MINUTES OF THE CHESHIRE TOWN COUNCIL SCHOOL MODERNIZATION COMMITTEE (SMC) MEETING HELD ON MONDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 2019, at 7:00 P.M. IN COUNCIL CHAMBERS, TOWN HALL, 84 SOUTH MAIN STREET, CHESHIRE CT 06410

Present
Committee Members: Jen Bates, Matt Bowman, Cathy Devlin, Rich Gusenberg, Kathryn Hallen (BOE), Anne Harrigan (BOE), Ann Marie Kemp, Rene Martinez, Charles Neth, Sylvia Nichols (Council), Anthony Perugini (BOE), Peter Talbot (Council). Ex Officio Member – Robert J. Oris, Jr. Town Council Chairman. Absent: Paul Bowman (Council)

Staff: Town Manager Sean Kimball; Asst. Town Manager Arnett Talbot; Supt. of Schools Jeff Solan; COO (Dept. of Education) Vincent Masciana.

Mr. Oris called the meeting to order at 7:04 p.m.

1. ROLL CALL
   The Clerk called the roll and a quorum was determined to be present.

2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE
   The group Pledged Allegiance to the Flag.

3. INTRODUCTION OF MEMBERS
   Mr. Oris welcomed everyone and thanked them for becoming involved in the work of the committee. He noted that 40+ people responded to the volunteer call, and an excellent group has been selected to serve on the committee. Due to the great response, the public membership was increased to seven (7) members. Those who were not selected will have the opportunity to become involved in sub-committees of the SMC.

   Members of the SMC introduced themselves and highlighted their personal, educational, business experience and background.

   Meetings of the SMC will be held in Council Chambers, will be broadcast on live tv (and taped) and will be aired on the Town website. Mr. Oris noted there will be complete transparency in the process with minutes of every meeting. The Council and BOE worked collaboratively on the Alexion building option for the school project, which was not successful. Mr. Oris stated the Council and BOE will continue to work collaboratively on an important school plan, and the SMC is an extension of that effort. The plan must also be based on fiscal prudence for the benefit of the community.

4. PROCEDURE FOR ELECTION OF CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR
   Mr. Oris explained that the SMC members will decide on who will serve as Chair and Vice-Chair of the committee.

   Ms. Hallen, BOE Chairperson, stated the sooner the selection of officers is made, the better it is for the SMC. These people will be leading the group.
In response to a comment from Ms. Devlin regarding the “name” of the committee, Mr. Oris stated the SMC is a way to begin to look at modernization of the schools and the importance of “doing” rather than the naming of the committee. He noted the Town Council voted to call the group the “School Modernization Committee”, but this could be changed by a vote of the SMC members.

Mission Statement – Mr. Oris advised this statement was compiled by both the Council and BOE, and he read the statement into the record.

5. REVIEW OF CHARGE TO THE COMMITTEE

The Town Council Resolution #091719-8 was read into the record by Mr. Oris. This resolution establishes the School Modernization Committee and the “charge” to the committee.

With regard to a question from Ms. Bates on the completion date of September 15, 2020, Mr. Oris explained it is based on a date certain, a given time for SMC to do its work, and something to be advanced in time for a referendum vote in November 2020.

Ms. Hallen stated the date gives time for the committee to work and make a recommendation to the Council and BOE, with the committee possibly meeting a few times a month. For the BOE to get State funding/reimbursement for a school project, Ms. Hallen said the recommendation must be submitted by June 30, 2020.

If the report to the Council and BOE will not be ready by 9/15/20, Mr. Oris said SMC can request to extend the completion date.

A request for information (costs per school, costs per student, last five capital improvements, types of fuel used, utility costs, etc.) on each of the Cheshire schools was distributed by Mr. Bowman to committee members and staff for review. Mr. Bowman suggested there be a staff presentation on the prior study, its strengths and weaknesses, at the next SMC meeting.

Ms. Nichols talked about the time frame completion schedule, and said it allows for things to get done, following deadlines and reporting times.

Mr. Neth asked about deliverables and the plan for the committee, and said he agrees with statements made which is a good start for future fact finding.

The committee was informed by Mr. Oris that there are appropriated funds for an RFP to find a consultant for the SMC. A consultant is needed to start the process, and there could be a consultant on board sooner than later. According to Mr. Oris, the Council and BOE do not want to tie the hands of the committee, expect the SMC to come
forward with a plan, i.e. closing a school, renovations at the high school, or build another school…and these are all decisions from the SMC to the Council and BOE.

This committee is totally ambiguous, and Mr. Talbot said the Council and BOE talked about the importance of starting with a blank sheet of paper. Anything is fair game, and it is hoped the expertise and diversity of the membership will provide out of the box ideas not yet thought about.

There was a similar group three years ago with the BOE plan, and Mr. Perugini explained this plan looked at enrollment trends, size of the school building, past projects, hired a consultant, etc. so this information is available for the SMC. There are also options for hiring a consultant.

Mr. Gusenberg stated the committee does not have to start at square one, as much of the information in each school is available in the prior report, which should be given to the SMC. He briefly reviewed his past administrative experience with school construction, renovation and redistricting.

Mr. Martinez said the SMC should look at the prior report, get to have a broad understanding of what the committee wants to keep and start the RFP for a consultant.

The SMC will write the specs for the consultant, and Mr. Oris reiterated that the funds have been appropriated in the capital budget.

Mr. Masciana advised there is a great deal of readily available information to be shared from the 2017 report, and it can be sent to everyone through Google docs sharing. For the next SMC meeting, Mr. Masciana offered to put together a detailed presentation on the school buildings, enrollment, status of each building, etc.

**Agenda Items** – Mr. Perugini recommended that items be proposed by committee members to the Town and BOE staff. The current report should be given to SMC members for review, questions to be answered, etc.

Ms. Talbot said committee members can request specific items for the agenda, and there will be clarification on what will be discussed at all meetings.

**6. REVIEW OF RULES OF PROCEDURE**
Ms. Talbot explained the SMC would follow the Town Council’s Rules of Procedure, where applicable, such as selection of a Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson. She noted these two positions are a big job, and include setting the meeting agendas, meeting with staff, running a meeting, maintaining order and decorum. The SMC could have executive sessions to discuss certain issues, i.e. land acquisition.
Other than executive session, all meetings are open to the public, will be taped, have transcribed minutes, have a public comment section on the agenda, and follow Roberts Rules of Order. Under FOI, Ms. Talbot advised that everything done as an SMC member is public; a quorum is seven (7) members, in person or via e-mail, and must be accessible to the public. The agenda and minutes are all part of FOI, and are posted on the Town’s website.

E-Mail Accounts for SMC members – Ms. Talbot said there can be one SMC e-mail account for all members, and there will be a permanent record of all e-mails in Town Hall. This is the same as was done for the Charter Revision Commission.

7. SET SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS
The SMC members had a lengthy discussion about scheduling of future meeting dates, with flexibility needed to accommodate Town Council and BOE meeting schedules, especially during the budget process, and member schedules.

Ms. Talbot offered to go through the Town meeting calendar and correlate the dates. There is flexibility with morning or weekend meetings and/or workshops.

SMC will review the 2017 report and Five-Year Capital Plan for the Town and BOE at the next meeting.

With a review of the prior master plan, BOE Chairperson Ms. Hallen said everyone will have more information on the modernization plan for the school system.

Mr. Masciana will provide information on the prior report, and give a short presentation on the BOE Five-Year CEP (maintenance work plan, no modernization projects).

Mr. Gusenberg recommended the SMC hold one meeting at each of the Cheshire schools. SMC members agreed with this recommendation.

School Visits – It was suggested by Mr. Bowman that SMC members make individual visits to the Cheshire public schools on their own time.

Supt. Solan welcomes visits by SMC members to the schools. He advised that both during school hours and after hours, a guided tour would be scheduled and is better for these visits. They can be set up by the Superintendent’s staff.

The committee and staff had a brief discussion about consideration of building a new school and closing a school. Mr. Gusenberg commented on redistricting being an emotional issue for people, and the SMC being careful about closing or not closing a school and students being redistricted. He said these conversations will be needed.
The committee members agreed that the people in the community should know what is going on in their schools, the needs driven by the school system (i.e. need for a 6-8 middle school), and being open-minded to discuss each school.

Ms. Nichols stated the SMC must consider the educational needs of the students and the changes in teaching today.

Mr. Gusenberg talked about his experience with school projects/additions, new education programs requiring different facilities, and the need for support facilities (cafeteria, gym, media center, etc.) with a school renovation project.

Mr. Perugini commented on the prior BOE report, and SMC members realizing it is not “in stone”, and having their own thoughts and ideas about a modernization plan as the committee work moves forward. He also asked any SMC member interested in being the Chairperson or Vice-Chairperson to reach out to the membership before the next meeting and express their interest.

It was suggested the SMC have a Facebook Page as a forum for factual information.

Public Comments – Mr. Oris recommended every SMC meeting have a “Public Comments” section. He opened this meeting to public comments. There were no comments or questions from the public.

Mr. Oris reported that, in the past, there has been outreach to the public on the school projects, and SMC can schedule a public session meeting for public input.

SMC Meeting scheduled for Monday, December 2, 2019 at 7:00 p.m. in Council Chambers.

The proposed agenda for December 2nd will include the following items:
- Information provided on 2017 report; one-half hour presentation by BOE staff (Mr. Masciana)
- Capital Budgets FY 2019-2020 for Town and BOE
- Election of a Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson
- Public Comments section
- Schedule next meeting; availability of SMC members
- Discussion on publicity for SMC

Mr. Masciana suggested a Google calendar poll with dates and times for committee members to provide availability for the next 3 or 4 meetings.
8. **ADJOURNMENT**

MOTION by Mr. Bowman; seconded by Mr. Perugini

MOVED to adjourn the meeting at 8:30 p.m.

VOTE The motion passed unanimously by those present.

Attest:

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Marilyn W. Milton, Clerk