

WILLIAM PENN TASK FORCE MINUTES

William Penn Taskforce Meeting (of the Harrisburg School District)
Reflecting Task Force Meeting of Thursday, December 7, 2023, at 6 p.m.
Harrisburg School District Headquarters

Task Force Members Present:

Jody Barksdale
Danielle Bowers
Linda Cammack
Audry Carter
Melanie Cook
Trina Gribble
Kia Hansard
Laura Harding
Reynardo (Rick) Hicks
Yvonne Hollins
Brian Hudson
Charla Plaines
Heaven Poles
Jolie Lawson
Gloria Martin Roberts
Vern McKissick
David Morrison
Rafiyqa Muhammad
Karl Singleton (via Zoom)
Doug Thompson Leader
Ryan Unger

Professional Staff (Ex-Officio) Present:

Mr. Eric Turman, Superintendent
Mr. John Reedy, Chief Operations Administrator, Harrisburg School District
Dr. Marcia Stokes, Chief Financial Officer, Harrisburg School District
Dr. Lori Suski, Commonwealth Court Appointed Receiver, Harrisburg School District
Dr. Travis Waters, Chief Recovery Officer, Harrisburg School District

Co-Facilitators:

Elan Drennon
Sheila Dow Ford

I. Elan Drennon convened the meeting at 6 p.m.

She directed those assembled to the following documents distributed:

- a. Minutes of the November 16, 2023, task force meeting.
- b. The agenda for the December 7, 2023, meeting.
- c. The Presentation documents submitted by HLCO, Inc.

II. Presentation of proposal submitted by Higher Level Community Outreach Inc. (“HLCO”) advocating demolition of much of the William Penn facility, and retention and adaptive reuse of the front section of the facility, for establishing a career education and community training facility serving the students and residents of Harrisburg.

Jaylene Crawley, an HLCO board member, presented a proposal to use a portion of the William Penn campus to house various educational and civic programs, to be underwritten by funding from a variety of sources, including the school district.

Ms. Crawley stated that the HLCO proposal contemplates the removal of all but the front, main section of the William Penn facility, noting significant financial savings to the district should the other sections of the facility be demolished. Ms. Cawley stated that under the HLCO proposal the costs of demolition were expected to be borne by the school district.

During the HLCO presentation Ms. Crawley identified various programs currently in operation throughout the City of Harrisburg, which, under the proposal, would be brought into the William Penn facility. Ms. Crawley noted that the HLCO organization has no independent sources of funding to bring to this concept, but that the organization would expect the school district and other interested entities to engage in the fundraising required to bring the ideas to fruition.

Upon questioning, she indicated that HLCO has been in existence for four years, is primarily a grant writing organization, and has served over 1,000 people in the Harrisburg area.

III. Presentation by Eric Turman, Superintendent, on potential adaptive reuse of the William Penn facility as a structure housing a multi-faceted, comprehensive Harrisburg School District Career and Technical Education Career Pathways Program and a fully operational student health and fitness facility.

Mr. Turman began by referencing the recent HBGSD public announcement of the planned reorganization of various schools within the district to better meet student needs. He noted the current focus on shifting away from the use of the Rowland Academy for classroom instruction, which was announced at the November meeting of the school board. Stating that winding down the use of Rowland for student instruction is the start of an overarching school district reorganization, Mr. Turman said that as the discussion has moved forward around best uses for the William Penn facility, he and his team acknowledge the degree to which the school fits into the vision for the district. With appropriate structural rehabilitation and retrofitting, WPHS can provide necessary and appropriate accommodations required for new programs affording greater opportunities and enhanced student achievement for students in career and technical education, in a range of academic areas, and in providing health and physical education activities.

Career and Technical Education Focus: As with other proposals brought forward to the task force in which career and technical education have been the centerpiece, Mr. Turman pointed out that he and his administrative team are concerned with the challenges posed by the limited participation of HBGSD students in the programs offered at the Dauphin County Technical School. He stated that factoring WPHS into the District's planning presents an important opportunity to meet present and future demographic and curricular challenges. He expounded at some length on the necessity of a Career Pathways Program that has skill development at its core, and that serves as a fundamental element of the district's student achievement blueprint.

Athletic Fields: Mr. Turman also proposed that under the re-conception, the WPHS athletic fields would be used for district-wide extra-curricular activities.

Funding: Mr. Turman indicated the vision articulated requires significant capital investment, but that he and his team are prepared to begin working on stabilizing the WPHS, by cleaning out the building, engaging in asbestos remediation, addressing any basic foundational or façade issues, and, finally, "buttoning up" the facility to make it more secure.

Partnerships: Finally, Mr. Turman discussed the importance of building stronger partnerships with a host of local educational and business leaders including Hamilton Health, Harrisburg University, and Harrisburg Area Community College (HACC). To illustrate this concept more fully, Mr. Turman concluded his remarks with a video highlighting the partnership between the HBGSD and Hamilton Health in which students are trained to become medical assistants.

A robust question and answer session followed the presentation.

Among the questions posed:

Q. How many students are engaged in the Hamilton Health Partnership? A. Nine seniors.

Q. How is the program being validated? A. Mr. Turman will provide more information.

Q. Are there any plans to add other curricular offerings to the partnership with Hamilton Health?

A. Yes, more information to follow; however, the parties have specifically discussed the dental hygienist program.

**A task force member noted that Physician Assistants are in high demand, and with early math and science foundational training, students would be able to study and train for such career paths. The member further noted that of the students featured in the video a number expressed an interest in becoming medical doctors. Task force members asked the superintendent to factor the elements of early, robust Math and Science education into curriculum development to ensure that students would be equipped with the skill set to pursue and achieve their future goals.

*** An addendum to this comment was the suggestion that the district "grow its own teachers," that is, build capacity for achievement from within and engage in serious recruitment by working with local institutions of higher education.

Q. What is the price for shoring up WPHS? A. An estimate of \$1.3 Million for asbestos remediation; An estimate of \$700,000 for a thorough clean out of the trash and other detritus.

** Mr. Turman noted that the clean-up must happen regardless of any other factors, and thus the funds have been and remain allocated for these activities.

Q. What does "button up" entail? Will attention be given to such matters as repairing the large holes in the fencing? Can students be hired to help with certain areas of the clean-up activities?

** A task force member noted that real numbers on the clean-out, as opposed to estimates, are required.

** A task force member directed the district to work more closely with Capital Region Water on any projects involving the clean-out and retrofit.

IV. Presentation by Dr. Lori Suski on status of task force activity to-date, the final activities around evaluating proposals, the process for bringing forward recommendations, and voting on first recommendation.

Summary of Status:

Acknowledging the work of the task force to date, Dr. Suski thanked the body for taking seriously the responsibility to hear the proposals presented to the group, to ask insightful questions and provide serious and substantive commentary on the proposals and other matters coming before the body.

She noted that at its organizing meeting, in keeping with the legal authority granted the Receiver by the Commonwealth Court, she informed the body that the Receiver is granted sole legal authority to make any determinations regarding the disposition of the William Penn High School.

To that end, she stated that in her capacity as the Receiver she convened the task force for the purpose of bringing community leadership to the evaluation and deliberation process, to better inform the school district in its work of determining the best path for moving forward with WPHS.

Dr. Suski mapped out the contours of the process for evaluating the proposals brought before the group, noting that each proposal would receive an evaluation from each task force member through a deliberative process designed to capture and convey the ranking of choices made by members.

Noting that the group had received and heard the last of the concepts to be presented, she directed the group to the first matter of the evaluation/recommendation process: a vote recommending the Receiver either to retain or to demolish the William Penn facility.

Discussion ensued among task force members around the value of voting on a recommendation at this time, with task force members opining that while there appeared to be consensus around retaining the building, the process of voting required greater clarity.

After robust discussion, it was determined that the best approach was to hold an open vote among those present, to be cast via roll call, on the following motion:

It was moved and seconded that: The William Penn Task Force recommends to Dr. Suski that the William Penn facility including buildings and surrounding land not be demolished. That does not mean that no buildings can be modified or torn down, but it does mean that any determination that the school be demolished be rejected. We recommend that Dr. Suski entertain recommendations for the retention and active use of programs in that facility.

The motion passed, with seventeen (17) votes in the affirmative, and four (4) abstentions. Affirmative Votes cast: Danielle Bowers, Linda Cammack, Audry Carter, Melanie Cook, Trina Gribble, Kia Hansard, Laura Harding, Renardo Hicks, Yvonne Hollins, Brian Hudson, Gloria Martin-Roberts, Vern McKissick, David Morrison, Rafiyqa Muhammad, Charla Plaines, Karl Singleton, Ryan Unger. Abstentions: Jody Barksdale, Jolie Lawson, Heaven Poles, Doug Thompson Leader. Five (5) members were not in attendance and did not cast a vote: Susan Brown-Wilson, Brian Carter, Joel Hervitz, Gloria Merrick, Mike Pries.

V. Update from Student Representatives, Heaven Poles and Jolie Lawson

The two student representatives, Jolie Lawson and Heaven Poles, gave a brief update on the student survey they intend to distribute to students in grades eight through twelve. They informed task force members of the survey questions and received recommendations and feedback from those assembled. The general sense from the members was the survey was a good way to generate feedback from students on their career interests and would serve as a valuable tool in helping the district move forward in its work around career and technical education.

The student representatives plan to present the survey results at the January 4, 2024, task force meeting.

At the conclusion of the presentations, Ms. Drennon reminded members of the final two task force meeting dates: Thursday, January 4, 2024; Thursday, January 18, 2024.

There being no further business to bring before the body, the meeting was adjourned at 7:25 pm.

The next meeting of the William Penn Task Force: Thursday, January 4, 2024, at 6:00 p.m.

