendent or Board of Ed. Makuch said that Committee members feel that they are going in a direction that they can't support, that they will reconsider and work toward the goal on the charge. Makuch said it is not his job to support his personal feelings on the Committee, but it is his job to listen and learn to try to make a good choice and recommendation. Makuch also said he did not support the land choice that was made because the situation regarding the ownership of the land was complicated. However he said after studying the situation it was the best choice for the town. Makuch noted that the people on the committee care about the town and the job they are doing. He said name calling and personal accusations does not help and discourages people from wanting to help. Makuch ended by saying he would like to move forward and work towards accomplishing things.

APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES

A. SBC regular meeting minutes of 3-15-23

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The meeting minutes are to be posted and will be approved at the next meeting when members have had time to review them.

COMMUNICATIONS

Chairman Makuch stated that he will be updating the Board members with emails that have been received.

SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS

Land Assessment Subcommittee: There is no new report.

Finance Subcommittee: P. Latinsics stated that the Finance Subcommittee met on Friday and that a lot of the focus had been depending on a positive referendum and the steps that would follow. This rejected referendum had the subcommittee reviewing where they were. Latinsics said that there are no financial commitments to the project that would have moved forward in a positive referendum. And all RFTs for project manager and the architect and the legal costs have been canceled or terminated due to the vote. Latinsics said that out of the \$200,000 the subcommittee received for professional costs such as consultants, studies and approvals there is \$52,047 left over with possibly another \$5,000 in costs that are not reflected. Latinsics said the conclusion the subcommittee made is that the leftover funds would be returned to the town.

Makuch commented that there are some invoices that may be incoming that the unencumbered balance may be used for.

Communications Subcommittee: There is no new report.

OLD BUSINESS

a. Property Appraisals

Makuch stated that when he got to the meeting he sent out property appraisal reports. Makuch said that the firm that did the original appraisal last August came in at \$270,000 came in at \$270,000 again this time and that the other firm that was hired had their appraisal come in at \$260,000. He noted that the reports were incredibly detailed. Makuch said the reason that there were two appraisals was due to requirements for grant funding.

NEW BUSINESS

a. Referendum Voter Feedback Survey

Makuch stated that it was important to understand what town residents are saying and what they want. He said there is a need to keep improving communication with the public. Makuch suggested sending a survey to those who voted and that it could be returned anonymously with comments on how they voted and why.

R. Tulis said that the reason the referendum was rejected was clear to him, with the cost being the key factor.

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M. Makuch stated that they were good points, but they should get feedback from as many people as possible, not just those in the room.

R. Tulis said he did not believe people would take the time to fill out a survey, but he hopes that he is proven wrong.

J. Marshall agreed that he is not sure how effective town mailers would be to get feedback, however it was really important to get feedback due to the disconnect with those who showed up at meetings and those who filled out the original survey. He said he wanted to understand what they missed and why the vote happened the way it did.

E. Wiececki stated she would be concerned if members did not want to hear voter feedback. She expressed concerns that a couple voters who she talked to were concerned about a proposal to build a high school, which was not what was put forward. She said she is concerned and would like to know where the misinformation is coming from. She stated that they need to understand the why so they can move forward.

A. Grosjean stated she thinks it is important to communicate in every way possible to town residents. She suggested adding a space on a survey where residents can suggest ideas.

R. Tulis voiced concern that if feedback was solicited in the form of a postcard with checkboxes then it would mean that the committee is dictating their responses. He is also concerned about not getting a lot of feedback from residents.

P. Latinsics said he was disappointed in the results and that the amount of energy expended did not equal the outcome. He said that he agrees that the committee had completed the charge and should be disbanded, however he also agrees that they need to understand what had happened. He stated that they should continue looking into the roof project, since the new school proposal was turned down.

P. Latinsics made a motion to dissolve the committee.

Makuch said that motion was out of order because they were talking about a survey at this time. He also noted that they do not have the power to dissolve the committee.

P. Latinsics clarified that he wanted to make a motion for the committee to make a recommendation to the Board of Selectmen to dissolve pending the completion of their tasks and made the motion.

R. Tulis seconded the motion.

Makuch said that the motion was out of order because they were discussing a survey at this time and that it can be brought up at a later time in the meeting, and encouraged them to bring it up again.

A. Grosjean made a motion to send a survey to voters for feedback.

Makuch seconded the motion.

K. Viveiros questioned what the cost of the mailer would be.

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M. Makuch responded by saying that if the motion prevails, then he would bring back a proposal at the next meeting.

J. Marshall suggested modifying the motion to pursue the creation of a survey.

J. Niderno voiced concern about the survey costing money, saying he is concerned the SBC is not supposed to be spending more money.

Makuch responded by saying that they do not have to stop acting because the referendum didn't pass and that funding could be used for the survey and that it is still reasonable within their charge.

B. Ross said that the information from a survey could be helpful to help understand the wants and needs of residents.

K. Viveiros said it was important to understand what they were going to do with the information from the survey once the feedback was received. She also suggested using an electronic survey to get feedback.

P. Lantisics stated that there was something fundamentally wrong with asking people why they voted the way that they did. However he said that if people came to them and wanted to express how they feel it would be more appropriate. He said surveying people to get feedback would be manipulating.

M. Makuch said that they were not trying to manipulate everything and that they were trying to learn what the public wants.

R. Tulis said that a survey going to only the people who voted is big brotherish and that the mailers should go to all the people in town.

B. Ross said that they should start with the people who voted because they have an opinion on the issue.

M. Makuch said if they did send a survey to everyone in town, they could add an option to be checked that says "I didn't vote" and ask those residents why.

B. Ross said it was important to learn and grow with feedback and discussed the goals of the survey.

J. Niderno said that they should not be surveying just the people who voted and that they should be looking for feedback on more than just the schools.

M. Makuch amended the motion to say conduct a survey for public feedback with the cost and questions to be reviewed at the next meeting.

J. Niderno suggested tabling the motion until the questions are decided on.

A. Grosjean agreed and withdrew her motion.

b. FY 2024 Funding

This was discussed during the Finance Subcommittee report.

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c. Discussion On How To Improve Public Communication at Meetings

i. Q&A

M. Makuch suggested changing the second present to speak in the meeting to a Q&A so there could be a back and forth.

E. Wiczenski says that a Q&A could get dicey and that there is a difference between a meeting in public and a public meeting.

M. Makuch stated different committees have different needs, and this is a committee that could use a lot of public feedback.

P. Stevens asked how to engage the voters that do not show up at the meetings or participate, but they do vote. He asked how to get more people involved in understanding the process.

E. Wiczenski says people pay attention when they want to and that the same question on how to get public feedback comes up in meetings every year.

P. Lantisics said that present to speak has its flaws, however Q&A would turn the meeting into a public hearing. He stated that if input from people who did come to the meetings there could have been a different income.

E. Wiczenski voiced concerns of the time a Q&A could take and that it would interfere with getting work down.

K. Viveiros said it was important to set clear parameters of how to execute a Q&A or present to speak.

ii. Present to Speak

M. Makuch said the present to speak does not allow back and forth, which has been complained about. He said attorneys say that they should not have a present to speak because it only allows one way of communication. The public has no legal right to participate in public meetings. However he does not agree, and that he believes there should be a present to speak. However, there may be something more effective. He said that the first present to speak could be for residents to make comments, and a Q&A could be added to the end of a meeting instead of a Present to speak.

M. Makuch said he is asking the members for ideas at the next meeting to see how communication can be improved.

R. Tulis suggested that preceding the meeting, there could be a Q&A or forum with a fixed time limit where the public could air grievances and there could be a back and fourth.

iii. E-mail or Other Submissions of Public Comment

K. Viveiros said she thought emails would be a good option and that people may be more comfortable sending emails, however she voiced concerns that one member may get bombarded with emails.

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d. Committee Status

P. Lantisics made a motion to discuss committee status to the agenda and recommended dissolving the committee.

R. Tulis seconded the motion.

K. Viveiros said that she felt adding it to the agenda tonight because there is no clear path on the direction of the committee.

J. Niderno said that before they motion to dissolve the committee that they should reach out to the Board of Selectmen to see where they stand.

P. Lantisics clarified saying he wants to finish the Committee's business and then recommend to the Board of Selectmen that the Board dissolve based on the resident's vote.

R. Tulis stated that if the item is added to the agenda then they could discuss it or table it until the next meeting which may be appropriate since the Board of Education hasn't met yet post referendum.

A. Grosjean said that she felt her work was not done and neither was the work of the committee. She said that exploring other options besides building a new school should be considered.

Member	Vote
Mike Makuch	N
James Marshall	N
Christopher Tillona	A
Ann Grosjean	N
Peter Latinsics	Y
Justin Niderno	A
Briana Ross	N
Katherine Viveiro	N
Ralph Tulis	Y

Vote: 2 YES 5 NO 2 ABSTAIN

Motion fails

FUTURE BUSINESS – ITEMS FOR FUTURE AGENDA

Future business items will include discussing a recommendation to dissolve the committee and the future of the committee, surveying the review, financials, discussion of having a joint meeting between the School Building Committee and Board of Education, discuss how to move forward with construction projects & facilities, discussion of timetables moving forward, potential projects, an update on the town facility projects,

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PRESENT TO SPEAK

Matt Pelletier, 227 River Road: Mr. Pelletier thanked the committee, however he said that the committee should be disbanded and noted that trust is clearly an issue and to fix that, they have to start new.

Pete Tanaka, 125 Mason Road: Mr. Tanacka said that there will be issues with the survey because not enough people would respond and suggested opening up town meetings to more discussion instead of less.

Nick Tella, 49 Mirtl Road: Mr. Tella said that residents want the SBC to be dissolved. He said the possibility of a second referendum should not be considered. He also criticized some members for their behavior during present to speak comments. He said that he agreed to a Q&A discussion with a time limit. He also stated he believed E. Wiczenski should not have been a part of the discussion of the new school since it involved her family's property.

Linda Spillane, 33 Clover Springs Drive: Ms. Spillane said she supported the committee and believed they should stay together since they are a team of experts. She said they need to find out what needs to be done to fix the schools and make them better.

Linda Hothan, 24 Pinecrest Road: Ms. Hothan said that it was not clear how the \$60 million projections were reached. She noted that there was a communication issue because it was not clear how the charge for the School Building Committee was formed. She had many suggestions on how to reach the public. She also noted that more public hearings could have been held. Ms. Hothan also noted that E. Wiczenski should have excused herself from meetings due to her family owning the property for the proposed school.

Zafier Hussein, 48 Mirtl Road: Mr. Hussein noted that it was the first night of passover, so some of the participation from the Jewish community would be lacking. He said that the SBC should stay intact because a new school is needed. He said that the Committee could use a lot of feedback from the town that they already have to make a recommendation on what the town wants. Mr. Hussein said that he voted no because his wife was called by the Board of Finance and was asked to vote yes, which he thought was wrong. He said that a small town solution was needed, not a \$60 million solution. He also said that a comprehensive plan on everything that was going on in the town was needed.

David Currant, 42 Willington Hill Road: Mr. Currant said that the committee should be disbanded because they did their job and now it is done. He said that the residents of the town did not get enough information.

Samantha Sperry, 73 Luchon Road: Ms. Sperry asked what the purpose of the survey is and questioned whether the committee would be satisfied with the answers they received. She said she believed there were already answers to the problems that were brought to them and that a hybrid public hearing could be held which could be more effective than a mailer.

Nick Tella, 49 Mirtl Road: Mr. Tella asked if the SBC would honor what voters said and will not have a second round of referendum.

Christina Milos: Ms. Milos said that the facts regarding a new school were unclear and that there were different interpretations of what the facts were. She mentioned that she thought explanatory text that was

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sent out was unclear and not widely distributed.

Kylie Vault, 321 Tolland Turnpike: Ms. Vault stated she appreciated the time the SBC put in. She said that those who voted no thought that it meant taxes would go up, she asked how is the town going to fix the schools without taxes going up and that repairs are going to need to be made, which will result in taxes going up. She also noted that she found no offense in how the property was found.

Stephanie Summers, Ms. Summers said she would like to give a big vote of confidence to the SBC and that it would be a crime to disband it. She voiced concern about going into a roof project and that it was very important going forward to have a plan on how the issues with the schools are fixed. Ms. Summers also noted that there is not as much state funding that goes to school repairs and renovations as there is for the project that was on the table. She also voiced support for the idea of sending survey postcards to the voters. Ms. Summers also said that she did make phone calls on her own time to talk to residents about a yes vote and that the exchange of ideas was productive, even for those who did not support the project.

Matthew Clark, 42 Burt Latham Road: Mr. Clark said that he believed that a mail survey would have the same results they had before and that there will be a low response. He said prior surveys did not accurately represent what the vote showed. He suggested doing a survey in three waves with letters from town officials. He also stated that he did not believe the plan failed due to lack of communications. Mr. Clark also said he would support adding a Q&A but not replacing a present to speak with a Q&A.

Marisa Pelletier, 227 River Road: Ms. Pelletier stated that she thought there were a lot of valid concerns that were not answered. She said that when people asked questions they were met with accusations of misinformation. She also accused some SBC members of being biased. She said that they should look past their personal goals and act on what the town is expressing. She said people will not want to speak up if they are immediately insulted when they ask questions. She also asked who is in charge of getting state grants and if they are applying for them.

Samantha Hills, 53 St. Moritz Circle: Ms. Hills thanked the SBC for their work and the time they put in for the project. She stated that she believed that the Committee had fulfilled the charge, and that there should be an analysis of what could be done better. She said that they should possibly reconvene in a new format. Ms. Hills also stated that it is important to know how they are going to use the data that survey or feedback would give. She also noted the importance of using proper clear language.

Mark Mascinda, 216 Luchon Road: Mr. Vincinda commended the committee for the hours they put in on the project. He stated he believed that the committee should not be disbanded and that there was a lot of talent on it. He said that their charge has been completed and that a new charge needs to come forward.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by P. Stevens to ADJOURN meeting.

Seconded by P. Lantisics.

All in favor, motion carried unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 10:08 PM.

TOWN OF WILLINGTON, CT
Received for record November 20 2023
At 1:27 PM Russell cutz

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