

MINUTES

William Penn Taskforce Meeting (of the Harrisburg School District)
Reflecting Task Force Meeting of Thursday, November 2, 2023, at 6 p.m.
Harrisburg School District Headquarters

Task Force Members Present:

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

Professional Staff (Ex-Officio) Present:

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 October 19, 2023, task force meeting.
- b. The agenda for the November 2, 2023, meeting.
- c. The Presentation document submitted by the Career and Technical Education work group.

Ms. Drennon welcomed and introduced Jolie Lawson, a senior at John Harris, who was attending her first task force meeting, having just been appointed. Ms. Lawson spoke briefly of her interest in the work of the group, and of her future plans which include moving on to higher education.

II. Presentation of proposal on behalf of the Career and Technical Education subcommittee (the "CTE Subcommittee") advocating adaptive reuse of William Penn as a multi-faceted facility housing an array of career and technical education, skills-based academic, training and community initiatives serving the students and residents of Harrisburg.

The members of the CTE subcommittee: Danielle Bowers, Melanie Cook, Laura Harding, Yvonne Hollins, Charla Plaines, Gloria Martin-Roberts, Rafiyqa Muhammad, Doug ThompsonLeader, and Gloria Vasquez- Merrick.

On behalf of the subcommittee convened to develop a proposal around career and technical education, **Melanie Cook** presented the recommendations of the group to the full task force. Ms. Cook emphasized that the recommendations proposed were devised to institute a full range of experiences and opportunities in the form of curriculum and capacity to provide students with skills that align with workforce trends and expectations around current and future growth industries.

Further, the proposal contemplates a series of community-centered programs. The proposal makes clear that the concepts are expected to be phased in over a series of years.

In addition to a brief question and answer session after the presentation, there was further discussion of the concept during the last half hour of the meeting, which was reserved for discussion among task force members.

The topical areas set forth in the proposal include Environmental and Climate Technology; the Harrisburg Academy of Theater, Arts and Music; Cottage Industry Shared Workspace; Entrepreneurial Incubator; the Harrisburg Language Academy; Alternative Education; Hospitality/Special Event Venue and Training Space; Video Gaming and Artificial Intelligence High School Certification Initiatives to be developed in partnership with a host of entities, including Harrisburg University; the Harrisburg Fire and Police Public Safety Academy; Miscellaneous other professions for which the campus could offer training in fields currently not offered by DC Tech that would be beneficial skills for Harrisburg students; Preservation of the campus, with retrofits to accommodate income generating operations, including an indoor skating park and BMX track, roller rink, indoor trampoline park, and flag football training area.

The CTE Subcommittee proposal and the presentation are set forth in full at the Harrisburg School District website, under the following tab: [William Penn Task Force / Proposals \(hbgisd.us\)](https://www.hbgisd.us/William-Penn-Task-Force-Proposals)

III. Presentation of Task Force Members Trina Gribble and Vern McKissick on logistics/creativity/financing of adaptive reuse project in Chambersburg, PA: Adaptive Reuse and Financing.

Starting with the premise that the William Penn edifice should remain intact to the extent possible and practicable based upon factors such as its structural integrity and the development of comprehensive plans to reuse the building in ways that reflect fundable, mission-driven utilization, Ms. Gribble and Mr. McKissick provided the task force with a comprehensive overview of their work in adaptively reimagining and reconfiguring a long-neglected Chambersburg, PA school building.

The objective of the presentation was to illustrate through the successful Chambersburg, PA retrofit the logistics and creativity involved in large scale adaptive reuse projects, and, further, to give the group a sense of the extent to which financing challenges and opportunities are practical drivers of determinations around mission.

Addressing the significant square footage of the William Penn edifice the duo noted that there are several hybrid mixed-use models of rebuilding, that, with appropriate planning and financing, can address multiple objectives such as education, housing, and community needs.

To further illustrate the point, Ms. Gribble asked the hypothetical question: "Can we consider turning the third floor into residential housing?"

Mr. McKissick conveyed the challenge around financing that had to be addressed in completing the Chambersburg project and suggested that task force members remain open to possibilities of lease-buy-back arrangements, public-private partnerships (P3s), and other such structures which might have to be taken into consideration given the school district's current inability to issue bonds.

Among the questions posed following the presentation: How do we leverage the land surrounding the school? What comes first, funding versus the building? Can we structure a parallel approach involving both rebuilding the school to accommodate student needs while also developing programs for the community? What is the cost to clear out the building? Can we approach this- the project (s) in phases? Going forward, with whom do we partner? Can we determine the cost to build a STEM/Career Pathways campus?

In response to an inquiry asking directly if the Harrisburg School District has legal ownership of the William Penn building and the land, Dr. Marcia Stokes, the Chief Financial Officer for the district responded. Dr. Stokes noted that all of the district's previous lease-buy back agreements have been terminated; thus, the district has full ownership of the William Penn facility.

IV. Funding: Task Force Members Brian Hudson and Audry Carter

Task force members Brian Hudson and Audry Carter provided the group with a high-level overview of the range of potential funding structures that can be pursued in growing any project from the concept stage to reality. They also discussed the necessity of providing detail to proposals sufficient to attract partners and underwriters in both the capital and programmatic spheres.

Mr. Hudson reiterated that all funding solutions must be framed within the challenges posed by the district's restriction against debt funding via the capital markets until 2035. Thus, solutions to funding by necessity must involve partnerships (both public, private, for-profit, non-profit), grants, and perhaps the use of conduit funding facilities.

Mr. Hudson referred to the private-public partnership model (P3) discussed by Mr. McKissick as an example of a project which successfully leveraged private development dollars to build market-rate housing units and commercial spaces, thus placing a once defunct building on the local tax rolls while also addressing local housing and economic development challenges.

Mr. Hudson noted that a project can be a blend of for-profit and not-for-profit activity, especially one involving a facility of such scale as William Penn. To this end, he asked that the task force maintain an open mind around opportunities and prospects, with an eye towards potentially recommending phasing in certain elements of any proposal, and melding various concepts to best align vision, mission, and financing.

To this end, Mr. Hudson also noted that a project can be formed around a series of public entities, such as involving the school district, the city, the county, and state government. As Ms. Gribble noted, various iterations exist and there remains the possibility of developing a hybrid model, which achieves multiple ends.

Ms. Carter discussed the prospect of pursuing grant funding for initiatives deemed a high priority. She noted that grantors prefer specific, measurable, achievable, and sustainable projects. She conveyed her commitment to working on the grant funding approach to projects as decisions around direction become clear.

V. Open Discussion

Ms. Drennon opened the discussion to the full task force for the purpose of evaluating more fully the concepts presented and to discuss future engagement.

The group noted there are three meetings remaining on the official task force schedule: November 16, December 7, and December 21, amounting to a total of six hours available to receive and respond to proposals, engage in discussion, evaluate proposals, and discuss the results of the evaluation process before turning recommendations in to the receiver.

Task force members suggested that given the abbreviated timeframe relative to the list of tasks remaining, the administrative team endeavor to have all proposals on the presentation roster at the November 16 meeting. Ms. Drennon reminded the group that Dr. Suski indicated at the outset that should necessity require, she would extend task force activities into January 2024.

Finally, there was discussion around evaluating proposals. The group reached a consensus that the better approach was to refrain from evaluating any proposal until all had been presented. In addition, Ms. Drennon noted she was refining the evaluation structure initially introduced, to assign weights to factors, thus ensuring a more robust, reliable, and valid survey.

Having reached the hour of 8 p.m., the task force adjourned.

The next meeting of the task force: Thursday, November 16, 2023.

