

**TOWN OF EAST HADDAM
MIDDLE SCHOOL CONVERSION COMMITTEE
October 18, 2010
SPECIAL MEETING
Adopted November 22, 2010**

Call to Order

The special meeting of the East Haddam Middle School Conversion Committee was called to order by Mrs. Stricker on Monday, October 18, 2010 at 7:00 p.m. at the Town Annex.

Present: Craig Mansfield, Jim Ventres, Sharon Wheeler, Chuck Smith, Patricia Stricker, Elizabeth Dillon, Melissa Ziobron and Ed Blaschik.

Others Present: David Stein-Silver/Petrucelli and Associates (arrived 6:40p.m.), Tom DiMauro-Newfield Construction (arrived 6:16 p.m.), Chuck Grabowski-Newfield Construction (arrived 6:16 p.m.), Paul Maxwell, Bruce Dutch, Selectman Everett Lyman, Tiffany Quinn, Selectman Pete Govert, Bob Casner, Matthew Budzik (arrived 7:21 p.m.) Dick Everett, First Selectman Mark Walter, 2 citizens and Ruth Ziobron.

Absent: Mary Jane Malavasi, Alan Hanks, Sharon Wheeler and Bryan Perry.

Chairman's Report

Mrs. Stricker noted Mrs. Malavasi was apologetic for missing this evening's meeting and had requested input from the Board of Finance and the Board of Selectmen. Mrs. Stricker during the meeting tried to conference Mrs. Malavasi via her cell phone but was not very successful. Mrs. Ziobron questioned if Mrs. Malavasi was asking the committee not to make a decision tonight. Mrs. Stricker stated if the committee had enough information, they could make a decision.

Review of Newfield Construction Value Engineering/Options

Committee members reviewed and discussed each page of the following document:

- Newfield Construction, Inc. East Haddam Middle School Conversion Committee, October 18, 2010, The East Haddam Middle School Conversion Project, Options Summary;

Mr. Smith stated the estimates were higher than anticipated. Mr. Smith stated all of the planning the committee had done to reduce construction costs by minimizing the movement of walls and reuse inside the building still didn't bring the down figures as he had anticipated.

Ms. Wheeler stated she needed more time to review the document before commenting.

Mrs. Dillon stated there were still items which couldn't be quantified because there wasn't a design for all of the options. Mrs. Dillon stated she was disappointed but felt that she was seeing what she needed to see in the proposal.

Mr. Ventres stated there had been an estimate in the year 2000 for \$8,250,000 to renovate the school as it was. Mr. Ventres stated the committee had added through the geothermal, additional hazardous materials, garage, and access approximately \$3,000,000. Mr. Ventres stated he was not surprised by the figures. Mr. Ventres stated the removal option #3 gave 25% of the space for 76% of the cost and that the town would not be getting their dollars worth. Mr. Ventres stated Option 2A removed 27% of the building, yet reducing the cost by 10% and not having room for the BOE, Youth and Family Services and the Chatham Health District's potential rental income.

Mr. Mansfield stated he agreed with Mr. Ventres. Mr. Mansfield stated people wanted to keep the gymnasium.

Mr. Blaschik stated he agreed with Mr. Ventres and Mr. Mansfield. Mr. Blaschik stated demolition of the entire building was not an option. The town has been through a demolition of many buildings in Moodus center in the 1970's and look at what we have. Demolishing the Ray section which would save \$3,000,000 and end up with 25-30% less of the space was also not a viable option.

Mrs. Ziobron stated option 2B did make sense. Mrs. Ziobron stated Option 3 if they were true costs, that she would have an issue with spending almost \$10,000,000 to build new verses renovating what we already have. Mrs. Ziobron stated option 2A possibly based on comments could be reduced more. Mrs. Ziobron stated she was interested in public comment. Mrs. Ziobron stated demolition of the Ray wing had a lot of merit for obvious reasons and should be considered carefully in decisions.

Mrs. Stricker requested Board of Selectmen comments.

First Selectman Walter stated benefit verses cost needed to be considered. First Selectman Walter questioned if it was worth increasing the public's taxes by almost 10%. First Selectman Walter had been advised by Bob Carroll that the State was not foreseeing an increase in ECS contributions to the town for many years. First Selectman Walter stated the town's costs would go up to run the schools but that the State would not be increasing their contributions and this would increase the mill rate. First Selectman Walter requested a cost benefit analysis to be included in the committee's final recommendation to the Board of Selectman.

Selectman Govert requested clarification to Mrs. Ziobron's comment to demolish the Ray building for obvious reasons. Mrs. Ziobron replied the Ray building had the most weakness with a lot of issues. Mrs. Ziobron stated the other obvious reason was cost. Mrs. Ziobron stated the only other additional concern the committee had discussed was what the cost would be to relocate the electrical service, noting in the current plans they were all coming in at the Ray building, which would require adjustments to the plans. Mrs. Ziobron stated there was no contract with Chatham Health District, there had not been Family Youth and Services at the table, that this was the first meeting some of the auxiliary departments, which were in attendance, had ever attended. Mrs. Ziobron stated

the committee had been meeting for 3 years and these people had not attended. Mrs. Ziobron stated the committee had heard a lot of hesitation from the Board of Education about moving and that their FF & E request was unbelievable and more than all the other town agencies requests. Mrs. Ziobron stated she could not vote for a \$13,000,000 project.

Selectman Govert stated he was thinking about the project over a course of 50 years. Selectman Govert stated he understood the cost was high for now, but that the Plan of Conservation and Development estimates East Haddam growing out to 14,000 to 15,000 people given the zoning regulations, which would require more space for town offices. Selectman Govert stated this would be one of the cheapest times for a conversion project as costs would go up over time. Selectman Govert stated some sort of decision would need to be made as to what to do with the facility.

Selectman Lyman stated a lot of people went to school there and that demolition probably wouldn't be the best option, but that reuse was. Selectman Lyman suggested developing a plan that people of the town could afford. Selectman Lyman noted of homes in East Haddam and Moodus in foreclosure. Selectman Lyman stated of the importance of being conscious of tax increases during tough times.

Mr. Maxwell stated he agreed with Mr. Lyman's concerns regarding the economy. Mr. Maxwell stated the flat ECS funding was just the beginning of the town's budgetary issues. Mr. Maxwell stated that the State had a monstrous debt hole to fill and that the only alternatives were to raise taxes, slashing expenses or reducing municipal aid. Mr. Maxwell stated he assumed that reducing municipal aid would be a significant portion of the decision which our Legislatures and the Governor would need to make during the next session. Mr. Maxwell stated the costs would fall on the taxpayers. Mr. Maxwell stated there would be significant tax increases over the next several years with a declining economy, significant unemployment and foreclosures; and he was uncomfortable with such a large project on the taxpayers when he didn't see a lot of benefits to the project. Mr. Maxwell stated the project did not show any new town services. Mr. Maxwell stated the project also didn't show town services which would be offered in a more efficient or better manner as a consequence of the project. Mr. Maxwell stated he could not speak for the BOF.

Mr. Budzik stated \$13,000,000 in the current economy for a "nice to have" project was problematic. Mr. Budzik agreed with Mr. Maxwell that there were no new additional services to the town. Mr. Budzik stated while the current town offices were inadequate, that it would be a good idea to ask the town's people what they wanted.

Mrs. Stricker questioned if the BOF or the BOS had a reasonable figure which they would offer to the committee to work with. Mr. Maxwell replied for no new services or improved services, nothing. Mr. Maxwell stated he could not speak for the BOF, that the committee needed to come to a BOF meeting with a proposal and to ask questions and at which time, they would vote.

Mrs. Ziobron explained the importance of planning for the future by setting the foundation for when the town could afford it. Mrs. Ziobron stated option 2A did not mean that the project could not be phased in over a period of time as the need for additional space arises. Mrs. Ziobron reiterated Mrs. Malavasi's comments from the last meeting that it was not the committee's charge to provide several options, but that perhaps a study committee should be considered.

Mr. Casner suggested building new and disagreed with the size of the proposed facility and voiced concern with the operating expenses. Mr. Casner suggested a study committee to review new construction.

Ted Stum stated he did not see the benefit to the proposed options. Mr. Stum voiced concern with cutting services and still spending money for the new building. Mr. Stum stated the town could not afford this project.

Mr. Everett suggested adding on to the current offices and doing nothing to the old middle school.

Mrs. Quinn stated loss of the gymnasium would reduce programs and not allow for program growth.

Mr. Ventres stated the committee had worked hard for 3 years and that options 1 and 2a were the best proposals to meet the needs of the town and should be sent forward to the BOF and BOS and let people choose.

Mrs. Dillon agreed with building with a foundation for future planning. Mrs. Dillon suggested demolishing the Ray wing and mothballing or protecting the Hale portion for future planning when the economy was more stable.

Mr. Mansfield agreed with Mrs. Dillon to develop another option.

Mr. Smith stated the committee was charged with coming back to the town with a project. Mr. Smith stated he was unsure with which of the options was the best. Mr. Smith stated he had a problem with tearing down a structurally sound building. Mr. Smith agreed with Mrs. Dillon. Mr. Smith stated the committee had really tried to make space work in the existing space and not move much in the old Hale building. Mr. Smith stated more government could be put in the Hale building than the plans indicated.

Mrs. Stricker stated option 2A eliminated the Food Bank and Youth and Family. Mrs. Ziobron stated the Food Bank could be absorbed into the Hale section. Mrs. Ziobron stated there were not commitments from any of the people that would occupy the Ray portion and questioned why a roof would be capped to wait for people that have not attended any of the meetings and had not demonstrated enthusiastic desire to be there. Mrs. Ziobron stated she was at a crossroads because the committee had done so much work. Mrs. Ziobron stated her concern was that 95% of the people were unaware of their work. Mrs. Ziobron stated she was unsure if 2 to 3 options should be brought forward to

the public for input before making a recommendation to the BOS. Mrs. Ziobron stated she wanted the public's input. Mrs. Ziobron stated they stood a chance of having a stacked meeting by having certain interest groups which were aligned with certain departments, stacking the meeting and being cheerleaders in the audience. Mrs. Ziobron stated that was a risk she was willing to take. Mrs. Ziobron recommended having a booth during the elections to distribute information about the proposals.

Mrs. Stricker stated the committee had been working extremely diligently for the past three years to come to the BOF, BOS and the public with a workable number. Mrs. Stricker agreed with Mrs. Ziobron that the committee was at a crossroads. Mrs. Stricker stated she did not believe that the committee could make a final decision tonight.

Mrs. Ziobron suggested thinning out the options.

First Selectman Walter stated it was a difficult decision. First Selectman Walter stated the Hale side was a beautiful building. First Selectman Walter stated a \$10,000,000 project on a \$250,000 home was an annual increase in taxes of \$400-\$450 per year for 10 years. First Selectman Walter stated there was not pressure to move out of the current town offices with the revitalization plan. Mr. Ventres stated currently the town was putting \$150,000 into the old middle school each year for maintenance. Mr. Ventres stated the public had been told that the old middle school would be converted.

Mrs. Stricker questioned the BOS and BOF what would happen if nothing was done. First Selectman Walter stated no one wanted to spend \$150,000 a year only for a gymnasium. First Selectman Walter stated the Food Bank would be moved to the Grange and that the only reason to keep the old middle school was for long term preservation or usage of the gymnasium.

Mr. Mansfield questioned if the committee could ask Newfield for a proposal for long term preservation of the facility. Mrs. Stricker stated that was not the committee's charge. Mrs. Ziobron stated the committee needed to decide whether to make a vote with or without public input.

Mr. Stein advised against mothballing the building. Mr. Stein stated historically construction costs increase by 3% annually.

Mrs. Stricker requested that the Selectman tell the committee what project they were looking for the committee to submit for guidance. First Selectman Walter stated the Selectmen could not speak to that at this meeting; it would need to be at their meeting.

Mrs. Ziobron stated the committee would not get any more new information besides that what was in front of them and encouraged the committee to vote on a decision, unless they found it necessary to get public input. Mrs. Ziobron suggested a booth at the elections on November 2nd.

It was the consensus of the committee to review the documentation and meet on October 25th to develop various plans and questions to make a decision.

Mrs. Ziobron suggested removing some of the options this evening and requested that committee members send her questions for the public before the October 25th meeting.

Motion by Mr. Blaschik to eliminate option 3 and option 4. Second by Mrs. Ziobron.

Favor: Mansfield, Ventres, Wheeler, Smith, Stricker, Ziobron, Blaschik

Oppose: Dillon

Abstain: None

Motion passed.

Mr. Mansfield requested an alternate option to mothball the Hale portion and demolish the Ray portion. First Selectman Walter voiced concern with mothballing the building. Mrs. Dillon stated an option for renovation at a later date should be presented. First Selectman Walter stated the building did not do well even with heating it when it wasn't occupied. First Selectman Walter noted of a major mold issue which occurred last winter.

Mrs. Ziobron asked Mr. Stein if a presentation at a Public Hearing would cost the committee additional money. Mr. Stein replied no.

Mr. Stein stated a public hearing would allow the public to get information on the project and for the committee to hear feedback; after which time the committee could go back to the BOF and BOS to give a recommendation.

It was agreed to have a booth during elections and to schedule a public hearing.

Mrs. Stricker stated the committee would like to present various options to the public during the public hearing for the town's input to help with the decision. Mr. Stein stated asking for feedback was good, but that the public would be attending the meeting to see which direction the committee was in favor of. Mrs. Stricker stated she hoped that during deliberation at the next meeting the committee could come to a consensus.

Responsive to Ms. Wheeler's question, Mr. Stein replied various options would require graphics during the public hearing.

Mr. Maxwell voiced concern with receiving subjective information at public hearings. Mr. Maxwell questioned how the committee expected to elicit objective information at a public hearing. Mr. Maxwell stated the committee had received substantially objective negative opinions from this audience and didn't see that any of it had swayed committee members. Mrs. Dillon suggested a survey. Mrs. Stricker stated the committee had been meeting for 3 years and if they didn't care about the comments, they would have

submitted figures a long time ago. Mrs. Ziobron stated the public hearing would be an opportunity to give information to the public about the project and get their input.

Motion by Mrs. Ziobron to have a Public Hearing on November 10th. Second by Mr. Smith and unanimously passed.

Subcommittee Reports

Mrs. Ziobron reported the business briefing was attended by 12 people. Newfield Construction was thanked.

Furniture is for sale on GovDeals.

A withdrawal letter will be submitted with the Planning and Zoning Commission.

Public Comment

There was none.

Next Meeting Date – Regular meeting – October 25, 2010 7:00 PM-Annex

The next regular meeting is Monday, October 25, 2010 at 7:00 p.m. at the town Annex.

Adjournment

Motion by Mrs. Dillon to adjourn at @9:16 p.m. Second by Ms. Wheeler and unanimously passed.

Respectfully Submitted;

E. Ruth Ziobron
Recording Secretary