Approved 2-19-2024

Merrimack School District
Bond Hearing Minutes
Merrimack Town Hall – Matthew Thornton Room
February 5, 2024

Present: Chair Ken Martin, Vice-Chair Laurie Rothhaus, Board Member Lori Peters, Board Member Jenna Hardy, and Board Member Naomi Halter. Also present were Assistant Superintendent for Business Matt Shevenell, and Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Amy Doyle.

1. CALL TO ORDER/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Chair Martin called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. BOND HEARING FOR A PROPOSED $6,900,000 BOND TO FINANCE THE CONSTRUCTION AND ORIGINAL EQUIPPING OF A NEW COMBINED SUPERINTENDENT'S OFFICE AND STUDENT SERVICES OFFICE.

Chair Martin explained the Student Services Building and the Superintendent's Office were constructed as small three-bedroom ranch houses in 1963. The Superintendent's Office building (green house) was acquired in 1973 and the Student Services Office building (blue house) was acquired in 1979.

Chair Martin highlighted issues with the current buildings:

- Building security is non-existent providing no secure entrance or locked vestibule.
- Confidentiality of conversations is non-existent due to the structure and location of the offices.
- The Human Resource Department is located in the basement and accessed via stairs only.
- The only evacuation route from the basement is via the stairwell.
- The buildings are not ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) compliant.
- Emergency evacuation routes are limited.

Proposed New Building

- Designed to serve District needs for now and into the future.
- Centralized and consolidated offices for Superintendent of Schools, Student Services, Student Wellness, Technology, Business Operations, and Human Resources.
- Greater confidentiality for public and staff calls and meetings within the building.
- Public meeting room for both public and District use.
- Energy efficient construction.
- Secure and sufficient storage.
- ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) Accessible.
- Compliant with current building codes offering a solution to proper egress routes in case of threat or emergency evacuation.
- Would have a secure entrance constant with school buildings.

Marinace Architects was chosen from the bids to build the proposed construction of the 11,100 square foot building with a 2,000 square foot basement, if approved. If approved, the new building will be constructed on the site of the former Brentwood School.

Chair Martin explained a 15-year bond schedule will be less than the cost of the middle school bond that was just paid off.

3. Public Comments

David Rutzke, 38 Belmont Street, questioned why the consolidated building is being proposed at this time and why the need for many administrative offices within the building.

Marie Berry, 50 Marty Drive, stated that she supports the idea of building a new building but disagrees with the scope of the project. She compared the proposed building to Nashua School District's SAU office. She questioned why the proposed building will have many individual offices rather than shared working space. She questioned why the proposed building is 2,000 square feet larger with an elevator than the previous proposal in 2010. She understood the need for the conference room. She asked if there had been a decrease in the leadership staff to correspond to the decrease in student enrollment.

Jeanne Wagner, 4 Cowan Road, spoke to the security at the current Superintendent's office. She noted that if the vestibule in the Superintendent's office was closed regularly, it would provide some security.

Chuck Mower, 4 Depot Street, spoke in support of the proposed combined Student Services Building and the Superintendent's Office. He emphasized support for additional meeting space. He stated the reasons to pass this proposed bond and construction project are too numerous to particularize.

Vice Chair Rothhaus thanked everyone who spoke. She noted the proposed project has been a passionate project of the Planning and Building Committee for many years. She noted the current environment is not a good working environment for the administrative team.

Vice Chair Rothhaus recalled one administrative position had been eliminated during her time on the School Board.

Chair Martin spoke to the need for the Leadership Team, consisting of 21 people, to have a place to meet.

Chair Martin stated every conversation pertaining to a student is confidential and we have an obligation to maintain that confidentiality.

Chair Martin explained that storage area was needed for the many file cabinets containing records.

Chair Martin noted legal requirements for administrative staff positions have grown in the last 25 years. He added some administrative staff positions were reduced and others consolidated.

Board Member Hardy stated Merrimack School District is an employer and is responsible to provide a safe and healthy work environment for employees. A large number of employees work in a basement without an egress. She cited a situation where an applicant was not able to enter Mr. Olsen's office in their wheelchair for an employment interview. She emphasized the importance of having ADA compliant, safe and healthy work environments.

Board Member Peters explained commercial leases put the cost of expenses on the tenant and there is the possibility of having to relocate at the end of the lease. The expense of leasing commercial property exceeds what the bond would be over time.

Board Member Peters explained modular units deteriorate over time and would cost more over a 20-year period than a 15-year bond for a new building.

Board Member Peters explained that a 15-year bond would not be new dollars out of taxpayer pockets.

Board Member Peters explained the 2,000 square foot basement is needed to house technology equipment that was not needed ten years ago and for storage for records.

Board Member Halter clarified that the voters decide to support this project or not on election day in April.

Board Member Hardy moved to accept the bond article as presented, seconded by Lori Peters.

The motion passed 5-0-0.

The bond hearing adjourned at 6:50 p.m.