



East Greenwich School Committee Meeting
Joint Special Meeting
East Greenwich School Committee - East Greenwich Town Council -
East Greenwich School Building Committee

Wednesday, July 26, 2023
6:00 pm

Hybrid Meeting: Swift Community Center & Via Zoom

Minutes

Those in attendance

School Committee: Ms. Alyson Powell, Chair; Mr. William Hangan; Mr. Tim Munoz; Dr. Eugene Quinn, Mr. Kevin Murphy

Absent: Ms. Nicole Bucka, Vice-Chair; Ms. Clare Cecil-Karb

School Administration: Dr. Brian G. Ricca, Superintendent; Mr. Michael Podraza, Assistant Superintendent; Mrs. Maggie Baker, Director of Administration; Mr. Neil Marcaccio, Director of Student Services; Mr. Robert Wilmarth, Director of Facilities

Town Council: Mark Schwager, President; Michael Donegan, Vice President; Caryn Corenthal, Renu Englehart and Michael Zarrella

Town Administration: Andrew Nota, Town Manager; Andrew Teitz, Town Solicitor; Leigh Carney, Town Clerk/Executive Assistant to Town Manager; Timothy Wheeler, IT Director; Major Robert Siple, Deputy Chief of Police; Sgt. David Petrucci, Patrolman

EG School Building Committee: Alyson Powell, Chair; Kevin Murphy, Co-Chair, Tim Munoz, Dr. Brian Ricca, Robert Wilmarth, Margaret Baker, Michael Podraza, Neil Marcaccio, Andrew Nota, Mark Schwager, Renu Englehart, Robert Siminski (arrived @ 8:50pm)

Additional Attendees: Derek Osterman, Project Manager/Colliers

I. 6:00 pm ~ Call to Order

Chairwoman Powell called the School Committee/School Building Committee to order and made introductions.

II. New Business

(Any items that have not been previously discussed or acted upon.)

- A. Discussion and review of School Building Committee Education and Infrastructure Priorities as part of the school district's building master plan.

Council President Schwager introduced the item and provided a brief overview of the process that has taken place to get to this point. The intent was to have a discussion and needs assessment as part of the master education and facilities plan. Chairwoman Powell provided some general opening remarks.

Mr. Osterman spoke about the plan forwarded in April and the School Committee's priorities based on Option C1. He noted that significant investment was warranted which included a new build at Hanaford for grades 1-5, a new build at Frenchtown for grades 1-5, renovations at Meadowbrook for pre-K and kindergarten with additional investment at the high school. These priorities were summarized into two tiers with the most critical needs for equity and overcrowding in elementary:

- Tier 1 new build at Frenchtown and new build or expansion at Hanaford
- Tier 2 upgrades at high school and preparing Meadowbrook for early childhood

Dr. Ricca pointed out that elementary schools are the biggest priority as they are not currently meeting the needs of students or teachers. The focus here was based on meeting every criterion (fiscal, equality, target population, best practice and all students).

Ms. Corenthal reported on two opinions she received from residents about why the high school is not the highest priority and if the number to bring Eldredge up to code was ever reported to the community.

Dr. Ricca reiterated that the elementary schools are more critical than the high school and the number for Eldredge was \$26 million; however, when opened back up would lose half its capacity.

President Schwager asked for a review of the concept for the high school. Dr. Ricca explained it is educationally sound, which is not the case at elementary schools. Mr. Osterman noted that option C1 attempted to get the critical needs taken care of such as special education/life skills, athletic spaces and larger spaces such as the auditorium, library, etc. Mr. Podraza commented that certain renovations at the high school could ease congestion and add more classroom spaces for the high demand for CTE programs such as the arts, engineering, etc. Mr. Osterman added that feedback from the community clearly indicated civic pride at the high school and that small investments could lead to a better overall experience.

Ms. Englehart asked for clarification on the needs at elementary schools. Mr. Marcaccio addressed current violations in special education services which need to be in specialized settings and space with privacy to support the social/emotional health of students. He added that 10% of the student body at this level have special needs and it can be challenging to accommodate diversity. Dr. Ricca concurred that having the appropriate space at elementary level would enhance learning.

Town Council Vice President Donegan asked if increased costs of new buildings have been considered and voiced his concern about the impact of the debt and the potential for the allocation to the school department to lessen in future years. Dr. Ricca replied that Mr. Wilmarth has addressed operational costs. They are going to make it work and are supportive of further conversations on the topic.

Mr. Zarrella inquired about how many classrooms will be added between the two elementary schools and if new teachers will be needed. Mr. Osterman and Mr. Marcaccio replied potentially up to seven classrooms but the labor demand would remain unchanged. Mr. Podraza added that the goal is to look for savings as the project evolves. Mr. Osterman noted that finding cost savings is a frequent and common concern; however, savings can be offset by investments in environmental infrastructure and technology.

Mr. Donegan inquired whether or not Eldredge will be taken off-line or utilized in some other way. Mr. Osterman replied the school district planned on transferring Eldredge back to the Town. Mr. Munoz confirmed that was the plan. Chairwoman Powell interjected that no formal vote has been taken yet. She voiced concern about the building being abandoned and felt strongly that it should have a purpose. Mr. Munoz commented on including the future of the building into the Comprehensive Community Plan.

Ms. Baker made a comment regarding maintenance of effort.

Mr. Donegan questioned the dollar range for Hanaford. Mr. Osterman explained that the feedback received on Hanaford was questionable on a new build or renovations. Discussion ensued on the fluidity of the ranges and maintaining space for flexibility. Mr. Osterman encouraged Council to keep the bond question clean and simple as there will be a need for slide room as the project progresses. A communications consultant will be brought on (Main Street Media) and designers will work within ranges but flexibility is necessary during the process.

Discussion ensued related to the distinction between the language on the ballot and the bond indenture. Conversation continued and focused on the timing related to presenting the project to RIDE in February, RIDE locking it in May and the reality that this will happen after the vote. Mr. Osterman provided more details on the process of submission and the built-in safety measures that are intended to guide the project. Bonus points were discussed in detail.

Debate ensued on the Town's strategic approach to structuring debt based on a myriad of scenarios. There was talk about reallocating funds to the high school whilst still meeting Tier 1 priorities.

Mr. Schwager asked about the educational impact of an add/reno versus a new build at Hanaford. There was input from several on the School Committee that pointed out the constraints that would remain with just doing the add/reno. Dr. Ricca requested full funding for Tier 1. Mr. Osterman addressed the \$10 million increase for Hanaford.

Mr. Donegan asked Mr. Osterman what the percentage was, positive and negative, to account for error or unanticipated circumstance. Mr. Osterman offered to relay that

information at a later date. There was concern about RIDE disagreeing with estimates. Mr. Osterman explained the process to justify the costs and negotiate with RIDE.

Mr. Schwager asked about plans at Meadowbrook for pre-K. Chairwoman Powell replied that plans call for an early learning center. Despite a shift in grades, Mr. Osterman stated that costs at Meadowbrook are likely to be the same. Chairwoman Powell added that extra seats in pre-K available to out of district students could generate revenue. Mr. Marcaccio stated that if pre-K became mandatory, that could add approximately another 140 students.

Chairwoman Powell provided information gathered from Mr. Wilmarth, architects and high school students about changes that would make the biggest impact at the high school itself. Some examples were bathroom renovations, ADA compliance, auditorium and cafeteria remodel, enhancements to the courtyard, turning the old gym into a fitness facility, full renovations of locker rooms and transforming underutilized spaces.

IX. Adjournment

On a motion by Mr. Murphy, seconded by Mr. Hangan, the Committee voted 5-0 to adjourn the meeting at 9:15 pm.

Minutes adapted from Town Council Minutes (Leigh Carney, Town Clerk/ Executive Assistant to Town Manager)

Respectfully submitted,

Amy J. Healey
School Committee Clerk

Approved 8-22-23