



East Greenwich School Committee Meeting

Wednesday, January 31, 2024
12:00 pm

Hybrid Meeting: Cole Middle School & Via Zoom

Minutes

Those in attendance

School Committee: Ms. Alyson Powell, Chair; Ms. Nicole Bucka, Vice-Chair; Ms. Clare Cecil-Karb; Mr. William Hangan; Mr. Kevin Murphy; Mr. Tim Munoz; Dr. Eugene Quinn

Additional Attendees: Dr. Brian Ricca, Superintendent (via Zoom); Mr. Michael Podraza, Assistant Superintendent; Mr. Neil Marcaccio, Director of Student Services; Mrs. Maggie Baker, Director of Administration; Mrs. Amy Healey, School Committee Clerk

I. Call to Order

Ms. Powell called the meeting to order at 12:05 pm.

II. Discussion of and Possible Action to Approve Submission of Stage II Application as recommended by the EG Building Committee

Ms. Powell explained that the EG Building Committee unanimously approved the Stage II submission at its meeting on January 25, 2024. This meeting is an opportunity for the School Committee to ask any questions they have about the project, timeline, etc. If all questions are addressed, the Committee will hopefully vote to approve the Stage II submission today.

Mr. Derek Osterman of Colliers gave an update on the Stage II application. This meeting is so that the School Committee understands everything that goes into this submission. The Building Committee approved moving forward with an add/reno at Hanaford, a new build at Frenchtown, renovations at Meadowbrook, capital improvements at all schools; including projects prioritized at the high school.

Mr. Osterman reviewed the plans for each building as they stand now. Hanaford's cost estimates are \$42 million for an add/reno and \$50 million for a new build. The EG

Building Committee preferred the lower cost option which allows for some flexibility on costs.

Ms. Bucka expressed her support of the Stage II submission. She asked a clarifying question about what would happen if none of Hanaford is determined to be salvageable.

Mr. Osterman explained that the add/reno option allows the flexibility to renovate as much of the building as determined to be necessary.

Ms. Bucka inquired why Frenchtown is not an add/reno.

Mr. Osterman replied that we want to avoid having teachers and students in an active building site. The Frenchtown property will allow for a new build while the current school is used. The old Frenchtown school will be able to hold Hanaford's population during construction and avoid having a school in an active construction site.

Ms. Bucka noted that the add/reno at Hanaford would move the project further from concerned neighbors. She stressed the importance of maintaining the same level of special education services and facilities at both schools.

Mr. Murphy noted that the two building sites are unique and that different, yet equitable, schools will be built.

Ms. Powell said that no student should have a lesser experience based on the facility. The schools will not be identical but will offer the same experiences. She added that RIDE is an important part of this process.

Mr. Osterman stated that RIDE needs to have a sense of what is going on and an add/reno allows an open door for changes.

Mr. Munoz said that as the project goes from Stage II to Stage III, equity in the buildings will be at the forefront as plans are developed and the specific layout of each building takes shape.

Ms. Bucka said that it is important that dollars and cents are not made a higher priority than students.

Mr. Munoz asked Mr. Osterman whether he could see a scenario where more than 30% of Hanaford is saved.

Mr. Osterman replied that it is unknown at this time. Stage III is the final imagining of what these buildings can be. How much of Hanaford is salvageable will be determined during the building process.

Ms. Bucka inquired why Meadowbrook is not an add/reno. Mr. Osterman replied that it is because no additional space is being added.

Ms. Cecil-Karb said that all of East Greenwich's schools are highly regarded and that it would negatively impact the Town if both schools were not sought after. The most important aspect of this project is having equitable learning spaces at all schools.

Mr. Hangan inquired about the order of the construction projects.

Mr. Osterman said that the new build at Frenchtown would come before the Hanaford project. The work at Meadowbrook and the High School may happen during the summers.

Mr. Osterman said that communities develop 5 year capital project plans which are submitted to RIDE. Aside from the \$150 bond, \$2 million remains from a previous \$5 million bond and is still available to be bonded for capital projects. Ms. Powell added that projects need to be submitted to RIDE for the determination of reimbursement eligibility.

Dr. Quinn inquired about the 5% and 10% contingency.

Mr. Osterman explained that the estimator tries to project the ultimate cost. Colliers flushes the numbers out and takes contingency into consideration. The current project drawings are conceptual yet not qualified enough to get an exact cost. There are both design and construction contingencies. It is important to ensure that all expenses are eligible for reimbursement.

Public Comment

Michael Donegan, Town Council Member

Mr. Donegan said that the discussion is in line with the building committee's discussion. He asked if the current Stage II submission estimates line up with the approved \$150 million.

Mr. Osterman replied that Colliers now needs to screen, review and compile the overall project budget before the February 15th submission deadline. It is common practice to receive estimates and to make updates. Colliers will work with the estimator and architect to make specific changes to inputs on the estimates that do not change the projects. Priorities will need to be established. While the final budget projections is not yet know, Mr. Osterman stated that he is comfortable proceeding.

Ms. Powell explained that the submission to RIDE needs to include whichever projects may happen with the understanding that some aspects may need to be eliminated or modified.

Ms. Osterman said that these are reasonable cost projections that allow for slight changes to move money from one portion of the project to another. This realignment happens when a project is closed out and when East Greenwich files for reimbursement.

Ms. Powell pointed out that the Stage II submission is more than \$150 million and asked how concerned should the School Committee be?

Mr. Osterman replied that there is no need for concern; that as part of the screening process, Colliers and StudioJaed will work together to submit a project that will be approved by RIDE with the final set of estimates getting to around \$150 million. Some of the projects and aspects of these projects in the Stage II submission are unrelated to the \$150 million school construction plan (including repairs), which could potentially push the dollar amount above what the voters agreed to bond for. The additional projects being included in Stage II, but not the \$150 million construction project, would allow the School Committee to know if RIDE would be willing to reimburse other projects in the future. Stage II is conceptual only in order to secure funding. Stage III is where details are worked out.

Mr. Munoz noted that the EG Building Committee unanimously approved the Stage II submission.

Public Comment

Mr. Michael Donegan, Town Council Member

Mr. Donegan asked what the current estimates are for everything including the 30% for soft costs.

Mr. Osterman replied that the analysis is not yet complete. Some estimates have exceeded what is likely necessary or justifiable and reasonable changes will be made. Clear guidelines exist on what the Town's expected costs are.

Mr. Donegan stated that the Stage II is being voted on while estimates may be greater than \$150 million.

Mr. Munoz said that a lot of work still needs to be completed before the February 15th submission deadline. He reiterated the fact that the EG Building Committee unanimously approved the Stage II submission.

Ms. Powell asked how confident Mr. Osterman felt moving forward with the Stage II. Can this project be completed within the available budget?

Mr. Osterman replied that he was fairly certain that the projections will be under budget. The estimate includes more than can be funded and it may be that not all of the wants of the project will be affordable. The community will need to decide on priorities. A vote in favor of the Stage II submission will be a vote in favor of investing \$150 million for teaching and learning and to seek RIDE's support and state funds.

Citizen Comment

Mr. Peter Carney

Mr. Carney shared concerns with not having absolute numbers before action is taken. He expressed disappointment that those numbers are not yet ready. Mr. Carney referenced the discord between the School District and Town Council and the Town Council's vote against the Stage II submission. He asked whether there would be a public meeting with discussion on the request for a declaratory opinion. Mr. Carney asked whether the School Committee was aware of the request for a declaratory opinion and if the members were supportive of that request.

Ms. Powell explained that School Committee rules for public meetings differ from Town Council rules. The School Committee is unable to add topics for discussion during a meeting; topics must be on the posted agenda. Today's discussion is limited to the Stage II submission.

Ms. Andrea Hamlin

Ms. Hamlin asked if the Stage II is passed by the School Committee today and the Town Council does not do the same before February 15th, will the 20% in bonuses be lost.

Mr. Osterman replied that he has never been in a position before when one body approves and the other one does not. He is unsure of what would happen. Mr. Osterman stated that the project will be most successful when consensus is found.

Dr. Quinn stated that we are comfortable voting on something even if the exact dollars are unknown. Votes are made with the best information available at the time. It can be expected that adjustments will be made as the project progresses and it is not realistic to have to wait for exact numbers.

Mr. Munoz said that there will be a lot of review through a deliberate process and that RIDE is a good partner.

Mr. Murphy expressed his appreciation for the public comments. He noted that the Committee can not operate outside of the Open Meetings Act and must stay within the confines of the agenda.

Mr. Munoz made a motion to approve the submission of the Stage II application as recommended by the EG Building Committee. Ms. Bucka seconded the motion. Ms. Powell conducted a roll call vote. The Committee voted 7-0 to approve the motion.

Mr. Murphy voted yes

Ms. Bucka voted yes

Mr. Hangan voted yes

Dr. Quinn voted yes

Mr. Munoz voted yes

Ms. Cecil-Karb voted yes

Ms. Powell voted yes

III. Adjournment

On a motion by Ms. Bucka, seconded by Mr. Murphy, the Committee voted 7-0 to adjourn at 2:12 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Amy J. Healey
School Committee Clerk

Approved 2-27-24