MINUTES OF THE TEACHER/STAFF INPUT SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE CHESHIRE TOWN COUNCIL SCHOOL MODERNIZATION COMMITTEE (SMC) MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 2020 AT 2:55 P.M. TO 3:45 P.M. IN THE CHAPMAN SCHOOL LIBRARY, CHESHIRE CT 06410.

Present
Jen Bates, Rich Gusenburg, Anne Marie Kemp
Staff: Dept. of Education Asst. Supt. of Schools Marlene Silano; Chapman School Principal Diana Burns; Supt. of Schools Jeff Solan
Guest: Sylvia Nichols, Town Council Member

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 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 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

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 and are on the town’s web site. 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.

Ms. Kemp stated she is a former Chapman School parent and looks forward to the town going forward with a school modernization plan.
Ms. Bates is a former Highland School parent, and thanked staff for coming to the SMC meeting.

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

Jane Adinolfi, Special Education Teacher, commented on Chapman being a small community school which works well for students and staff and programs. She shares her classroom with another special ed teacher, and they make it work.

Diane Mancini, 3rd Grade Teacher, talked about co-teaching/team teaching, which cannot be done due to small classroom sizes, and rooms do not open up to each other. Grade level classrooms are not located near each other; this makes communication difficult; and teachers use planning time to work together.

Tanner Munroe, 6th Grade Teacher, said there is a need for dedicated space for the “Maker (STEM) program, which must be separate from the Science Room.

Regarding 6th graders in elementary or middle school, Mr. Gusenburg asked for opinions on this issue.

Mr. Munroe said there are pros and cons on both sides. Currently, the district 6th grade teachers cannot collaborate other than e-mails. With 6th grade in the elementary schools, the students stay part of the school community. The 6th grade teachers instruct in multiple subjects; teaching one specific subject would be better, as is done in 7th and 8th grades.

Mr. Gusenburg pointed out that the Dodd teachers prefer 6th grade teachers being certified in subject areas, i.e. 6th grade math. 6-8 grade middle school is not an easy process, and is more expensive.

Ms. Mancini feels that, developmentally, students may enjoy being at the middle school, but they are still young, and keeping them in the K-6 school keeps them younger a little longer. Her children experienced the 6-8 middle school but they were too young to be exposed to this level, and she and they did not like it.

At Chapman School, Mr. Munroe pointed out that teachers are exposing 6th graders to the middle school concept with switching classes. This helps with the transition to middle school. The 5th graders do not switch classes.

Mr. Munroe cited the issues of heating and cooling in the school. The rooms get to hot in the winter; heat cannot be regulated; windows are opened and it gets cold; it is too hot in the summer due to lack of air ventilation, inability to open windows.
The library is either too hot or too cold; some special ed rooms have air-conditioners.

Sherry Abelson, Art Teacher, has an Art room on the lower level, and she has heating and cooling issues in her room.

Susan Squire, 1st Grade Teacher, agrees with the window situation. Windows cannot open or are stuck; caulkling has resulted in windows shut tight, with cold air coming through; one day her room registered 60 degrees by the windows; the water used for the boiler system had something wrong and was fixed.

Ms. Abelson needs double the space for the Art room that services every student in the school. There is limitation on what can be done with students due to lack of storage. Other schools have larger art areas with more storage, and teachers can do large scale student projects; her room has tables held together with duct tape; new furniture is needed; the old kiln (for clay and sculpting projects) is in another location in the building, and should be closer to the Art room.

Jen Istas, Librarian, talked about the Library being below grade level. The facility has no windows, is far away from the rest of the school with difficulty getting children up and down stairs, and more space is needed for student projects. The library program is project based learning, which requires more space for kids to spread out and have hands-on activities. The Library needs more space and storage, and heating and cooling issues must be addressed.

The teachers and staff were told by Mr. Gusenburg that Council Chairman Oris has attended many meetings, and Council wants to hear from them on how a building affects educational programs. Cheshire students are doing well; the BOE has wonderful staff and administrators; but the buildings are hindering things in some way.

Principal Burns noted the noise coming from the Y Program on the other side of the Library doors, and during lunch waves the noise from the students competes with learning in the Library. The Band Room music practice noise also affects learning in the library.

Krista Saraceni, School Psychologist, has her own office space in the lower level with a glass wall barricaded with a table. She can conduct groups, testing, and doing things with students away from day to day activities. Ms. Saraceni commented on the glass wall as worrisome and a possible danger to students. It would be preferred if her office space was upstairs and closer to the Counselor and office spaces. Sometimes she uses the conference room for her services.

Andrea Wintenburg, Reading and Math Coordinator, explained there are two interventionists (primary and intermediate grade levels) in the school building. They
have one small work space; take corners of other rooms when possible; and they need more space.

Joanne Brown, Speech Language Pathologist for Chapman and Highland Schools, said there is no dedicated space for testing; and standardized testing is done in the band room and other rooms; sometimes there are four (4) groups for students with special learning needs with issues, all in close proximity. This is far from ideal…and more space is needed.

Amanda Weyrauch, Special Ed Teacher, said her resource room is downstairs, is smaller than a regular classroom, and typically she has more than one group going on at the same time.

The administration showed all of the rooms on a school district map to the SMC, and Mr. Gusenburg said student population is declining. Many people thought there would be empty classrooms, but because of the growth of special education there are no empty rooms.

Ms. Weyrauch commented on the space needs for special education students, especially a sensory or break room. This enables students to get away from their peers, take a break, decompress, etc. It is needed space.

Michael Grego, P.E. Teacher for Chapman and Doolittle Schools, noted the Chapman gym is smaller compared to other schools in the district. He must adapt lessons to the smaller space, and if class sizes grow, it would cut into p.e. activities. With the short ceiling, students cannot throw a basketball; gym activities are limited in the colder seasons; in the warmer seasons the p.e. activities are outside on the field space. The gym is also the auditorium; his storage space is limited, and he uses the closet and some stage space.

The SMC is meeting at Chapman School at 7:30p.m. tonight (Feb. 19th) and the meeting is open to the public.

Alice Klitherian, School Counselor, is new to Chapman School. She was surprised the school does not have an elevator; there are stairs everywhere; it is unique there are lockers for the older kids; young ladies are stuck when they have personal issues and lockers are important for student personal belongings; there is no privacy space for guidance meetings.

Mr. Gusenburg stated he was surprised at the lack of handicapped accessibility throughout school buildings, and every building should be accessible. These are things on the books for 50 years and handicapped accessibility must be taken care of in Cheshire schools.
Some of the teachers commented on the student backpacks, and how heavy and large they are becoming.

Ms. Saraceni talked about it being appropriate for 6th grade students to be in the middle school where the environment would better suit their needs. She said the Dodd structure seems to meet these student needs.

Principal Burns added that in her hometown of Westbrook a new middle school was built with 5th grade moved into a 5-8 grade middle school. The advantage is 5th & 6th graders have the opportunity to participate in middle school sports, clubs, after school activities. This opens up a big world of opportunity, much beyond the academics.

There are many different arrangements, and Mr. Gusenburg said they are driven by programs when building a new school.

Joanne Kotlarz, 2nd Grade Teacher, said current bathrooms have issues; paper towels should be removed; doors are an issue and do not make sense. Students go unattended into the bathrooms with many other students in a closed door room. This should be taken into account with school modernization...i.e. half bathroom doors/privacy divider. Ms. Kotlarz commented on bus duty, and students being petrified of thunder and lightening, and lack of a space to protect these children.

Open Space/Parking – Ms.Burns explained that as an old school, Chapman was not designed with the thought of parent drop-off and pickup. Buses pull into the front lane closest to the entrance way; there is a cross walk and then parking lot. Parents dropping off children pull into the parking lot, children exit the car in the parking lot, crossing the lane where buses come in. The area is heavily chaperoned and supervised with adults insuring children safety. It is a horrifying setup...and it only takes human error for an incident to take place. It is the safest procedure for the design in place now. The best setup is a separate place for parent drop-off and pickup, completely isolated from the area of bus travel. In a perfect world, Ms. Burns would like access from RT 10 with buses coming in from RT 10 into the side parking lot for student drop-off. When parents pick up they are asked to use the cross walk, but this does not happen. There is not enough parking for the school building.

Ms. Burns commented on limited parking space for after school activities. For open house the sessions are broken into two time periods. 6th Grade promotion is a full house event with standing room for attendees; there is parking at the church across the street; for concerts and band performances, field day...there is not enough parking. The school has an updated sound system donated by the PTSA. Should the gym have to be evacuated quickly it would be a challenge when the entire student body is in attendance.
Regarding school programs, Mr. Munroe commended Mr. Grego for being open and supportive of staff and accommodating these programs.

Meredith Jermine stated classrooms do not have enough storage for materials and supplies, and storage cabinets and space is limited.

Rob Bryden, Kindergarten Teacher, explained there are not enough electrical/power outlets in the classrooms and school building...more are needed. The rooms are hot, ceiling fans are needed, a few classrooms have old water fountains; the trap must be kept filled or there are gas smells, and these fountains should be removed. His classroom is a little bigger, has a bathroom, and more storage than other classrooms.

**Technology** – There are issues with the Smart Boards, which are older and being phased out; sometimes they work and sometimes they don't; Chrome Books are being used by students with more technology accessibility.

Susan Fenaughty, 2nd Grade Teacher talked about technology, Chrome Book carts, sharing carts which makes it more difficult for teachers, and having to put the cart in the hallway...and lack of a computer lab in the school.

Intermediate classes have a dedicated Science Room, and Ms. Mancini said help is needed with changes in the curriculum on the primary grade level.

Garrett Rigali, 3rd Grade Teacher, said new windows for the schools have been slated for over 20 years due to leaking, grout and glass issues, water seeping through onto the floor, damaging books, bookcases and student work. In the future the school buildings could have integrated air-conditioning, tinted windows to reduce glare and the sun. He echoed the comments on the need for more power outlets. His classroom has two outlets so he uses surge protectors. Mr. Rigali stated any new infrastructure must support technology; storage is greatly needed with shelves and cabinets, and access to a sink, drinking fountain, purel dispensers...in each classroom. He informed the group that Prospect CT, Region 16, has a new school which his children attend. This school has larger classroom sizes, flexible seating, larger bathrooms, automatic sinks, hand dryers, outside lockers, etc.

Sylvia Nichols, Town Council Rep to the SMC, informed the group that the Out-of-District Subcommittee begins tours/visits to school districts with recent “renovations as new, refurbished or new school construction”. The first visit is Friday, February 21st to North Haven CT. The next tours/visits will include Meriden, Southington, Guilford, South Windsor. Ms. Nichols commented on the fact that issues will not all be resolved by September. She agreed about the lack of space issues, but if the school size is increased, there could be loss of fields, and with increased parking lots there is loss of bus problems. The many issues raised during the teacher input meetings will be looked
at, considered, and discussed, while trying to find a delicate balance in decisions made for the betterment of the Cheshire schools. The Council must look at important issues to be immediately fixed such as leaking windows…but not put lots of money into something which might be fixed in 4 or 5 years from now.

Before adjournment, Mr. Gusenburg advised that the SMC meetings are held on the first Monday and third Wednesday of the month…and they are videotaped and open to the public. He commented on Cheshire having older school buildings, and it taking time and money to alleviate the cited problems and concerns.

5. **ADJOURNMENT**

MOTION by Ms. Bates; seconded by Ms. Kemp

MOVED to adjourn the meeting at 4:05 p.m.

VOTE The motion passed unanimously by those present.

Attest:

Marilyn W. Milton, Clerk