

**NEW FAIRFIELD BOARD OF EDUCATION
NEW FAIRFIELD, CT**

The New Fairfield Board of Education held a special meeting/public hearing on Monday,
September 16, 2019, at 7:00 p.m. in the New Fairfield High School Auditorium,
54 Gillotti Road, New Fairfield, CT.

MINUTES – September 16, 2019

PRESENT: Peggy Katkocin (Chairman), Dominic Cipollone, Greg Flanagan, Kimberly LaTourette, Samantha Mannion, Rick Regan, Ed Sbordone and Stephanie Strazza

ABSENT: Kathy Baker

ALSO PRESENT: Superintendent of Schools Dr. Pat Cosentino, Director of Business and Operations Dr. Richard Sanzo, Director of Instructional Technology and Communications Dr. Karen Fildes, First Selectwoman Pat Del Monaco, Selectwoman Khris Hall, BOF Chairman Wes Marsh, State Representative Richard Smith, State Representative Ken Gucker, State Senator Julie Kushner, Director of Office of School Construction Grants and Review Kosta Diamatis, Office of School Construction and Grants Review Staff Member Kermit Thompson, Rusty Malik (QA+M) and Chuck Warrington (Colliers)

I. CALL TO ORDER: Chairman Peggy Katkocin called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m.

II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

III. PUBLIC HEARING - NEW FAIRFIELD HIGH SCHOOL AND CONSOLIDATED SCHOOL EARLY LEARNING ACADEMY BUILDING PROJECTS

Director of Office of School Construction Grants and Review Kosta Diamatis gave an overview of the project and proposed school building projects for both the high school and Consolidated School. He spoke of the process and the advantages of building new school vs. renovating the existing schools. He noted that renovating of existing schools would be more expensive, disruptive to students and would also require portable classrooms at an additional expense. He further spoke of the reimbursement rate and the fact that the State is only willing to reimburse for new construction.

PUBLIC COMMENT AND QUESTIONS

State Representative Richard Smith asked the affordability of this project and how to get the solid numbers and specific facts regarding the projects. Mr. Diamatis noted that the vote of the Town should specify that this is a new building project and not a renovation project.

Jennifer Brackenwagen asked about cost per population and compared it to projects of other towns. It was noted that the size of the school is determined by student enrollment and not population of the town. There was a brief discussion of the cost per square foot.

Katie Williams asked about the accurate costs and whether or not the cost of portable classrooms were included in the estimate. It was noted that the portable classrooms would be extra.

Ron Freidman asked about how schools are built to the right size and whether or not contractors are held accountable for any problem that may occur after the construction is complete. Mr. Diamatis spoke of the controls in place and checklists and also noted that the right sizing of the schools is determined by student population.

Bob Burke asked whether or not money from the State is currently available. Mr. Diamatis noted that there is money from the State for reimbursement for the projects.

Carolyn Rowan asked if it was possible to get more reimbursement money if the building would be completely “green” and “solar”. Mr. Diamatis noted that the reimbursement money would be the same but there may be some rebates for energy savings.

Office of School Construction and Grants Review Staff Member Kermit Thompson spoke of the two different ways that the square footage is determined.

REVIEW OF PROJECTS

Dr. Rich Sanzo introduced Rusty Malik from QA & M and Owner’s Representative Chuck Warrington (Colliers) and gave a description of the process to date. He spoke of many reports that have been reviewed. He noted that NEASC did renew the accreditation for the high school but placed the school on warning due to the condition of the building and facilities. He also spoke of some civil rights ADA compliance violations.

Rusty Malik from QA & M spoke of the highlights of the problems with Consolidated School. Main challenges with the building include the traffic patterns in the parking lot, lack of natural light in some spaces, lack of sprinkler system.

Dr. Sanzo spoke of the challenges that would arise to the district if nothing was done or if renovation projects were attempted for either the high school or Consolidated School. He spoke of the plan to rebuild Consolidated School and the feasibility of putting it on the MHHS campus. He spoke of some of the ways to repurpose MHHS so that spaces can be shared with Consolidated School including the possibility of putting 2nd graders into MHHS.

Dr. Sanzo spoke of the size of the high school project and noted the proposed building is designed so that it can be added onto in later years if necessary. He spoke of the footprint of the building and how the rooms are arranged to maximize security and to allow for the building to reuse the current pool and locker room.

Dr. Sanzo and Mr. Malik spoke of the cost projections and tax analysis. The tax increase would be approximately 9.19% higher than current taxes. He spoke of a bonding schedule of both 20 year and 25 year bonds. The expected interest rates would be between 2.75% and 4%. He showed a chart of the tax increases based on average home values. There is a spreadsheet on the BOE website that includes all properties in New Fairfield.

Dr. Sanzo noted that the next steps for this project are a special BOF meeting on September 17th at 6:30 pm in the Community Room to approve the bonding resolution for both projects followed by special BOS meeting to set the date for the Town Meeting which is expected to

be Thursday, September 26th and is expected to be adjourned to a referendum on October 5th. He spoke of the exact questions that will be on the ballot and noted that there will be separate questions for the respective proposed projects.

Owners Representative Chuck Warrington from Colliers spoke of the process and noted that the budget does not change once approved. He spoke of schematic designs and estimates and other contractors that will be hired to do inspections to make sure that everything is done correctly. He noted that there will be a schedule to make the project is done on time.

PUBLIC COMMENT AND QUESTIONS

Dr. Sanzo encouraged all taxpayers to get involved in the process and realize the impact that the new schools will have on home values.

Patty Gay spoke in support of the new high school but expressed some concerns that the new high school would surround her property on Gillotti Road on three sides and how that would impact her personal property value. She offered to form a committee to find a piece of property in New Fairfield for the new high school that would not affect any particular home value.

Nicole Tavares also shared her concerns with her personal property value on Gillotti Road.

Lauren Mendoza asked about the cost of portable classrooms and noted that this would further add to the costs if renovation was decided but would not be necessary if schools were built as new.

Bob Burke asked about the current debt of the Town. Finance Director Ed Sbordone noted that it is currently \$18.5 million. Mr. Burke asked about the debt ceiling.

Craig David Rosen asked for the definition of “renovate as new” and if the buildings were renovated would each project have to be voted on separately.

Frank Scalsione noted that he has lived in New Fairfield for 51 years and remembered the original construction of New Fairfield High School. He spoke of concerns that the project is going too fast and urged the Board to slow down the process.

Amanda Lombard spoke of the dire need for new schools and examples of problems with the Consolidated School building project. She encouraged everyone to get accurate information and not rely on social media.

Jennifer Brackenwagen asked about the hard costs and soft costs per square foot and asked if it was possible to move the proposed site to somewhere else in New Fairfield. She also asked about the possibility of renting out the facilities to outside groups.

John Muir spoke in support of building new schools.

Jean Gephart spoke of the challenge for students living through construction projects. She noted that new construction would be the best option for the students with the least amount of disruptions.

Jennifer Hickey asked about Geothermal or solar energy and different sources of energy. She spoke in support of new construction.

Laura Consiglio asked about energy costs and potential cost savings and whether or not sports fields and driveways would be relocated. Dr. Sanzo noted that there would be an estimated energy savings of \$150,000 per year for the high school and \$75,000 per year for Consolidated School. He also noted that entrance and exits would be determined during the design phase.

Carolyn Rowan noted that the new buildings should not be heated with oil.

Eric Alviti spoke in support of the school projects and thanked everyone involved in the process.

Ron Friedman spoke of his concerns regarding the costs. Chuck Warrington (Colliers) noted that he is confident that the numbers are accurate and in line with projects from surrounding towns. Dr. Sanzo noted that this is the maximum project budget.

Superintendent of Schools Dr. Pat Cosentino spoke of the advantages of having the Middle School and High School on the same campus.

Elisa Beckett-Flores spoke in favor of new construction instead of renovating the existing projects. She spoke of the disadvantages of having the students living through construction.

Karen Hanley spoke in favor of the project and did not feel that it has been rushed.

State Senator Julie Kushner spoke in support of projects.

Bob Carlucci spoke of concerns for tax increases and why two schools are being done at once. He asked everyone to think of other options before rushing into this plan.

BOE Chairman Peggy Katkocin spoke economies of scale in doing two projects at once.

State Representative Ken Gucker spoke of growing up in New Fairfield and the challenges with the high school as soon as it was built. He spoke of his commitment to helping the Town of New Fairfield.

Joseph Galanti asked the specifics on how the numbers were determined.

Craig David Rosen spoke in response of Mr. Gallante's statement and thanked the BOE and everyone that worked on putting this presentation together.

Stephanie Marlow spoke in support of the children and noted that they are required to go to school and do not have a choice about being in the subpar buildings.

BOF member Jane Landers spoke of her tenure as the BOE Chairman and noted that this has been discussed since before 2004 and the high school has needed to be renovated for a long time. She spoke of many programs in town to help seniors with trouble paying taxes. She encouraged any seniors that are having trouble paying their taxes to talk to the Tax Collector.

Dr. Cosentino thanked everyone that attended the Public Hearing.

IV. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: Peggy Katkocin made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 10:20 p.m. Greg Flanagan seconded the motion. **IN FAVOR:** Peggy Katkocin (Chairman), Dominic Cipollone, Greg Flanagan, Kimberly LaTourette, Samantha Mannion, Rick Regan, Ed Sbordone and Stephanie Strazza

Respectfully submitted,
Suzanne Kloos