

A Public Hearing of the Regional School District 14 Board of Education was held on Thursday, May 16, 2013 at 6:30 pm at Nonnewaug High School, 5 Minortown Road, Woodbury, Connecticut.

Present: Superintendent Jody Ian Goeler; Board members George Bauer, John Chapman, Charles Cosgriff, Sophiezane Bartlett, and Pam Zmek; NHS Principal Andrew O'Brien, Director of Facilities Mike Molzon; Building Committee members JP Fernandes, Chris McGrath and Pat DiSarro; architects Mike Ayles and Paul Lisi; construction manager Ken Biega; engineering consultant Chris Cardany; and Board clerk Debra Carlton

Absent: Board members Maryanne Van Aken, John Swendsen and Gary Suslavich

Audience members included: Region 14 faculty member Katie Yocis; Woodbury BoF Chair Bill Butterly; two members of the press and approximately 24 additional members of the community.

**I. Call to Order**

Mr. Bauer called the hearing to order at 6:46 pm

**II. Appointment of Moderator**

Mr. Bauer appointed resident Attorney John McDonald to serve as moderator.

**III. Appointment of Meeting Clerk by the Moderator**

Mr. McDonald appointed Sophiezane Bartlett to serve as meeting clerk.

Mr. McDonald led the Pledge of Allegiance.

**IV. Call of the Meeting**

Mr. McDonald stated the following call of the meeting:

The electors and citizens qualified to vote in town meetings of the Towns of Bethlehem and Woodbury are hereby warned that a public meeting of Regional School District Number 14 will be held at Nonnewaug High School, 5 Minortown Road in Woodbury, Connecticut on Thursday, May 16, 2013 at 6:30 p.m. for the purpose of conducting a public hearing on the following recommendations by the Board of Education:

Mr. Bauer read the details of the call:

1. That \$63,820,605 be appropriated for costs related to various renovations, improvements, and additions at Nonnewaug High School in Woodbury so as to "renovate-to-new" the school per the definition of the State Department of Education. These renovations, improvements, and additions will include, but not be limited to, (1) addition of science labs and classrooms; renovation of the auditorium, stage, and lobby; the renovation/addition of space for team/P.E. locker rooms, health facility, and equipment storage; addition of a multi-purpose room next to the cafeteria; creation of a video studio/lab and computer lab; renovation of the Special Education suite; school security improvements; new A/C and window replacement in the 1970 academic wing; installation of a new sprinkler system; HVAC control and fire alarm system upgrades; emergency generator for major systems; code/ADA renovations in toilet rooms, elevator, and stairways; new gym bleachers; new interior doors and floor/wall/ceiling finishes; reconfiguration, regrading, resurfacing, and irrigation of the grass fields; provision of a new artificial turf on the main athletic field; new field amenities including lighting at the main athletic field, concession stand/toilet rooms, bleachers for 1,000 spectators, dugouts, and scoreboards; repair/expansion of the existing tennis courts; improved pedestrian/vehicular access to athletic fields; realignment of the entry/exit access; separation of bus/car traffic with a dedicated student drop-off; repair, expansion, and upgrade of all parking areas including lighting, signage, landscaping, curbing;

and (2) related work and improvements; and for costs related to the financing of the project. The appropriation may be spent for design and construction costs, furnishings, fixtures, equipment, materials, site improvements, survey and testing costs, architects' fees, engineering fees, construction management costs and fees, consultant fees, legal fees, net interest on borrowings, other financing costs, and other expenses related to the project and its financing. The Board of Education or any building committee delegated all or any portion of such responsibility by the Board of Education shall be authorized to determine the scope and particulars of such project, and may reduce or modify the scope of such project as desirable, and the entire appropriation may be spent on such project as so reduced or modified.

1. That \$63,820,605 bonds and temporary notes of the District be authorized to finance the appropriation. The amount of the bonds or notes authorized shall be reduced by the amount of grants received by the District for the project.
2. That the Chairman and the Treasurer, or such officer or body delegated such authority by the Board of Education, be authorized to require the District and its member towns to comply with applicable federal income tax requirements for tax-exempt bonds, and to make representations and enter into written agreements for the benefit of holders of the bonds or notes to provide secondary market disclosure information.
3. That the Board of Education be authorized to approve the entering into of contracts for the project, and the Board of Education, or such officer or body to whom the Board delegates such authority, be authorized to approve the expenditure of said appropriation and such other matters as it deems desirable or necessary to complete the project.
4. That the appropriation and bond and temporary note authorization be submitted to referendum vote of the electors and citizens qualified to vote in the member towns of the District.

#### **V. Presentation of the Nonnewaug High School Building Project**

Mr. O'Brien began with information about educational requirements driving the plan, including increased course requirements, and showed data on percentages of students currently underserved at NHS.

Mr. Bauer presented some history on the building committee and a timeline to date.

Mr. Ayles spoke to the design elements of the plan.

**Sean Murphy**, Woodbury, interjected a question about why more detail is not available at this point in the process.

Mr. Ayles explained that, at this point, detail that Mr. Murphy is seeking would be too expensive for the district when a referendum has not yet been approved. Most design plans of this type are specific enough to estimate costs, but not so specific as to be cost prohibitive to the organizations being served.

Mr. Biega outlined the project schedule estimated to span 36-38 months.

Following the budget presentation, Mr. McDonald opened the floor for public comment.

## VI. Public Comment

**Tom Arras**, Woodbury, asked if the firms represented tonight already have the job or will this go out to bid.

Mr. Ayles responded that Antinozzi Associates and O&G have been under contract with Region 14 since 2007.

Mr. Fernandes added that these two firms were chosen through a bid process in 2007, and O&G will bid out their work when the project begins.

Mr. Arras contended that the last time a building project was attempted, the 4<sup>th</sup> tennis court was not seen as economically feasible.

Mr. Fernandes corrected him; the last time, 6 courts were seen as desirable for tournament play but not deemed feasible in the current location. Four courts do not present a problem with the rock ledge and are the minimum acceptable for tournament play.

Mr. Arras contended that the last project sold the public on the need for outdoor space adjacent to the cafeteria and now that area is to be closed in. He asked why that changed.

Mr. Fernandes commented that this change is with a heightened interest in safety and security.

Mr. Chapman added that, by enclosing this area, lunch waves can be designed to facilitate class schedules and to optimize space.

**Duncan McDougal**, Woodbury, asked if all schools have football stadiums, bleachers, teams; asked why moving the tennis courts out to the field hadn't been considered; asked why adjacent landowners hadn't been approached to sell us their property to use for additional parking; and said we should be focusing on "lifelong sports" such as tennis and not football.

Mr. Ayles indicated the turf field will be multi-use, not just for football.

Mr. Cardany said that the plan does include at least 60 added parking spaces.

Mr. McDougal noted that auditoriums in Greece are thousands of years old. Also, maybe NHS should just be torn down and rebuilt for less.

Mr. Biega explained that this had been considered; however, the State offers less reimbursement for new buildings and this option would cost more, not less.

**Scott Baider**, Woodbury, asked about projected student enrollment and how many students are projected for Woodbury, Bethlehem, and agriscience. What happens in 10 years, he asked, if we don't need the space we're creating?

Mr. Biega commented that the needs of today are being corrected, while planning for the future.

Mr. Ayles added that State reimbursement is based on student enrollment at the time of submission.

**Sean Murphy** asked the difference between what we want and what we need; locker rooms for sports, he said, are not a need.

Mr. Ayles noted that the design was based upon the educational specifications created by the administration.

Mr. Murphy asked whether permits from inland wetlands had been received.

Mr. Cardany, of Langan Engineering, indicated that while applications have not yet been filed, indications from that agency are that wetlands will not be affected by this project.

Mr. Ayles noted that agency had been met with and nothing glaring was uncovered; also, permits are not required at this point in the project.

Mr. Murphy felt the space issues do not add up; fewer kids should mean less space needed.

Mr. Chapman urged him to look at the educational specifications – program needs, bricks and mortar, number of credits needed – the specifications were developed based on real needs.

**Katie Yocis**, Woodbury, and NHS science teacher, explained that while there are 10 science teachers at NHS, there are only 7 science classrooms; therefore, once every 4 days she teaches in an English classroom. She suggested that if the high school was improved, many of the 50% of students opting for private high school might return.

Students interested in drama are not here, she said, because the auditorium is deplorable. Local dance companies are not interested in renting our space because it is so bad. Improving the facilities will bring the community back here, she said.

**Chris McGrath**, Waterbury, and WMS athletic director, coaches JV girls soccer. It saddens him when grade 8 students explore where else they might rather play because our facilities are so poor. Injuries sustained by our athletes are not collision injuries but rather sprains from running laps. Yet, he said, our students do sometimes go on to play D1 sports in college – not because of our facilities but in spite of them. If students could be proud of where they come from, instead of moving away after college, they might move back here to start their lives. To the comment about life long sports, it was decided to put the turf field outside of the track so it could be used by all sports, not just football. Our teams have to borrow use of other towns' turf fields to prepare for competition play because our students have no experience playing on the surface they will see in tournament play. Also, there have been instances when our athletes could not enjoy home team advantage in tournament play because our fields were deemed unacceptable. This is embarrassing to our high performing athletes.

Mr. Goeler noted that what we hope to instill in our athletes is the importance of teamwork and camaraderie. These, he said, are lifelong skills. Bringing the community together is also a goal of team sporting events.

Mr. McGrath added that a lifelong love of physical activity is another goal of athletics.

**Don Fital**, Woodbury, commented that "need," as a central issue, is in the eye of the perceiver. He had 2 sons go through R14 in the 90s. He is thankful that students may finally get 4 playable tennis courts. Night lighting on the fields will lead to greater attendance at games. Parents who cannot be here in the afternoon will certainly come out at night. There are many needs here, and mandates on teachers, and increased pressure on the district. He feels the timing for the project is great with current interest rates and construction costs. He supports the work done by the board and building committee and thanked them for it. He will pay his share to get this work done.

Mr. Arras asked if the cumulative cost for the 25 year span of the loan is available.

Mr. Ayles agreed to attempt to calculate that.

Mr. Arras asked the percentage of time agriscience students spend in the high school; since they are 25% of the total population, how much do their parents pay for these improvements?

He was told that out of district parents do not pay for these improvements as they are not taxpayers of Woodbury or Bethlehem.

Mr. Arras noted that football costs an estimated \$45,000/yr. though the public had been sold on the idea it would cost nothing.

Mr. Bauer reminded him that the field improvements will benefit all sports.

Mr. Arras asked what the test borings had revealed as to the field conditions.

Mr. Cardany indicated those had not been done yet. The turf field will need to be slightly raised. He added that the field area will include both practice and game fields.

Mr. Arras read an opinion article about high school construction projects "robbing communities blind." Maybe building new does make more sense, he said.

**Kiera Stamp**, Woodbury, said she's only recently started coming to meetings and that she is sorry for that. To constantly hear "no" is frustrating to her. Her family moved here from NC for better schools and she hopes the referendum passes because the kids deserve it and so many positives can come from it. She thanked the board and building committee for their work.

Mr. McDougal revisited that idea that out of district families do not pay for this project, and added that time, effort and money have not been put into our grass fields.

Mr. Baider agreed that NHS is the flagship school, but enrollment is declining and the elementary schools are being ignored. To attract young families, he asked, what is being done for the elementary schools?

Mr. Bauer said changes in building use for K-6 are being considered.

Mr. Chapman added that the needs at NHS are here now. What is done here will lead to planning for the lower schools.

Mr. Murphy predicted that young families will not be attracted to our community because there is no reason to come to CT, elected officials are incompetent, this is an example of "mob rule," empty commercial space in town is due to dysfunctional zoning commission, and property values don't go up with increased school spending as evidenced by Waterbury.

Mr. Arras asked for the cumulative cost to a homeowner in a house assessed at \$350,000 and was told an estimated \$8000-\$8500 over 25 years. He said his problem with the scale of the project is there is no contribution from the agriscience students from out of district.

Mr. Bauer confirmed that all students would benefit from the improvements.

Ms. Zmek ended with a passionate speech about the importance of the project which will benefit all students. Our students are not asking for a Taj Mahal, she said. The project does not include a swimming pool or ice rink, amenities that many high schools in CT have. This is not an example of "mob rule," as was suggested, but rather an example of democracy. She suggested that those who support it should vote yes, and those who do not support it should not. We support our seniors in this community and we should support our kids, too. It is time to move forward, the building is in serious disrepair, and we cannot continually keep putting this off.

## VII. Adjournment

Hearing no further comment, Mr. McDonald adjourned the public hearing at 9:17 pm

Respectfully Submitted,

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Sophiezone Bartlett, Secretary  
Regional School District #14 Board of Education  
May 20, 2013