MINUTES OF THE TEACHER/STAFF INPUT SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE CHESHIRE TOWN COUNCIL SCHOOL MODERNIZATION COMMITTEE (SMC) MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 2020 AT 9:30 A.M. IN CHESHIRE HIGH SCHOOL LIBRARY, CHESHIRE CT 06410.

Present
Rich Gusenburg, Chairman; Anne Marie Kemp
Absent: Jen Bates
Staff: Dept. of Education Asst. Supt. of Schools Marlene Silano; CHS Principal Dr. Mary Gadd.

Mr. Gusenburg opened the meeting at 9:30 a.m.

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 and hear from the people who work in the school buildings on how to improve the school facilities and have the instructional means to meet the needs of the students. All meetings will be videotaped.

Mr. Gusenburg explained the goal of the SMC is to have a full plan for modernization of the schools by September for November referendum. He noted this is an aggressive timeline, and it is uncertain if the SMC will meet the timeline. The committee meetings are being videotaped in order for the full SMC and community to see, first hand, what is being done, and meeting minutes are submitted to the SMC members. The plan could include renovations or new construction, and there are financial issues for consideration. The most advantageous plan will be looked at along with the cost to the community.

The teachers and staff present were asked to provide input on the high school facility, focus on the programs, their evaluation and change, and whether the high school facility can meet the needs of those programs and other things that can be done.

4. COMMENTS FROM CHESHIRE PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS AND STAFF REGARDING SCHOOL FACILITIES
Leslie Paier, Business Department Teacher, asked what the committee has looked at for a modern school, update to schools, 21st Century learning at schools outside of Cheshire, learning environment and how students are learning.
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The CHS staff was informed by Ms. Kemp that the SMC has an “Out-of-District Subcommittee” that will tour renovated or new elementary, middle and high schools outside of Cheshire…in districts similar to Cheshire. These tours/visits begin next week.

Mr. Gusenburg said most of the SMC members are not educators, but they want to insure everyone is educated on what the Cheshire schools need. Talking about the changing nature of education is a way to go forward.

Ms. Paier commented on CHS classrooms being varied in size…small to medium with 24 students in a class. Space and tables are needed for collaborative learning; there are temperature issues in the classrooms along with other physical aspects.

Michelle Catucci, Guidance Counselor, talked about the FDL program and focus. She also said there are temperature issues, roofs leaking, windows do not open, there is no meeting space; Psychologist, Social Worker and Counselors work together to support students, and room is needed for expansion of services.

Ted Galvin, Social Studies Department Chairman and Teacher, commented on CHS being a 1950’s structure when education was lecture driven with smaller classrooms. CHS could benefit from a more flexible environment. Students do collaborative and individual work within a class; new furniture and tables are needed to facilitate new learning; classrooms are too small; there is no space for 3 to 4 students to work together.

Steve Trifone, Athletic Director, explained that in his job he visits many schools in the State with the CHS teams. Many of these schools have been renovated in the last 10 years. He has opportunity to visit classrooms, and noted the change from the institutional type of building from the 1960’s to a more open air environment. CHS does not have the facility to house 1400 students at one time. The concept of a new school is inviting. Mr. Trifone pointed out the front of CHS is inviting until you enter the building.

Artur Branco, World Language Department Chairman and Teacher, distributed a copy of information/items for the department to the committee. He talked about there being no space for teachers to prepare for class, meet with students, help students, many offices also serve as a lunch room, prep room. There is no area to hold confidential meetings with students. Classrooms are too small; there is lack of flexibility to allow mobility; teachers cannot walk around a classroom and work with students one-on-one; some teachers work on moving carts which is not good for instruction. CHS has poor air quality; some rooms have no windows; fumes from buses pass through classrooms; inside temperatures are either too cold or too hot, which is not conducive to learning, and students sometimes wear coats; working toilets are needed, along with warm/hot water in the bathroom. CHS has security issues, classroom safety…rooms are not designed to protect students from inside or outside threats. Mr. Branco is 30 years in
CHS, and said many changes are needed...no more additions, patches or band-aids. He is hopeful the town will take care of the situation.

Deb Bottaro, Special Education Chair and Teacher, talked about access to the building for students with disabilities and explained the route from the front of the school to different areas in the school. Some areas of the building are unavailable for these students. With a fire drill there is a plan, but it is not easily accessible. It takes disabled students a long time to get to the gym, auditorium, and other areas. Ms. Bottaro commented on special education being driven by legislation with changes to service the students, transitioning of students for after high school, independent living, how to make a bed, etc. There is lots of therapy and more space is needed such as therapy/transition rooms for student privacy.

In that regard, Mr. Gusenburg advised that SMC had a presentation by Mr. Masciana on declining enrollment, but there is growth of special education programs, and lack of space in the school district.

Dan Tartarelli, Vice-Principal, commented on the lack of parking spaces for CHS staff and students. Some student drivers park at Bartlem Park, cross a busy street during rush hour, and this is a safety hazard. The morning student drop-off (by parents) is difficult; teachers have a hard time getting to the school; buses are competing with parent and student drivers. He cited the importance of renovating parking areas for students.

Mr. Earley, Art Teacher, said there are three (3) teachers in the Art Department, in one old room in the basement, cabinets are falling apart, the air temperature cannot be regulated, and there is old furniture that is falling apart. More space is needed for the Art Department for storage of supplies and materials...and the department should be more a part of the high school.

Sean McKwon, Industrial Arts, said better and larger equipment is needed; there are safety issues all day long; there are water leaks, electrical cords, trash cans catching water leaks. There are air quality issues; dust collects due to the type of work being done; there are industrial welding class fumes; the early childhood education program needs a safer area. Staff tries to partner with area community colleges for programs, and it is uncertain the high school facilities would pass State inspection. More space is needed for support services, prep spaces, meeting spaces for students and parents; windows cannot open; concrete floors are waxed and become slippery with the sawdust; the lab furniture is old, and some furniture was donated by a bank; and a major building improvement would be the high heat issues.

John Kushner, Music Department Chairman, talked about the Chorus Room and Band Room, spread out storage areas with supervision and safety issues, and the benefit of the department being connected. There is no break-out space, windows or doors. The new band room is of adequate size; more cabinets are needed as current ones are
breaking up and will not lock. The old band room is windowless, but has some air-conditioning; a/c units for the auditorium and gym would be helpful; there are temporary units for students needing air quality assistance; the chorus room needs a/c, and air would be better circulated if windows were installed. The band room has heating issues, and is sometimes up to 90 degrees. With 160 to 200 band students it is difficult to supervise when they are practicing in many small areas. Acoustics vary in the three rooms, and better acoustics are needed in the new band room; storage is an issue for musical equipment. One a/c unit in the auditorium is not functioning (on the stage) and it is hot during performances; the lighting board needs to be upgraded.

Ian Wildermann, English Department Chairman and Teacher, said he discussed issues of concern with the Drama Dept. teachers, and all had similar complaints about the auditorium and stage areas. There is lack of storage for props; bathrooms are used as dressing rooms; a separate set area/space is needed with larger doors for moving props and sets. The sets on stage interfere with other events in the auditorium. Mr. Wildermann cited the BRAVE program as one that should be inclusive of all CHS students in the auditorium, not seeing it on a link. He commented on CHS being a declining structure needing asbestos abatement, etc. and asked at what point does the town stop putting money into a structure built 60 years ago.

Kathy Sullivan, Physical Education and Health Teacher, explained that the two gyms are used 24/7 by the school and community, and the east and west gyms have many issues. Storage is minimal; money is needed to replace and upgrade the locker rooms; windows are left open in the boys’ locker room for air; west gym (girls) locker rooms are atrocious; it is embarrassing when other teams visit CHS and use these rooms; there is bad ventilation, lack of handicapped accessibility and sometimes elevators freeze during use; there is no regulated heating/cooling system.

Tanya Kares, Science Teacher, said there are 15 teachers in the department, using small classrooms; one teacher is a floater and has no assigned space; students have study halls in the lab space and this is an issue. The cabinets are old/cannot be locked/or need 3 separate keys and still malfunction; cabinet glass fronts are falling off; storage space is old and minimal; the roof leaks with rain entering one of the science rooms. Ms. Kares has concerns about air quality. For STEM and GSS there is no space in which to put these models. Students are not using the small lockers, and bring backpacks into the small classrooms, which is an issue as teachers trip over them. Windows, heat, cooling, air quality and circulation are problems throughout the school, along with plumbing and heating in science labs and classrooms. In Science classes, gas jets cannot be used due to possible problems.

John Redford, Math Teacher, Union President, submitted a list of concerns from the Math Department. He noted that school wide there are HVAC issues and problems, maintenance issues with things not done right the first time. The Math Department is in the new wing (upstairs); has good sized classrooms; but there is no storage. He said Cheshire students deserve better than what they are getting. Mr. Redford noted
the new ceilings already have leaks from the roof, and ceiling tiles have been replaced a few times in classrooms.

Dr. Gadd stated that the Cheshire High School recent evaluation under #7 cited the recommendation to solve heating and cooling issues and long term plan to address structure issues in the 2 and 5 year reports.

Parking – A custodian is posted outside; he puts out cones and gates to shepherd traffic safely; but he could be doing something more constructive.

HVAC – there is absence of a large adaptive space, and no space for the entire school population to get together at one time.

Tom Lewoc, Chrome Book Technology Integrator with the District, talked about teachers and cross department sharing, CHS access to the WiFi network as comparable to a college in the State. He commented on lack of handicapped access in Science classrooms, and lack of power access for these students. CHS has a great WiFi setup, but not enough power access. Mr. Lewoc works in all the school buildings, and the district does not have equity for teachers across the board. He mentioned the security issues because of the dual entrances to the high school, noting that for Power School and security, Cheshire is far behind.

Mr. Gusenburg and Ms. Kemp thanked the CHS teachers for their important input on the high school.

5. **ADJOURNMENT**

MOTION by Ms. Kemp; seconded by Mr. Gusenburg.

MOVED to adjourn the meeting at 10:48 a.m.

VOTE The motion passed unanimously by those present.

Attest:

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Marilyn W. Milton, Clerk