

School Building Committee (2020)
Regular Meeting via ZOOM App
Tuesday November 17, 2020
6:30 PM

Committee Members Present: Alderman Mark Bettencourt, Alderman Joe DeLucia, Alderwoman Stacy Gould, William Hull, Gerald Martin, Gregory Ballassi, Greg Carabine, Peter Gauthier, Heather Romanski, Kristen Talley and Christine DiStasio.

Committee Members Absent: None.

Ex-Officio Members Present: Chris LaRose, Jamie Bender, Kristen Stringfellow, Josh Pothier, Pat McLaughlin, and Athena Nagle.

Citizens Present: Matthew Brown, Norwich Board of Education Facilities Manager; Bob Castronova, City of Norwich Purchasing Agent; Eileen Eagle, Arcadis Associate Project Manager; and Charles Warrington, Project Manager.

- I. Call to Order and Quorum:** Alderman Bettencourt called the meeting to order at 6:34 PM.
- II. Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes:** Peter Gauthier made a motion to approve the October 27, 2020 meeting minutes with some clarification and spelling changes. William Hull seconded. All voted in favor. The motion passed unanimously.
- III. Public Comment:** None.
- IV. Discussion: Path going forward and timeline:** Alderman Mark Bettencourt stated various business owner representatives have shown interest in the project and being that he felt that roll would ultimately need to be filled, questioned if acquiring that representative or an architect should be the Committee's first step. Alderman Bettencourt added that although the Committee had initially discounted the former Greenville School site the City in fact owns an adjacent piece of land to the site which extends out to Boswell Avenue, and in turn extends the overall

site area but with some topographical issues. Alderwoman Stacy Gould reported that the former site of the Greenville School was 12.3 acres and that the City owns an additional 2.1 acres that abuts the site with access from Boswell Avenue. Alderwoman Gould stated that she had Deanna Rhodes, Director of Planning and Neighborhood Services, produce a map of city-owned properties that were larger than 5 acres which did not amount to many candidates for the site of the new school. Alderwoman Gould stated the only other possibility was a large piece of property behind the Rose City Senior Center, which abuts Mohegan Park, but that it may have its own topographical issues. Alderwoman Gould agreed that the Greenville School site should not be discounted too quickly as it is one of the larger plots that the City owns. Alderman Bettencourt stated the Greenville site should be the Committee's working theory pending an assessment from an architect. Greg Ballassi asked for clarification on the access point to the 2.1 acre site in Greenville to which Alderwoman responded the access was close to Hickory Street. Pat McLaughlin stated he was certain that wetlands were located within the 12.3 acres of the Greenville School site but that there should be enough space upland for construction. Alderman Bettencourt reiterated that the Greenville site was currently the best working theory for the Committee and that the site would be an answer to many of the geographical location issues the former School Facilities Committee had concerns on.

Alderman Bettencourt asked for the Committee members opinions on the next step. Gerald Martin asked if the Committee should get a projection of what the student level will be in order to determine the approximate square footage for the new school. Alderman Bettencourt stated the former School Facilities Committee had arrived at a maximum number of approximately 600-650 students. Alderman Bettencourt stated that an enrollment study would be needed prior to submitting an approval plan. Christine DiStasio questioned if the Committee's first step should be an enrollment study or hiring an architect. Alderman Bettencourt responded the Committee should start with an architect or a business owner representative, as they would sublet an enrollment study. Peter Gauthier asked how

many classrooms would be needed to hold 700 students. Matthew Brown, Board of Education Facilities Manager, responded that a school about the size of Kelly Middle School would be needed to hold that amount of students. Peter Gauthier questioned the plausibility of fitting a school that size within the Greenville site and noted that the former Greenville school only had 14 classrooms and 2 kindergarten rooms. Discussion ensued. Alderman DeLucia stated that while on a map the area appeared to provide a decent amount of property there were topographical challenges. Greg Carabine asked if the Committee did not know the approximate number of students or have an enrollment study how could they size the new school. Alderman Bettencourt responded that the new school will direct the composition of the remainder of the project and that the process would be to determine what will fit on the site and process from that point, and that an enrollment study would be required regardless. Christine DiStatsio noted that the access road would need to be closely inspected as any turning on Boswell Avenue may prove difficult for school buses. Discussion ensued regarding the location of the access point to the 2.1 acre site. Alderman DeLucia asked what the resolution was in regards to the batting order of tasks for the Committee in order to make progress. Peter Gauthier responded that the first step should be to determine and gather a list of site options; if Greenville is the only available site or if Moriarty or Stanton Schools perhaps have the foot space. William Hull stated one of the things the Committee needed to do would be to bring in an expert and an architect who would guide the Committee through the process opposed to them attempting to project things that are not within their expertise. William Hull stated to accomplish that the Committee would need an RFP and funding for it to get initial approval for an architect. Bob Castronova, Purchasing Agent, stated from his perspective the Committee should look into acquiring an owner's representative as it seems there are several moving pieces that needed to happen simultaneously and that the owner's representative would guide us through state requirements and hire an architect on their behalf, as well as conduct an enrollment study. Bob Castronova stated he felt as though the owner's representative would help the Committee

determine what steps to take first and noted that the construction of the new school was not the entire project. Heather Romanski noted that in the last month's meeting it was determined that the State of Connecticut's advice was to start with an architect which Alderman Bettencourt agreed was correct and added that some of the benefits of bringing in an owner's representative would be a sense of direction, gaining contacts with the State and removing stress from Norwich Public School staff. Kristen Stringfellow stated in her experience in Rhode Island the process was to begin with an owner's project manager and that she had reached out to the Department of Education prior to last month's meeting who put her in touch with the Office of Policy and Management and they stated clearly that in Connecticut the process always begins with architect engineering firm. Kristen Stringfellow stated after hiring a firm they would assess buildings and tell the Committee precisely what the enrollment capacity would be. Kristen Stringfellow continued that the firm would perform site visits and provide assessments given the current rules and regulations on how schools are built in terms of space and handicap accessibility. Kristen Stringfellow stated a professional with discreet knowledge of the current regulations needed to take a look at the project in whole which would take some time. Kristen Stringfellow stated that once the RFP is in place the Committee would need to determine how they wished to approach interviewing potential firms and determine what values are important for the firm to have such as imagination, an enrollment forecaster, etc. Kristen Stringfellow noted while the properties that had been discussed could be suggested to the future architect, their potential use may not be a worthwhile conversation so early on. Alderman Bettencourt stated he would defer to the Committee on whether a project manager or an architect should be the first hire. Greg Carabine stated if the Committee was looking to hire an architect there would be a minimum charge of a \$165 an hour and if the Committee, for instance, were quoted \$80,000, with a team of people, that would only equate to approximately 480 hours and what the Committee is requesting would require significantly more time than that. Alderman Bettencourt agreed and noted that at

current point the Committee would likely be seeking only conceptual work but that would be determined when the Committee goes to bid the project as there is some money put aside but not enough for the architectural issue so it would be an issue for the Council to handle. Alderman DeLucia stated he felt the Committee should follow the advice of first hiring an architect. Alderman DeLucia made a motion that the Committee requests the City Council to direct the City Manager to write and publish an RFP for architectural services based on the report from the School Facilities Review Committee with the intent of assisting the current School Building Committee to chart a school realignment project for the City of Norwich. Heather Romanski seconded. Alderman Bettencourt reiterated the need for bringing in an architect. Alderman DeLucia stated with his experience in engineering and architecture he has seen that many larger firms have project management in-house so the Committee may end up with both options from the architectural firm or could choose to specify within the RFP that project management services needed to be provided. Alderman DeLucia stated once the Committee has a firm dollar amount they could hold presentation interviews prior to awarding the RFP. Alderman Bettencourt stated likely a subcommittee would be established prior to the RFP to develop interview questions. Bob Castronova, Purchasing Agent, stated there would more likely be a request for qualifications, not pricing, as the Committee would review the response packages and develop finalists to then interview. Bob Castronova noted there would not be a cost involved to begin with. An amendment was made for the motion to read RFQ, not RFP. All in favor. The motion passed unanimously.

V. Discussion/Potential Action: Professional services needed to be retained – Creation of RFP/Q: See above.

VI. Adjournment: Heather Romanski made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:20 PM. Alderwoman Stacy Gould seconded. All voted in favor. The motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted, Katherine Rose