Present
Rich Gusenburg, Chairman; Jen Bates; Council Chairman Robert J. Oris Jr.
Absent: Ann Marie Kemp
Staff: Dept. of Education Asst. Supt. of Schools Marlene Silano; CHS Principal Dr. Mary Gadd.

Mr. Gusenburg opened the meeting at 2:01 p.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 SMC has three subcommittees (Teacher/Staff Input, Out-of-District Site, and RFP (for consultant) Committees). All the committee meetings are being videotaped in order for the full SMC and community to see, first hand, what is being done. Meeting minutes are submitted to the SMC members and are on the town website. The SMC 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.

On behalf of the Town Council, Mr. Oris thanked the teachers for attending the meeting. He said his three children went through the Cheshire School System and are very successful thanks to their great teachers. Mr. Oris commented on the school physical plants being old, the need to fix them, and how to do it in a cost effective manner. The
mandate of the Town Council and BOE is to work out the school system issues on behalf of the entire town, and part of this plan is to talk to the people in the community so they know what they are voting on.

4. COMMENTS FROM CHESHIRE PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS AND STAFF REGARDING SCHOOL FACILITIES

Dawn DeMeo, English Teacher, commented on the CHS building being used by many outside groups from 2:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. every day; the lack of nighttime security and inconsistency of security with doors and windows that do not lock; no regulations about space being used (i.e. stage) being put back into the norm; lights get broken, and repairs come out of the Drama program budget. Ms. DeMeo talked about the auditorium stage being a good size, old equipment (lighting), no secure area for equipment, broken auditorium seats needing repair, staff accommodations for programs and events, I.E. Department building the sets for performances which is a great student experience, and need for classrooms closer to the stage as a benefit.

Ms. Bates asked teachers how a new school would solve some of the current issues at the high school.

Ms. DeMeo suggested hiring one person to monitor and manage the stage/auditorium space, handle lighting and sound, keeping everything in order.

Tanya Chouney reported that Hamden H.S. remodeled its stage/auditorium, enabling staff and students to leave sets in the stage area; there is additional theater classroom space with teachers engaging more with students. CHS has rehearsals in the hallways, and more classroom space is needed.

Ms. Velec, World Language Teacher, has a classroom without windows, poor ventilation, no regulation of heat, bus fumes come into the classroom which affects her and the students and their health. She has had continuous sinus infections; the health problems affect others; there is poor classroom lighting; if there is a fire in the school her room has one door and a small window without an exit to outside; with a lockdown her door cannot reopen; security in the school is not safe. Ms. Velec worries about her health due to the existing poor conditions in the school.

Michelle Kochiss, English Teacher, talked about the heating issues and 80 degree temperature every morning this week. She noted students get sleepy due to the hot atmosphere. She meets with parents and staff for PPTs and space is needed to conduct these meetings, and there is lack of conference rooms.

According to Dr. Gadd there are four (4) conference rooms in the high school, and smaller rooms are repurposed.
Mr. Oris asked about adequate sized classrooms for teaching, which will be a requirement for a renovation project…and how to segment the community groups using areas of the school.

Donna Carbone, English Teacher, said larger classrooms are needed; students do much of their work on computers; a teacher cannot walk around a room during class.

With regard to the size of a classroom today, Dr. Gadd advised it would be 900 S.F.

Holly Skrzynirz, Social Studies Teacher, has a classroom with 24 desks, two Instructional Assistants (without desks) and the room is too small, as are doors and hallways.

Katy Oparowski, World Language Teacher, is a homeless teacher who works full time on carts, and said her own space would be amazing to have. In one day she has 6 classes, 5 prep periods, and is in 4 different classrooms. This is not an effective teaching method for students or the teacher. There are 15 people in the department, and all share a small office which is also a lunch room and storage space.

Artur Branco, World Language Teacher, commented on the lack of office space, and the department office used as a lunch room, storage room and conference room. There is lack of space for confidential meetings, tutoring students, and instruction. Teachers cannot move around in the small classrooms space and will not run the risk of possibly touching a student.

Mary Lent, Science Teacher, was in Room 85 which was a great classroom, but she is now in Room 72, with cabinets that are broken, glass fronts falling off (dangerous). With new teaching standards this style of teaching is no longer. In smaller rooms teachers fall over student backpacks; windows do not work or open or close. There are many safety issues in her room.

David Cadugan, Science and Chemistry Teacher, commented on broken lab sets, accidents waiting to happen, chem labs being large enough and shared by many teachers, teaching/lab sequences being off due to scheduling.

Jim Vicario said more communal space is needed at the high school. At meetings teachers sit on the floor; there is lack of space for AP testing, special education student assessments; there are no teacher break rooms or prep period space, collaborative space, and the faculty room is inadequate. The high school has no space for the entire student body to meet, and this happens once a year, freshmen to seniors meet on the athletic field. The storage areas are inadequate. There are parking issues, with parents parking in fire lanes and handicapped spaces, and widening areas within the school would help with this problem.
Virginia Knott, Social Studies Teacher, talked about multiple problems such as storage for the classrooms, humidity in the rooms, brown stuff growing out of the floor tiles, leaking when it rains, replacement of windows, safety and security concerns of the building. Ms. Knott said she does not feel safe in the building all the time. She noted the security booth is inside the building…so a person is already inside the building before being registered.

Mr. Oris stated the safety of everyone is of utmost importance, and he is glad this issue has been brought up by the teachers.

Gina Warburton talked about building security, the fingerprint scanner to get into the building, and her inability (on a weekend) to get into the building to do something with students. Recently, at the rear of the building another organization was using space, had all doors and windows open, and she was able to walk right into the school building. There are safety and security concerns even on the weekends.

These are important issues and Mr. Oris said that even with a new school there will be community use, and the question is management of the security and safety.

In some schools the public areas are together and Mr. Gusenburg said they are blocked off from the rest of the school building.

Matt Swanson cited his health issues as a teacher in the building, with migraine headaches. He has a classroom with windows, must leave one window open, cannot turn on the heat due to the headaches, and tells kids to wear coats because his classroom will be cold. He does not believe the tunnels were fixed; when the hatch is opened, no one is to be in the building for health reasons; and if this is the case something is wrong and needs to be addressed. Mr. Swanson gets sinus infections from the open hatch and has concerns about his health issues, and has had more sinus infections than he can count. The hatch opening triggers these infections and he said something is under there making people sick. If the hatch cannot be opened with people in the building, it should not be opened at all…and people going down there should have safety equipment. He has a larger room; it is cramped; there are tables that can be moved around; there is no storage or security for equipment, especially for Winter Fest. Restrooms have no ventilation, are hot boxes and have broken utilities.

Amy Balisciano, English Teacher, echoed Mr. Swanson’s comments about the poor air quality in the high school building. From September to January she does not feel well, has migraine headaches due to poor air ventilation, and other poor health issues. This is disheartening and scary. The students do not feel this as much because they move around the building all day while teachers are stationary in their classrooms.

Mr. Oris stated his concerns about what he is hearing, and hopes there is quality testing for these issues. With the hatch not being opened unless everyone is removed from the building, there must be understanding of the issues and how to deal with them.
Having people in spaces not conducive to their health is not something anyone wants, and he is anxious to learn more, in the short run, how to help and assist staff with these issues. He commented on the "glue" coming up from the floors and it is something more serious, and it must be fixed. Mr. Oris said it is clear that air handling is a problem in these aged buildings, along with climate control and HVAC issues. However, in the short run, he said health issues must be addressed and fixed, and he is not pleased people are not feeling healthy in their space.

Rebecca Elliott, Special Education Department, explained that this department needs more space to service special education students, and the space should be closer to the counseling office. Conference rooms are not large enough for 12 people (parents, students and staff), and space is needed for testing students in an alternate setting.

All of this must be brought to the public and Mr. Gusenburg said there is lower student enrollment over the last decade. So, people think there should be lots of extra space, but do not know about the special programs that now exist taking up more space. Without this space, the school district would be out-sourcing students at a higher cost.

Leslie Paier commented on the need to bring classroom space to the 21st century learning environment to prepare kids for college and the work force. Ms. Paier talked about new windows in the computer labs without air-conditioning units, and keeping these rooms cool. There is a need for better labs; some rooms have portable air-conditioning units installed (duct taped to a window) that do not work and are blowing hot air. The Business Department also has old windows with cold air coming through the crevices...but these windows have old a/c units that do cool down the classroom, so new units are not needed. Whatever the future plan, new school or more band-aids to improve the high school, these are things to be thought about for cooling down rooms.

Terry Morneault, Business Department, has a classroom with new windows and blinds that do not block out the sun…the room is too bright…and she spends time pulling down 9 blinds every day.

Kim Christensen has a room with the mysterious growth out of the tiles, mostly in September, and it grows in the middle of tile...not in the grout. If looking at new classrooms, multiple power outlets are needed for all the technology, without cords all over the room. In terms of security, new locks and bolts are needed for classroom doors as current ones are outdated. From the inside of the room teachers cannot tell if a door is locked, and an inside bolt or system is needed to insure doors are locked.

It was stated by Mr. Gusenburg that he is certain new construction will have great ideas regarding security and safety.

A suggestion was made by some of the teachers that SMC consider an organized meeting with students regarding their perception and ideas for the high school.
Mr. Gusenburg said this is not in the plan at this point, and meetings are only scheduled to meet with teachers and staff. In walking down the school halls today he noticed the small lockers and understands the need for kids carrying backpacks around. There is a need for larger lockers for backpacks.

Laurie Reed, Assistant Principal CHS, informed the group about recently changed State graduation requirements which include Humanities and STEM. There must be a look at the best way to collaborate departments to meet the requirements.

With the first BOE school modernization plan, Mr. Oris said it was a 6-8 middle school model as the first option. He asked if teachers were comfortable with the design, etc. in this plan...some of the option would still work well today. It is important to know if something has changed so dramatically over the last four (4) years, and now a building design would be different...teaching wise, curriculum wise, for a particular look.

Mr. Gusenburg said the design was for a middle school, with the high school coming after.

Ms. Lent noted the size of the middle school and high school students is different, and the high school Science model is different from the middle school model.

In the morning session, Mr. Gusenburg said there was discussion about focus on real life experiences in classes, with more group activity and projects. There were a lot of concerns raised about storage for Tech Ed, Music, Art Departments equipment and materials.

Ms. Elliott said the role of special ed teachers has changed. There is no place for work on transitioning skills; special education needs have changed; some rooms do not have a complete wall, heaters run all the time, and classroom instruction and talk can be heard between the special ed room and chemistry room next door. She does not have storage; there is no space to work; p.t. and o.t. space is shared in a related service area and should have its own space.

Asbestos Abatement – this is an issue in the high school. CHS is the shelter site for the town, and abatement could not take place if the roof is leaking. Aside from academic things, the high school is a community service building; it should be open for the people in emergencies; and structurally it should be sound.

It was explained by Mr. Gusenburg that the SMC must look at choice for a school, i.e. the high school. The State says the town can renovate…but it must be “renovate as new”…doing all that must be done so the school looks and feels like a new school. The question is what will it take to renovate a school like CHS to make it like new…or what would it take to build a new school. He noted asbestos abatement would be extremely expensive.
The issue of the State reimbursement rate was explained by Mr. Oris. The reimbursement for renovation is higher than for new construction. Another difficult piece is dealing with school issues now, how to time things with every school. Even with a project starting tomorrow it will take two (2) years to get off the ground going through the process...just for one school. The town must be thoughtful about everything. If the decision is to start with a 6-8 middle school...how does the town deal with the high school repairs and renovations...keeping staff and students comfortable until the town can do the next phase of the approved plan. This is the challenging piece. The town cannot afford $500M to do all schools at once. There is the challenge to figure out the logistics...which school to lead with...6-8 middle school...what is most important...how to gain efficiencies. From an educator's perspective and from what Mr. Oris has heard, the 6-8 middle school is important. Once this is done it allows for other consolidations throughout the school district...possibly taking a school off-line. There would be operating efficiencies and savings for additional debt to renovate the schools that will be here for a long time. The high school would be here for the long haul, renovated as new or another building on this or another site. The pieces are challenging, without easy answers.

According to Mr. Gusenburg, the SMC must come up with a long term plan...additions or new building over a period of time. No decisions have been made.

Ms. Skrzynirz (Social Studies Teacher) said most of her department rooms have walls that are paper thin, causing disturbance among classrooms...one room having testing while an adjacent room is noisy.

The committee members thanked the CHS teachers and staff for attending the meeting and for the good job they do every day teaching the students.

5. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION by Ms. Bates; seconded by Mr. Gusenburg

MOVED to adjourn the meeting at 3:28 p.m.

VOTE The motion passed unanimously by those present.

Attest:

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Marilyn W. Milton, Clerk