

SCHOOL BUILDING COMMITTEE

Regular Meeting Minutes

March 17, 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 Wiczenski	Board of Selectmen Representative	X	
Mike Makuch	Board of Finance Chairman	X left at 7:00pm	
Niko Semerzakis	Board of Education Staff		X
Ann Grosjean	Board of Education Member	X Arrived at 7:08	
Katherine Viveiros	Construction Industry Experience	X	
Gary Anderson	Member at large	X	
Nancy Bailey	Member at large		X
Peter Latincsics	Member at large	X Arrived at 6:41	
Justin Niderno	Member at large	X Arrived at 6:37	
Briana Ross	Member at large	X	

CALL TO ORDER

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

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

First Selectwoman Wiczenski MOVED to approve the minutes of February 22, 2021. Mike Makuch SECONDED the motion.

DISCUSSION:None

VOTE: 6 Yes, 0 No

MOTION CARRIED

Member	Vote
Erika Wieceński	Y
Mike Makuch	Y
Niko Semerzakis	Not present
Ann Grosjean	Not present
Katherine Viveiros	Y
Gary Anderson	Y
Nancy Bailey	Not present
Peter Latinsics	Not present
Justin Niderno	Y
Briana Ross	Y

PRESENTATION BY COLLIERS INTERNATIONAL, PROCESS OVERVIEW

Scott Pellman and Marc Sklenka of Colliers International shared their thoughts and recommendations. Mr. Pellman has worked with Superintendent Stevens on the school roof project. He has visited both schools and is currently doing the roof project. He has reviewed previous studies done. He stated that something needs to be done. The buildings are old and not suited for 21st century learning.

CES is right the size for the population at 28,000 sq. ft. The allowable space according to the state is just over 31,000 square feet. Based on the population, HMS should be 28,000 sq. ft. but it is 63,000 sq. ft. The state will consider this oversized.

The state will want to know the student population and the size of the school buildings now. They will be looking for efficiency and they are merging schools or consolidation. The state won't pay for replacement or repair. They will fund renovating as new if the buildings are of a certain age (CES and HMS are) and it must be entirely renovated, including things like electrical, paint and plumbing, to like new conditions so it will last twenty years or more. When doing a renovation, a swing space is needed so students can still attend school while the project is going on. This is challenging and adds time to the project.

The state won't fund a renovation as new of HMS because it is too large based upon the student population. They may ask that part of the building be taken down or to consolidate the two schools there. However, factors must be considered. For example the PreK-1 students cannot traverse stairs and they need to be at a level of exit discharge, so all common areas must be as well.

It would be hard to consolidate at either site because there is not a lot of additional space. Building an addition on CES is not an option. At HMS there is also not enough field space.

A key aspect in the space standard is the student population.

Step one is to get a demographer for a population study to look eight years into the future to predict the highest projected enrollment for the state calculations regarding reimbursement.

The other option is to build a new facility. Based upon the current population, the space standard is 58,000 sq. ft. for a PreK-8 school. The state recommends 15 acres plus 1 for every 100 students for a K-8 school. Therefore 19-20 usable acres are needed for a PreK-8 school in Willington.

When considering consolidation, what happens to the existing buildings? Colliers can bring in commercial people to help identify uses such as commercial or housing.

It is key to collect data and discuss it with the state to determine the most beneficial options and what the state will support. OSCGR may tour the buildings in person to better understand the challenges.

Grant applications are due annually by June 30th.

The state will reimburse for the purchase of land up to 20 acres based upon Willington's population.

In phase 1, an environmental study of an existing or new site must be done to test for potential contaminants. A phase 2 environmental study includes soil testing and rock geotechnical exploration. It is necessary because the state is looking for this information. OSCGR will reimburse 65% if building new and 55% if renovating to new. Bringing Mr. Diamantis, Director of OSCGR, into the conversation early is essential. He wants to be involved.

Recently Colliers worked with Mr. Diamantis on the Mansfield elementary school project. They walked the schools and discussed all of the options. Mr. Diamantis said putting money into the present buildings was a poor investment. He spoke with the townspeople who wanted to renovate the schools and said he would not fund them. Mr. Diamantis may ask to take some building area off or to modify the grade configuration before approving a renovation.

An estimated "hypothetical" timeline was presented for building a new school which would entail a multiyear process. A renovation would require a similar time frame for design, but it may take longer for construction while the building is also in use.

Superintendent Stevens wanted to know how purchasing land falls into the process. Mr. Pellman answered that the land purchase is tied to the overall referendum for the project budget. Colliers could assist in finding the land. If there is land with 20 acres that work from a design standpoint, a matrix of options and parcels can be created considering things like topography and available utilities like power, sewer and so on. Then begin the phase one environmental study. Land purchase is tied to a successful referendum for land purchase and the build. It's important to build a relationship with Mr. Diamantis and Ms. Dixon to help get the project on the priority list. Once a project is on the priority list (in November of the year application is filed) it gets passed onto the legislature and the Governor's office and it is voted upon as a bill in June or July of the following year. In this case funding approval could happen in July of 2023.

Gary Anderson asked Colliers what they recommend the committee ask OSCGR. Colliers suggested having background data ready. It is good to ask what is changing with the process such as security and things affected by COVID. Ask if the process is changing at all. The trend is to support building new.

Peter Latincsics asked about the impact of buildings being abandoned and if there are schools the committee can talk with about their recent building experiences. Colliers can point out several districts that have recently built new and renovated. Buildings that will be vacated need to be addressed. Constituents of the town want to know what will happen financially. That information is not factored into the project cost. Towns can do a town asset study to determine if it has a need for the building. If not, it could become taxable property. Colliers offers an asset valuation service to decide if it can be rezoned as a residential property.

Superintendent Stevens asked if there were stipulations with that. HMS is a historical piece of the town so it cannot be torn down. Colliers said that you can stipulate certain things that may be important to Willington in

the RFP. Developers may determine that an original building must be maintained and additions can be torn down. It is important to listen to citizens' concerns about building a new school and what to do with old buildings.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski asked when a consultant or owner's representative should be hired. Colliers suggested doing so as soon as there is something to explore. A consultant is needed early to steer and guide the committee, put data in a format to make an informed decision and talk to the town about what is bonded. There are two ways to approach these studies. Get a firm like Colliers to focus on the process and look at data, or to hire an architect. Architects provide a design and floor plan, but that is needed later in the process after the needs and price points are determined. At this point in the process, it is more about data than design. This committee will be in need of a project manager for help when ready to collect and use data, and to offer direction.

Colliers offered to help the committee as needed.

PRESENT TO SPEAK

None

COMMUNICATIONS

Niko Semerzakis has resigned from the committee. The position will be filled by a Board of Education Staff member. Superintendent Stevens will ask the staff for volunteers. He will present the name of the volunteer to be voted on at the Board of Selectmen's 04/05/21 meeting.

OLD BUSINESS

a. Discussion of documents shared through Google Drive

Most members were able to access and review the documents shared on Google Drive.

b. Identify documents to share on School Building Committee website

Chairperson Viveiros suggested that the committee share information relevant to what the committee is doing now and that all documents are available to the public. She suggested the prior SBC folder may be confusing to the public and the information is more beneficial to committee members.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski suggested eliminating the Ed Specs, the information from the 1990 committee, and the Mansfield examples. There was discussion of creating a historical folder for things that are used for background knowledge like the 1990 SBC documents and the Ed Specs. Determining what qualifies as historical may be difficult. Other towns exclusively share current documents. In the interest of transparency, it was determined that an Archive Folder will be created to file documents that have been gathered as background knowledge.

NEW BUSINESS

a. Questions identified for the Office of School Construction, Grants and Review

The goal is to create a list of questions to ask the Director of OSCGR(The Office of School Construction Grants & Review), Mr. Konstantinos (Kosta) Diamantis, and grant staff member, Ms. Michelle Dixon.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski and Superintendent Stevens have met with Mr. Diamantis and Ms. Dixon within the last few years to discuss other projects. They would like them to come walk the buildings to better understand the conditions.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski asked if the committee should move forward with a demographics study.

Gary Anderson asked for the date of the most recent demographic information. Superintendent Stevens responded that it is from October 2019. He will email Mr. Diamantis and ask if that demographic information is sufficient because it costs thousands of dollars to pay a demographer.

Peter Latincsics asked if the demographic data needs to include more than enrollment? He asked if economic and town growth information is also needed and shouldn't the committee look at that before meeting with state officials? Gary Anderson replied that yes, the committee will want to look at all of those things. But the demographic data is used to set up a preliminary conversation with the state to see what they think should be done.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski asked if Mr. Diamantis would support the renovation of the two schools although there is already a penalization based upon the excessive size of HMS.

Ann Grosjean thought it would be good to ask about the possibility of adding a second story to CES.

Chairperson Viveiros asked if the OSCGR supports the renovation of both schools as well as the building of a new school, what are the guidelines and which option offers the highest reimbursement?

First Selectwoman Wiecenski said that maybe they would waive the percentage of penalty if the schools were consolidated.

Superintendent Stevens said that they may be likely to support the building of a new school because the roof replacement project alone is a \$1-1.5 million project.

Chairperson Viveiros asked if there is an incentive for districts to consolidate like changing the percentage of reimbursement.

Gary Anderson reminded the group to ask about changes in legislation because of COVID and security measures.

Chairperson Viveiros suggested putting questions into a word document so that people can add to it. Superintendent Stevens sent one to her to modify and share.

Justin Niderno asked what burden is brought to the town if nothing is done. First Selectwoman Wiecenski reiterated that the state doesn't like to replace or repair and that is what is presently being done for the schools. If a referendum fails, it will be important for the townspeople to understand that certain, necessary projects may be denied.

Ann Grosjean asked if Mr. Diamantis could be asked for a hypothetical timeline.

Peter Latincsics suggested that the committee ask if there is any significance knowing that HMS is in a historical district.

First Selectwoman Wiczenski said that she was struck by the "data before design" comment made by Colliers. There is a need for expertise later to look at the data.

Chairperson Viveiros said that she thinks it is best to get someone to guide the committee sooner rather than later and that the group should ask OSCGR about the process for what they go through to review the projects. Superintendent Stevens said that the 2016 School Construction Guidelines might show that. He is not sure if the buildings are prioritized by need or first come, first served. Chairperson Viveiros asked if Scott from Colliers could maybe help. Superintendent Stevens will find out what they can share.

b. 2021-2022 BOE Capital Improvement Plan Requests

The Board of Education submitted their needs to the Board of Finance. They are not listed by priority. Some costs are estimated. There is a column explaining if a project would be eliminated if there was a new school built. There are also notes about projects eligible for a grant reimbursement percentage. The Board of Education decides when projects are done within a five year span and then CIP modifies it.

First Selectwoman Wiczenski showed the current CIP. She said that because of finances, some projects have to wait. She also said that some projects, like resurfacing the gym floor or fixing a PA system, may not be necessary if a new school is built and the remaining structures are used for something other than schools.

Further discussion included the fact that if nothing is done and the town continues to repair the schools, it is going to cost approximately \$1.5 million of which none is reimbursable. One must also account for the unforeseen projects not yet listed on the CIP. A comment was made that it is a poor investment to keep spending money on buildings if the town won't be using them as schools. It is a problem if operating costs are increasing and the town has a low population. Indirect costs such as service calls and regular maintenance will continue to increase cost for two existing buildings.

Superintendent Stevens recommended asking Mr. Diamantis if reimbursements will decrease if the town chooses to continue the use of both buildings in present condition.

c. Establish Communications Committee

The goal is to share accurate, current information. The subcommittee will make a FAQ to distribute based upon what is known so far. They will identify a consistent method of communication. They will consider doing another survey.

Ann Grosjean and Gary Anderson volunteered to be on the communications committee.

First Selectwoman Wiczenski MOVED to establish a communication committee with no more than three members appointed by the Chair. Ann Grosjean SECONDED the motion.

DISCUSSION:

Superintendent Stevens will be part of the subcommittee. All recommendations must be presented to the whole committee and the Chair makes the final approval. The subcommittee will determine the overall communication procedure such as social media responses and article writing.

VOTE: 7 Yes, 0 No

MOTION CARRIED

Member	Vote
Erika Wiecenski	Y
Mike Makuch	Not present
Niko Semerzakis	Not present
Ann Grosjean	Y
Katherine Viveiros	Y
Gary Anderson	Y
Nancy Bailey	Not present
Peter Latincsics	Y
Justin Niderno	Y
Briana Ross	Y

d. Suggestions for Next Agenda

- i. Review 2019 Survey and Data
- ii. Review draft timeline for committee work

Ann Grosjean asked what data is needed.

Chairperson Viveiros stated that Superintendent Stevens will ask Mr. Diamantis at OSCGR if the demographics are updated enough.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski said that studies cost money and the committee will need to determine what funding to ask for.

Superintendent Stevens clarified that the demographics needed to present to OSCGR are strictly about student enrollment because of the student/square footage ratio. However other demographic information is helpful to the committee.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski restated that hiring a Project Manager(PM) soon is necessary to ensure that well informed decisions are made. A PM can also help talk to voters about how decisions came to be.

Superintendent Stevens said that Colliers can give a sample of an RFP (Request For Proposal), checklists of needed data, and a sample timeline, but a Project Manager is still required.

Ann Grosjean asked when to take on a PM. First Selectwoman Wiecenski replied that it could happen after July 1st at the earliest if funding is included in the new fiscal year budget.. Chairperson Viveiros said it is good to have a goal of what we need to know and by when.

Four items for the agenda for the next meeting on April 7, 2021:

- Report on what enrollment data is required
- Review the 2019 survey data

- Discuss the timeline for RFP

-Share updates from the Communications Committee

ADJOURNMENT

First Selectwoman Wiczenski MOVED to adjourn the meeting at 8:57 PM. Gary Anderson SECONDED the motion.

DISCUSSION:None

VOTE: 7 Yes, 0 No

MOTION CARRIED

Member	Vote
Erika Wiczenski	Y
Mike Makuch	Not present
Niko Semerzakis	Not present
Ann Grosjean	Y
Katherine Viveiros	Y
Gary Anderson	Y
Nancy Bailey	Not present
Peter Latincsics	Y
Justin Niderno	Y
Briana Ross	Y

Respectfully Submitted,

Briana Ross

School Building Committee Member and Recording Secretary

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TOWN CLERK