



**Hillcrest Middle School Building Committee  
October 14, 2025  
7:00 pm  
Board of Education Auditorium  
Long Hill Administration Building  
6254 Main Street, Trumbull, CT**

Present: Andrew Lubin, Bill Mecca, John Morello, Fran Basbagill, J.C. Cinelli, Bob Gerbert and Jeff Alterman

Absent: Joseph Costa and Ann Sather

Also Present: John Butkus, Arcadis; Gregory Raucci, Bismark Construction; Kevin Bova, Purchasing Director; Town Attorney James Nugent; Kevin Dion, Director of Operations, Board of Education; Michael Scott, TSKP; Randall Luther, TSKP; Brian Rickert, Hillcrest Principal and Martin Semmel, TPS Superintendent

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 pm followed by Roll Call and the Pledge of Allegiance.

**Past Minutes**

**Motion was made by Mr. Mecca to approve the minutes of September 30, 2025; seconded by Mr. Lubin. Two abstentions – J.C. Cinelli and Bob Gerbert. Motion passed.**

**Public Comment**

Lucinda Timpanelli, Chairman of the Board of Education for Trumbull Public Schools, brought the following concerns to the Committee, some may have been addressed:

1. The current enrollment of Hillcrest is currently between 755 and 800. With that in mind, there needs to be a space to accommodate half of the population for activities throughout the school year. Heard the Black Box has a capacity of 250 individuals which is inadequate for the activities and events held at the school.
2. Unaware of the gym capacity and hopes the Stepping Forth Ceremony and other activities can be accommodated.
3. Geothermal component – understands the up-front cost is \$3-5 million and each classroom needs to have a closet type space for monitoring the controls and pump access from the

hallways. How much does this take from instructional and storage space and what is the cost to the Board of Ed if one of them breaks and needs to be repaired.

4. System is all electric; understands there is no generator. Electrical costs are sky rocketing. The Principal discusses this cost at meetings which is concerning.
5. Noted that Kevin Dion attends all the Board of Ed meetings and provides an update on the project with discussion.
6. Seeing a design option for the Black Box that reflects current terms rather than accommodating the needs of the school community and would like the Committee to make sure students, staff, teachers are getting what they need. Need spaces to plan for activities within the design. Hoping the architects will respond to those needs. Worried about spending money on superfluous options that may hinder the Board of Education from renovating other buildings in town that require updating.
7. Thanked the Building Committee for spending time to work on this. It is appreciated by the entire Board of Education.
8. Asking to schedule meetings opposite the Board of Education meetings so that a representative may attend.

### **Review and Approval of Invoices**

No invoices presented.

### **New Business**

Arcadis Project Update – Mr. Butkus noted the following:

1. Responded to Mrs. Timpanelli's concerns noting there has been a number of improvements to prior designs. A field trip was taken to Farmington High School Black Box and there were concerns brought forward from members of the TPS staff and design team. The design team is working to address those concerns. A follow-up meeting was held with the Principal and Assistant Principal and they walked through the proposed adjustments from TSKP. They noted the design had significant increase in capacity in the gym and adjustments to the Black Box has more flexible space than originally shown. There are still areas to be discussed. The goal of having a half student body occupancy in the Black Box has not been reached and may not be reached and still maintain functionality as a Black Box. The gym space design improvements to accommodate assemblies, pep rallies, the promotion ceremony, etc. have come a long way and should allay any concerns.
2. Overall, the project is moving forward and they are in schematic design.
3. Upcoming meeting to meet with the Public Works Director and Trumbull Day coordinators to be able to explain what the site will look like in 2026 so they can make appropriate plans.
4. In discussion on how they are best equipped to execute the test well for the geothermal system so they can move forward and collect data.
5. Feels the project is in a better position than when concerns were expressed to Mrs. Timpanelli and making good progress.

### **Questions**

1. (Mecca) – there was a great presentation at Town Council and feedback was specific to performance space and capacity. This may have prompted the discussion. Requested clarification about the Black Box as there is not a main stream understanding of what it is as it is

a fairly new concept. How does it differ from an auditorium? (Butkus) – an auditorium has fixed seating and fixed performance area; a Black Box theater is meant to be completely flexible. The intent of the space is to provide infrastructure for lights, etc. that can be used in any configuration within the space. According to space standard of the State, an auditorium is not a common feature any more.

2. (Rickert) – noted for the parent performance, 300 chairs are set up and student performances is per grade (286 has been the highest to date). Chairs set up is according to the function of the usable space. The cafeteria has poor acoustics, folding chairs of various quality and site lines are not good.
3. (Lubin) – under the current plans what is the maximum capacity of the Black Box. (Butkus) – currently it is 300 seats with a stage.

Architect's Project Update – Mr. Scott discussed the following:

1. The concern about the building location and how much fill would be required is being addressed (the improvement to the southwest corner of the pit which is mostly fill or elevation of the gym). Sketches were sent to TPS after discussion with the structural engineer to see if they could remove the defunct natatorium, music spaces and some of the locker rooms early to establish a clean line on the school. This would allow them to create a new zone that, while the building is occupied, fire trucks could still get around it and Bismark could build this part of the building in a safe way and minimal impact. This allows a majority of the front north wing of the building to be on/close to actual grade level with the current school and for movement of the other side of the building out of the pit area with the fill. They believe there is considerable construction savings to be yielded in the area of six to seven figures. After consultation with school administrators, they feel confident to proceed with some preliminary pricing efforts to determine the potential savings. They will then bring this back to see if the savings is worth the inconvenience. This should not affect the parking. They will work with Town officials to maintain a fire lane access for the existing school. (Cinelli) – how long would it take to demolish that part of the structure and how does it fit into the timeline? (Scott) – first you have to abate it and then demo. It is not a quick process. Would be started in the summer and hopefully could be completed in that summer. (Lubin) – does this change affect the delivery date of the school? (Scott) – it will affect Bismark's timeline but wouldn't expedite matters. (Raucci) – Bismark is looking at this and starting building pricing to see the value and also reviewing the process. (Scott) – if we can build a better building, it is worth looking into. It would be the same footprint just moved into the new space. (Butkus) – this process should not be a problem within the eight week timeframe as long as cutting the portion of the building does not require a lot of temporary work to fix the wall on the south end. (Gerbert) – is there any idea as to the abatement timeframe (Raucci) – should be done within four weeks with concrete work to complete the wall. (Nugent) – would like more detail on how the savings are being calculated. (Scott) – approximately \$2 million in fill and demo of that area is included in the estimate. Question is how much fill could be eliminated and what is the cost of stabilization of the gym wall. (Alterman) – removing the pool, weight room, two music rooms and partial locker rooms; the gym will remain fully functional until the new school is occupied. (Scott) – yes.
2. Design development plans were reviewed.
  - a. Trying to right-size the gym, kitchen and cafeteria seating.

- b. Working on definition of the planetarium because of the technical details and use of outside parties; changing rooms and PE offices; second elevator; mechanical rooms and mechanical spaces throughout, toilet count to meet code but still function as a classroom wing.
  - c. Working to minimize encroachment into the educational spaces for mechanicals. Working on flexible teaching space. Mechanicals do not affect the required locker counts in the corridors.
  - d. Working on the concerns of the assembly spaces in the building. Proposed gym designs were shown having 300-600 seat capacity.
3. Proposed Black Box designs were shown. Hillcrest staff is requesting a fixed stage. Storage is also a requirement. Ed Specs are difficult to achieve with this request. Discussion was held regarding various configurations for seating and stage areas. Retractable seating is expensive. (Lubin) – has staff weighed in – yes. Board of Education – no. (Rickert) – visited the Farmington High School Black Box and are much closer than they were a week ago for the new design. Met with chorus and music instructors and still have some details to be worked out. Trying to maintain key capacity benchmarks to run the programs but also maintain the square footage of the entire building. They are working within the limits. (Alterman) – how are the acoustics in the gym? (Scott) – not ideal as it is a gym. Noise absorption details will be included. (Alterman) – Black Box will be designed with better acoustics. (Alterman) – design of the planetarium with rest rooms, will this also be considered for the Black Box so that the area can be closed off from the other part of the school. (Scott) – yes. (Lubin) – location of elevators. (Scott) – one in each of the three story wings.

Bismark's Project Update – Mr. Raucci discussed the following:

- 1. Having bi-weekly meetings with Arcadis and TSKP to review progress. Mr. King and Mr. Rickert attended the last meeting to discuss the field fencing and geothermal wells.
- 2. Working on construction schedule phases.
- 3. Review of test well locations will be determined.

### **Next Meeting**

The next meeting will be held in person on October 28, 2025 at 7:00 pm in Council Chambers. Future meetings in November and December will be discussed. Mr. Lubin noted Tuesday was the most convenient day for Committee members but consideration will be given, as requested, to avoid Board of Ed meeting dates.

### **Update on the Commissioning Agent**

Mr. Bova noted they have a letter of award signed. Mr. Nugent is working out the details of the contract and they should be available to come to a future meeting. A presentation should be given to introduce themselves.

### **Geothermal**

Mr. Semmel discussed the geothermal that was previously noted. From an energy standpoint, he has no problems, if that is the best way to proceed. His concern is that geothermal was not part of the Ed Spec or something they needed in the building. They are concerned, if it will be prohibitively expensive, how

it will impact the final fixtures and those items that affect the students in the classrooms. He does not want to get to the final phase and find out things can't be done and the students are not getting what they need. If geothermal is what is needed, how does it impact the final touches of the building for teachers and students. (Lubin) – noted the Committee was concerned also and all options were reviewed. While initially the up-front costs were higher, it was determined for the long run, it will save the Town substantial money. Budget numbers originally developed included geothermal and are close to the budgetary Ed Specs for the other needs of the school. (Butkus) – when the project went to referendum, there was a supplement to normal construction to develop a net zero design. During the schematic design phase, geothermal with distributed heat pumps was preferred and was the base bid for the numbers compiled. Numbers secured and adjustments made by the Building Committee resulted in no affect to Ed Spec while maintaining the highly efficient system. As other parts are developed, there is a design contingency that covers the intricacies of the design without taking away from the Ed Spec. (Scott) – can provide information on other schools with net zero designs as being proposed. (Butkus) – there is a generator in the building. Questions is how large to cover more than life/safety requirements. The estimate included a generator.

(Cinelli) – the Board of Ed and Superintendent should be aware that the selection by the Committee of the teams is saving money.

#### **Adjournment**

**There being no further business, motion was made by Mr. Alterman to adjourn the meeting at 8:00 pm; seconded by Mr. Cinelli and approved by unanimous consent.**

Respectfully submitted,

Barbara Crandall  
Clerk