

Elementary School Building Advisory Group
Public Hearing Minutes
Location: Elementary School Cafeteria
November 13, 2013
7:00 p.m.

A. Power Point Presentation

Members of the ESBAG, and representatives from KBA, O&G and Webster Bank talked through the Power Point presentation, including the group's recommendation to renovate the elementary school as new.

B. Public Comment

1. John Piontkowski, Joe Williams Road.

John Piontkowski asked how long the construction phase would take if Option 2 was approved, and what would happen to the school children during that time.

Ray Wiley of O&G answered that the plan would be to renovate while the children occupied the building, and that construction would be phased. He stated that the project would take 18 months to complete, and that asbestos and hazardous material removal would be done during the summer. Portable classrooms could be used and their cost was included in the cost calculation.

2. Paul Buhl, Casner Road

Mr. Buhl discussed vital statistics, noting that the school age population in East Haddam is decreasing. He questioned whether the town should return to a two-school system and not spend the money renovating the elementary school.

Cindy Varricchio discussed the NESDEC enrollment numbers, and that those numbers are being taken into account in this project.

Mr. Buhl continued to discuss data concerning housing starts in town, noting that there has been little new construction in the last ten years.

Jim Ventres responded by discussing the 25% growth rate during the period of the 1960s through the 1990s, and noted that the town didn't have enough space in the school. In 2003, the regulations were changed to slow the growth rate, and in 2006 everything came to a halt. Given this history, Mr. Ventres said he would be remiss as a planning person to vacate this school. He advocated for fixing what the town has so that in 20 years no one complains that we need more space. He concluded that retracting to a smaller system is not the way to go.

3. Elaine Woods, 407 Hopyard Rd.

Ms. Woods asked whether the “renovate as new” option included all of the work in the “code compliance” option. Ray Wiley answered that it does.

Ms. Woods asked why the schools aren’t constructed out of steel. Mr. Wiley responded that the lifespan of pre-engineered buildings is short – approximately 20 years as opposed to the 50-year life span of standard construction.

Ms. Woods asked how a building can only have a 50 year life span. Mr. Wiley answered that a building is designed for a 50-year life span. Dave King of KBA answered that you can design a building for a longer life span, but it will cost more since you use different materials. For example, the life span of a roof is 20 years.

Ms. Woods commented that shingled roofs last 30 years; Mr. King responded that the roof on the school is tar and gravel. To construct a longer lasting slate roof, would cost much more.

4. Ronald Savitzky, Stockburger Road.

Mr. Savitzky questioned whether anyone had thought about estimating the cost for maintenance of the building before the town goes to bonding so that the cost can be built into the financing.

Mark Walter responded that such a cost cannot be bonded, but explained that the town has upgraded the maintenance portion of the budget significantly. He explained that no one disagrees that maintenance is important and that the middle school is the perfect example of what happens when a town does not maintain a building for the long term. The town’s current problem is what to do with these old buildings.

5. Matt Belcher, Cedar Meadow Road

Matt Belcher asked about the time frame for the project.

Mr. Wiley explained that, following referendum, the town would submit to the State in June 2014 to be approved in June 2015, at which time the town would know the amount of money it would receive. At that point, design would begin and last about 6 months. Construction would start shortly after that. Asbestos abatement and hazardous material removal would happen when children are not in school.

Mr. Walter noted that financing of the project would be explained in greater detail at the next public hearing.

6. Laurel White, Norwich Salem Road.

Laurel White noted that the Board of Education had stated that there portable would not be used because of security issues. Principal Joanne Collins responded that children can be moved safely into different wings during construction and that the portable likely would not be used.

Ms. White also asked whether money from the state for security upgrades would be used in this project. Craig Mansfield responded that money was awarded to be used for cameras, alarm system, card access systems, which will be used immediately. That money does not address security issues associated with the vestibule construction. Mr. Walter noted that the town was awarded \$550,000 for upgrades.

7. Patty Stricker, Petticoat Lane

Patty Stricker noted that in June 2013 there was discussion about moving the 4th grade back to the elementary school in order to receive a higher reimbursement rate and questioned where the issue stood.

Ms. Collins responded that this is on the table with the Board of Education. Tracy Gionta answered that the elementary school renovation project is totally separate from the decision whether the move the 4th graders back, which is an educational issue and not a reimbursement issue. Ms. Gionta explained that the school was in the past K-6, K-5 and K-4 and that it was busting at the seams at times. She stated that we cannot maintain our buildings based on how many children are coming down the pike. The issue with the elementary school is maintaining the town's infrastructure, and that the Board of Education will make the separate determination of how to utilize the schools educationally. Mr. Walter noted that it is his hope that the Board of Education will come to a decision concerning the 4th grade before January 2014.

8. Tom Tarbox, Honey Hill Road

Tom Tarbox questioned whether it was worth it to finance for 20 years (as opposed to 30 years).

Xay from Webster Bank answered that it depends on the town's threshold. He noted that it makes sense to finance for 30 years through USDA since the rate will be competitive and will more likely be better than the public market. Xay also noted that transaction costs with a USDA loan are much lower, and would save the town about \$85,000.

9. Todd Moss, 90 Main Street

Todd Moss noted that he was Chairman of the former middle school project committee. He agreed that Option 2 is the way to go, but noted that \$19.6 million is not enough to get the project done. He explained that the cost of construction will

increase by the summer of 2016. In two years, everything will be 8% more expensive. He stated that he does not want this project to go to the town for a vote and then have the project come back with bigger numbers. He questioned whether site costs, traffic re-routing and septic system costs were considered. He concluded that \$19.6 million on 76,000 square feet is not enough. He stated that he is an estimator for Turner Construction.

Mr. Wiley answered that O&G's estimates considered those points and tried to be realistic with the numbers. He noted that the septic system was not examined in depth but that the wells at the school are fairly new. He explained that there is not much site work to be done. He said that, while the town could spend more, it did not need to do so.

10. Mary Jane Malavesi, Alger Road

Ms. Malavesi inquired if the project fails referendum, how quickly will the needed repairs need to be done.

Mr. Mansfield explained that the town would be lucky to make it to 2015 with the current roof. He explained that there is a list of projects that need to be done prior to the start of the 2014 school year per the order of the fire marshal if the project fails referendum.

11. Alicia Dargenio, Grandview Terrace

Alicia Dargenio asked about enrollment trends and asked, based on growth trends in town, who will be paying the taxes for this project.

Mr. Walter explained that we are talking about maintaining our existing infrastructure with this project and we cannot afford not to do that. Mr. Ventres noted that 40% of people in Middlesex County move every five years, but that the houses in East Haddam always get re-filled because this is a desirable place to live. He noted that East Haddam is not Detroit; it is not a depressed suburb. He noted that we just need to fix what we've got.

12. Peter Novak, Joe Williams Road

Peter Novak asked for clarification on Option 3, which is to rebuild a much smaller school. He asked whether the group was saying that this would not meet the town's needs. Jason Guernon stated that the town now has a building with bones that are in good shape. He stated that this is an asset to the town, and that by demolishing it and building a new school, we would be throwing away a perfectly good asset.

Mr. Novak asked whether the entire school would have to be demolished. Mr. Wiley answered that you could do anything, and that O&G looked at options to demolish just portions of the building, but that none of them were good or cost-effective

options.

Mr. Novak asked how the questions for this project and then middle school would be presented at referendum. Mr. Walter explained that there would be two questions – one for each project.

13. Matt Rockwell, Tater Hill Road

Matt Rockwell asked if there is any benefit to Option 3 (demo and rebuild). The group responded that it would be a new building with a nice new look.

14. Carol Fitzmorris, Oriole Road

Carol Fitzmorris asked whether we had talked to another school district that had done a similar renovation project. She noted a similar project that worked out well. Ken Biega of O&G responded that the majority of school projects that O&G does are renovation projects. He noted Old Lyme, Waterford, Rocky Hill, and Wethersfield. He explained that the process is commonly done and that it is most helpful to have wing space. The children have an easier time adjusting than faculty. Dave King noted that the town's current superintendent was the principal of a school in New Britain when a similar renovation project was done.

15. Jill Kelly, Oak Road

Jill Kelly asked if the group had considered the difference in operating costs between renovating and building new. She suggested looking into building a middle ground school that might have higher costs at the beginning but would have lower ongoing maintenance costs. The group acknowledged that it had not considered that option.

16. David Carpenter, North Moodus Road

David Carpenter asked whether the elementary school is worth \$20 million. He asked if anyone has looked at the life cycle maintenance costs of Option 2 versus Option 3. He asked what amount the building is insured for. The group could not answer that question.

17. Dean Pelletti, Wickham Road

Dean Pelletti noted that he has lived in town for 30 years and has been here for the past middle school and high school projects. He noted that costs keep rising. He noted that if we shrink the school, we will be right back at needing more space in the future. He stated that if we are going to do this, let's not piecemeal it. He said Option 2 is the most viable. With respect to the tax increase per household, he questioned whether, in conjunction with the proposed middle school project, people in town could afford this.

Mr. Walter responded that at the public hearing for the middle school conversion project, part of the discussion will concern new opportunities for the town.

18. Myriah Rodowicz, East Haddam Colchester Tpke.

Maya Radowitz noted that she is a teacher, and the school where she works is going to build a new facility. The size of the school is smaller and it is a challenge to make sure that there is enough space for desks. She stated that building a smaller school is not a good idea. She also noted that the State's numbers are not fair or accurate. She concluded that we don't know what will happen in 25 years and that the future is impossible to predict.

19. Ed Ingram, Honey Hill Road

Ed Ingram asked about the population capacity for the school. Ms. Collins responded that the school has housed almost 600 students in the past, it comfortably can house 450 students, and there are currently 335 students in the school.

20. Vincent Garofalo, Winterbrook Road

Ben Garofalo asked why all of the repairs need to be done at once if the referendum fails. Mr. Mansfield explained that different fire marshals call out different things, and the current fire marshal wants compliance on specific things.

21. Chuck Smith, Ray Hill Road

Chuck Smith asked whether there is a risk that we could get less money from the State than is currently being estimated. Mr. Wiley responded that once we go into June 2014, the rate is locked in. He noted, however, that the reimbursement rate has been coming down, but that the June 2014 rate has already been set.

22. Elaine Woods

Ms. Woods asked whether the work on the school will be guaranteed. Mr. Wiley responded that no one intends to use products that won't last, and that construction warranties are a year.

Respectfully Submitted,

Melissa Munster
Secretary