

**School Building Committee (2020)**  
**Special Meeting**  
**City Hall Room 335**  
**100 Broadway**  
**And Virtually via ZOOM**  
**Wednesday April 6, 2022**  
**6:30 PM**

**Committee Members Present:** Chairman Mark Bettencourt, Alderwoman Stacy Gould, President Pro Tem Joe DeLucia, William Hull, Gregory Ballassi (ZOOM), Peter Gauthier, Mark Kulos and Gregory Carabine, Cindy Beauregard, Christine DiStasio and Mark Adams (ZOOM).

**Committee Members Absent:** None.

**Ex-Officio Members Present:** Mayor Peter Nystrom.

**Citizens Present:** None.

**I. Call to Order and Quorum:** Chairman Mark Bettencourt called the meeting to order at 6:32 PM.

**II. Approval of Minutes from Previous Meetings:** Peter Gauthier made a motion to approve the March 15, 2022 meeting minutes, with some minor adjustments. Alderwoman Stacy Gould seconded. The chairman called the roll of members present and all were in favor. The motion passed unanimously.

**III. Update by DRA Representative Jim Barrett and Staff:** Gregory Smolley stated that DRA conducted three surveys in which they received 841 student responses; 204 responses from parents and guardians; and 225 staff responses. Gregory Smolley reiterated that the surveys were conducted anonymously online with outreach done through the school administration and the survey hosting done by DRA. Gregory Smolley explained that the surveys were designed to pose similar questions to each group in a different way and that they received generally good feedback. Gregory Smolley noted that only 31% of parents responded that they were familiar with the school facility that their child attended, and that the percentages from staff and students were understandably much higher. Gregory Smolley provided examples of survey questions and the response values received. Gregory Smolley discussed a forecast of the city's demographic and enrollment projections based on information collected by DRA. Gregory Smolley noted that the city's population is not likely to increase and noted various contributing aspects such as the resident fertility rate falling below replacement level and that most in-

migration is occurring between ages zero to nine and 25 to 44 years old. Gregory Smolley continued that the median age of the city is projected to increase between the years 2020 and 2030. Gregory Smolley noted that home sales will become the dominant factor of populations and enrollment changes if older generations are moving in and keeping their homes. Gregory Smolley concluded the total enrollment forecast for the city is projected to decrease between the years 2021-2026 (-5%) and projected to increase between the years 2026-2031 to 2069. Gregory Smolley stated that overall enrollment is projected to remain relatively stable. Gregory Smolley reviewed a chart of forecasted district total population changes from 2020 to 2031. Gregory Smolley discussed enrollment projects for each school over the course of two five-year increments for elementary and middle schools, as well as the district as a whole. Gregory Smolley discussed current enrollment maps and discussed details of the maps, showcasing proximity to the largest population of enrolled students in relation to the school they attend.

Gregory Smolley stated he met with Matthew Bob, Robert Sierpinski and Superintendent Kristen Stringfellow on March 21<sup>st</sup>. Gregory Smolley stated their discussion included legislation that would improve stricter indoor environmental standards, the district's desire to better align enrollment across facilities as some enrollments are too small to be educationally and fiscally effective. Gregory Smolley stated that the magnet school approach is not fiscally or logically feasible for the entire district. Gregory Smolley continued that at the meeting they discussed an approach for the district in line with a 'Princeton Plan' which may be beneficial to students, staff and the city overall. Gregory Smolley explained that the 'Princeton Plan' would eliminate the use of geographic locations in determining which school a student attends and instead would pull all same-aged students together.

Gregory Smolley noted that the ideal size of elementary schools had been an area of debate nationwide and discussed various points lending to the debate such as a large number of elementary students creating a significant negative impact on student achievement. Gregory Smolley discussed a few facility approaches for elementary school populations with over 400 students. Gregory Smolley stated that DRA recommends that whatever approach to facilities the city takes it should allow for smaller learning environments within the larger facilities and discussed examples. Gregory Smolley discussed differences between houses and academic teaming within schools, both of which have been an approach in larger schools nationwide. Gregory Smolley noted that the Norwich public school system would likely be the same size in 10 years that it is now. Gregory Smolley discussed various DRA potential school configuration recommendations based on enrollment project information. Gregory Smolley stated the demographic growth patterns do not support a seven school system due to transportation logistical staffing and fiscal considerations. Gregory Smolley concluded that DRA recommended the city have four elementary schools with 500 to 600 students in each or three schools with 700 students in each. Gregory Smolley stated either model would require capital, logistical transportation and curricular needs.

Gregory Smolley discussed variations between the existing school plan, the 2019 School Building Committee plan and DRA current thinking to showcase options on

how to proceed with the district.

Gregory Smolley showed a first option for the district which would consist of the administrative office being absorbed by Huntington School and keeping Moriarity, Stanton and Uncas Elementary Schools. Gregory Smolley stated a fourth new elementary facility would be required in this model, with each of the four schools holding 550 students. Gregory Smolley continued that students would be split between Teachers and Kelly Middle School. Gregory Smolley stated Wequonnoc Elementary School would be kept on as a virtual learning academy, but noted it would require a large investment to get the facility ADA compliant.

Gregory Smolley discussed a second option that would keep three elementary facilities with 700 students in each and 650 students at each of the middle schools. Gregory Smolley discussed the benefits of a three elementary school system in terms of geography and student transportation.

Gregory Smolley discussed enrollment maps for each school and transportation issues, as well as demographic factors.

Gregory Smolley listed off the next steps for DRA and the committee:

- Meet with Police Chief Patrick Daley for insight;
- Reach an agreement on the grade configuration for elementary and middle schools;
- Reach an agreement on the amount of schools to study;
- Reach an agreement on the building program guideline;
- Reach an agreement on a site program in regards to state funding and the city budget;
- Develop comparisons between existing buildings, sites and agreed guidelines;
- Develop develop test fits over the existing buildings and sites;
- Identify and research potential sites for a new building or buildings if needed.

#### **IV. Discussion and consideration of any actionable items from update**

**as/if necessary:** Bill Hull made a motion to instruct Drummey Rosane Anderson, Inc to research options for four and three elementary school facility school systems for further review. Alderwoman Stacey Gould seconded.

Peter Gauthier questioned if the Committee should have DRA options for discussion at the April 26 public forum on how a three or four school system study was decided upon, when the committee has not yet discussed. Discussion ensued. Peter Gauthier suggested providing a cost analysis to present along with suggestions on closing or replacing buildings. Gregory Smolley stated the Committee would be well to develop a program for each existing building to show overlay in comparison of where kids are located demographically. Discussion ensued on researching a program that applied to 300 students for five or six schools. Bill Hull made an amended motion to instruct Drummey Rosane Anderson, Inc to research options for a seven, four and three elementary school facility school system for further review. Alderwoman Stacey Gould seconded. The chairman called the roll of members present and all were in favor. The motion passed unanimously.

**V. Next Regular Meeting:** April 19, 2022 Regular Meeting. April 26, 2022 Public Information Session.

**VI. Additional Agenda Items:** None.

**VII. Adjournment:** Alderwoman Stacy Gould made a motion to adjourn the regular meeting at 7:59 PM. Mark Kulos seconded. seconded. The chairman called the roll of members present and all were in favor. The motion passed unanimously.

*Respectfully Submitted, Katherine Rose*