MINUTES OF THE TEACHER/STAFF INPUT SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE CHESHIRE TOWN COUNCIL SCHOOL MODERNIZATION COMMITTEE (SMC) MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 2020, AT 2:55 P.M. TO 3:40 P.M. AT DOOLITTLE SCHOOL LIBRARY, CHESHIRE CT 06410.

Present
Jen Bates, Rich Gusenburg, Anne Marie Kemp; Robert J. Oris, Jr. Town Council Chairman; Staff: Dept. of Education Asst. Supt. of Schools Marlene Silano

1. ROLLCALL
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 PURPOSE OF INPUT SESSION
Supt. Silano explained that the School Modernization Committee (SMC) was formed between the Town Council and Board of Education. There are a number of subcommittees within the SMC, and the Teacher/Staff Input Committee is one of them. Members of this committee are Rich Gusenburg, Chairman, Jennifer Bates and Ann Marie Kemp (SMC Chair). The goal is to gather information from the people who work in the school buildings on how to improve the school facilities. All meetings will be videotaped.

Mr. Gusenburg gave a short introduction of the SMC and its mission to look at what should be done with Cheshire schools. The SMC membership includes three (3) Town Council and three (3) BOE members and seven (7) members of the community. He noted the Council deemed it important for full and open visibility for all meetings, so they are being videotaped. Over the next few weeks, the SMC will hold one of its regular meetings at each of the Cheshire Schools, with a tour of the school building, followed by discussion on pros and cons of each facility.

The issues of concern were pointed out by Mr. Gusenburg as follows:
- Overall facility
- Classrooms
- Core facilities
- Special Education
- Parking and Grounds; Parent drop-off and pickup
- Feedback on grade levels – Middle school 6 to 8 vs. 7 to 8; grade 6 at the elementary or middle school; 5 and 6 grades intermediate school; or any variation of the grade level structure.

4. COMMENTS FROM BOARD OF EDUCATION TEACHERS AND STAFF REGARDING SCHOOL FACILITIES
Amy O'Brien, Principal of Doolittle School, reported she has been at the school less than a full academic year. She commented on Doolittle being one of the best schools
in the district. Classrooms are not large; space is adequate for the current 1 to 6 grade levels; there is enough space for almost everything, except storage and closet space. Ms. O’Brien said that Doolittle is a beautiful school, with a nature walk which they do not want to lose.

Kristen Gallagher, 2nd grade teacher, talked about the steep roof as an issue, leaking, soffit problems, ice freezing and some flooding in classrooms, and mildew and mold in some areas.

Sarah, 6th grade teacher, cited issues with moisture on the vinyl tile slab floors, which become slippery and unsafe, and some classrooms with smells of mildew.

Kristen R. 2nd grade teacher, suggested there be mobile storage, on wheels, for easier movement and less likely damage by the cleaning staff. She said bookcases do not hold up well, and suggested the SMC receive teacher input for a new school.

Nicole, 3rd grade teacher, commented on classroom storage with large metal old cabinets, lockers in the hallway for grades 4 and 5, bookcases without backs, most teacher desks being broken and held together with duct tape. The student desks were purchased over 20 years ago, and she said the laminate peels off and they do not stay open.

Physical Education Teacher said Doolittle has a beautiful gymnasium, with a slab floor; the area hallway sometimes has puddles of water; and a wet gym floor on hot/humid days. There is new tile in the hallway near the gym, and it has condensation.

Jen P. 1st grade teacher, reported on the issue of mice in the school, and her room had a small snake earlier in the year, with another snake found in another area of the school. She talked about inclusion of Kindergarten students into the school so there is support for these students as they transition into 1st grade. This would also provide more interaction for 1st grade and Kindergarten teachers.

Mr. Gusenburg commented on that issue being one supported by the SMC.

Jen Dube, 2nd grade teacher and former Darcey teacher, explained that Kindergarten students from Darcey into Doolittle have a difficult time transitioning to the new and larger school and its environment.

Mary, SRBI Teacher stated that Kindergarten at Doolittle would be a space issue with more classrooms needed.

Andy DeLucia, 6th grade teacher, talked about 6th grade students being forced into the elementary school environment when they should be in the middle school.
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Sarah, 6th grade teacher, explained the team teaching on this grade level, and the 6th grade curriculum in an elementary school being very challenging.

Lindsay, Counselor, said it is a disadvantage that the Kindergarten students are not part of the Doolittle School community; other schools have the opportunity to work with the young students. It would be better for these students to be in-house rather than Darcey sending the information for their transition to 1st grade. The counselor's office is too small for meetings with students, and it has no windows.

Melina, 4th grade teacher, has taught at other Cheshire schools, and commented on the beautiful nature walk at Doolittle School. She also reported there are bats in the school building, especially the gym area.

Beth, 3rd grade teacher, commented on the heating and cooling system in the school...it is either hot or cold, sometimes warm, and this makes it difficult to work with students. There is no air-conditioning in the school, with the exception of the Library. There is condensation and there is no air flow.

Christine (teacher) said the heating system is ancient; a yard stick is needed to turn blowers on and off; cold air can be felt under the blowers; there are bacteria, debris and rodents in the system, which is not healthy, and mice in closets and heating units.

Jen P. talked about seasonal allergies which affect children and teachers, with students going home sick; there is a need for air-conditioning in the school.

Kristen G. 2nd grade teacher, said there are many problems. Maintenance is called to her classroom and others. The air flow system comes from outside into the floor system and out; outside air goes through heating units, the air strips can be felt and papers move. Filters are not changed regularly, and some teachers block off the air flow. All of this is a major concern with an older boiler system. There is no hot water in some classroom sinks, but the new part of the building does have hot water.

Sarah, 3rd grade teacher, stated her classroom has hot water...too hot for students to use the sink.

Rebecca, Special Ed Teacher, stated more special education classrooms are needed, and teachers have had to use shared space.

Karen, Special Ed Teacher grades 4, 5 and 6, said there are two teachers in a small room making it difficult to service special education students. She stated the SMC should consider the special education needs in classrooms.

Sarah, 3rd grade teacher, talked about air circulation with windows open; her classroom abuts the playground area, so it is a noisy environment even with windows closed.
Kelly, 3rd grade teacher, said windows are opened in the summer, and she considers this a security risk; there are no outside speakers on the grounds for announcements or notification of an emergency.

Kristen D’Orio pointed out the doors do not lock or unlock easily, and this is an issue when there is a lockdown.

Beth, 6th grade teacher, talked about the doors on the courtyard side, difficulty with windows which are hard to open throughout the building and do not lock. Window latches are not always working, can be easily slid open and this is a security issue. This is all an indication of the age of the Doolittle School building.

With regard to windows and replacement, Mr. Gusenburg explained that the BOE is undergoing a window replacement that is a multi-year process. Most of the school buildings have single pane windows with loss of heat through these windows.

Nurses Office – has air-conditioning, one room to service students, and small area for students to lie down.

With increasing student population, staff expressed concerns about parking during student drop-off and pickup. Parents are parking on the grass areas, which is not permitted. Doolittle does have more outside space than the other schools for parking.

Mr. Gusenburg thanked the teachers and staff for their input on the Doolittle School facility. He advised there will be a full report to the SMC upon completion of meetings at all the district schools.

The SMC will be working on a comprehensive plan to bring to the Town Council in September for referendum in November 2020. It is not certain SMC will make this time line. An outside consultant is being hired to assist SMC in looking at the best ways to deal with the district facilities, and there must be consideration of what the taxpayers can afford. Whatever the plan will be, it will reach out over a few years. It could include a new school or renovations. The State of Connecticut has a higher reimbursement with a “renovation as new” criteria if a district does not want to build a new facility.

Council Chairman Oris thanked the teachers and staff for attending the meeting. He was pleased to see how many teachers gave their input on the school facility and did not mind talking in front of the camera. The teacher input is very important to the SMC, and the entire community can view the videos of each school and know what staff had to say.
Mr. Oris commented on the information from teachers and staff as being enlightening to him. He explained the Town Council gives the BOE the funding for the school budget, and how that money is spent is a decision of the BOE.

During this meeting, Mr. Oris heard about ongoing maintenance issues which teachers and staff must deal with, and some of them can be fixed...and their message insures they will be fixed...but some of them are large capital expenditures.

A new school or renovations is the key issue, and the SMC is charged with hearing about how teachers would teach students in a new school building.

Mr. Oris said climate control is a horrendous issue, and a new building or renovated building would fix these issues. The SMC will consider classroom sizes, space locations, interdisciplinary services being closer together, special education needs, grades K-6 at Doolittle and what would happen with this arrangement. Everyone is interested in fixing the problems.

Mr. Oris stated Cheshire has the best teachers, and he thanked them for what they do every day.

There are elderly citizens on fixed income in the community who want to continue to live in Cheshire, and Mr. Oris pointed out that the Council must make decisions without increasing the mill rate too high for all citizens. There are thoughts about new construction or renovations for schools that have good bones. He believes the Town will have the answer by November.

Mr. Oris cited his promise to the community that if the project is not ready it will not go forward.

The Doolittle teachers stated their maintenance staff is top notch, doing the best with what they have...and the staff strongly supports them.

Mr. Oris invited the teachers and staff to communicate with the SMC about any issues or concerns. With so many in attendance at this meeting, he said the other school teachers and staff have a hard act to follow.

Mr. Oris thanked everyone for attending the meeting and for their informative input to the SMC.

On behalf of the committee, Mr. Gusenburg thanked the Doolittle teachers and staff for attending and participating in the discussion.

5. ADJOURNMENT
MOTION by Ms. Bates; seconded by Ms. Kemp

MOVED to adjourn the meeting at 3:55 p.m.

VOTE The motion passed unanimously by those present.

Attest:

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Marilyn W. Milton, Clerk