MINUTES OF THE TEACHER/STAFF INPUT SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE CHESHIRE TOWN COUNCIL SCHOOL MODERNIZATION COMMITTEE (SMC) MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 2020 AT 3:45 P.M. TO 4:45 P.M. IN THE NORTON SCHOOL LIBRARY MEDIA CENTER, CHESHIRE CT 06410.

Present
Rich Gusenburg, Chairman; Jennifer Bates; Absent – Ann Marie Kemp
Staff: Dept. of Education Asst. Supt. of Schools Marlene Silano and Norton School Principal Kelly Grillo.

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. Mr. Gusenburg opened the meeting at 3:40 p.m.

Principal Grillo welcomed the SMC committee to Norton School.

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 academic needs of the students. All meetings will be videotaped.

Mr. Gusenburg explained the BOE had a plan four (4) years ago for school modernization with a grade 6 to 8 middle school, which was not accepted by the Town Council. The BOE and Council collaborated to move forward with a new plan and Council appointed the SMC to undertake the mission and report back with a plan.

The goal of the SMC is to have a full plan for modernization of the schools by September for November referendum. Mr. Gusenburg 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. 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 SMC has three (3) subcommittees – RFP Committee for selection of an outside consultant; Out-of District Committee to visit/tour districts with recent modernization of schools; and Teacher/Staff Input Committee to meet with staff and get their input on the status of their school and its needs.
Mr. Gusenburg informed the Norton School staff that SMC “Out of District Subcommittee” is visiting and touring school districts in Connecticut that have newly renovated or newly constructed schools. The committee visited North Haven CT and South Windsor CT in the past week and will visit Guilford CT next week. Plans are being confirmed to visit Meriden and Southington school districts in the coming weeks. SMC evening meetings are being held in some of the Cheshire schools following a tour of the school. The next meeting is Monday, March 2\textsuperscript{nd} at Highland School.

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

Kara LaDore, Science and Social Studies Teacher, 6\textsuperscript{th} Grade, commented on curriculum standards being written for 6\textsuperscript{th} to 8\textsuperscript{th} grade levels, the amount of time needed to teach core curriculum, and finding time blocks for other study areas. Ms. LaDore supports 6\textsuperscript{th} grade in the middle school. She said elementary classrooms are not set up for teaching science; the size of the classrooms are not equipped for 23 – 6\textsuperscript{th} grade students; and there is minimal storage for the teacher and students. Sixth grade teachers would love to be part of the middle school, and Ms. LaDore commented on redistricting for a 5\textsuperscript{th} and 6\textsuperscript{th} grade school.

The group was told by Mr. Gusenburg that the SMC will be looking at inclusion of 6\textsuperscript{th} grade in the middle school, and noted this is supported by teachers in every elementary school. The SMC will be hiring an outside consultant to provide guidance and help with the process and modernization plan for Cheshire. He reiterated that the time line is aggressive; it will be a step by step process; and it will take a number of years to update all the school facilities. The tours of the schools is being videotaped for public viewing. SMC must determine how to reach out to the community at large, and all the SMC work is open to the public.

Terri LaChance, 2\textsuperscript{nd} grade teacher, stated there is unusable space in classrooms due to the old heaters taking up space. She asked for a way to send photos to the SMC for their review.

Mr. Gusenburg recommended photos or any information be sent to the SMC e-mail address, which will be circulated to all committee members.

Bryan Campbell, Music Teacher, talked about the physical plant of Norton School and the big issues to be addressed. He cited the need for a multi-purpose space for school events, concerts, school plays, musical rehearsals and performances, and a full school assembly. When certain programs are held, a teacher is misplaced to use his/her space. The Music Department is at the extreme...in the basement and outside trailer. There is no lobby in Norton School where a parent can meet a child, and there are safety concerns when adults come to pick up a child. The trailers house the Music
Department, Art Department, Physical Therapy and Occupational Therapy, and they need to be replaced. Trailers are handicapped accessible.

Jillian Puckett, Art Teacher, read a prepared statement into the record about the Art Program…and she calls the trailer the “Fine Arts Suite”. In her statement, Ms. Puckett noted that 200 students a day are back and forth to the Art trailer; the ramp is falling apart; rain and snow melting result in puddles which soak children’s sox and shoes; the large fence is broken; small animals are under the fence and trailer, they die and an awful smell results. Trailers are small and ill-equipped; the Art Room does not have a kiln; there are climate control problems; the air-conditioning units do not work; the temporary heater works okay unless there is a power outage; the Art Room has no hot water; on hot days the temperature goes above 90 degrees, and instruction takes place outside the trailer. Ms. Puckett supports a multi-purpose space for events, without displacing a teacher, and said Norton School needs a lobby area.

The group was informed by Mr. Gusenburg that there will be a small addition on the front of the school (and other schools) for a “Man Trap Security System” for safety purposes…with double lock doors and provide monitoring from the school office.

Mr. Campbell stated that one teacher on duty at the front door is not enough to insure safety of the students.

Principal Grillo commented on the issues and problems with parent drop-off and pickup of students, and the Norton School parking area not being designed for the amount of current traffic. The school dismissal starts at 3:20 p.m. During the dismissal procedure, walkers leave the school to go home; some kids not going on buses are picked up; and the school uses the church parking lot across the road. There are safety concerns about the student drop-off and pickup, even with staff outside to supervise the activity. In bad weather the traffic is backed up on North Brooksvale Road, and buses cannot get into the parking lot. The bus loop is close to the building; buses pull up to the playground area entrance; students exit and go into the school. Cars go into the other lane; there is a sidewalk area and crosswalk to the front of the school; buses and cars do cross…and this is dangerous. Ms. Grillo advised that parents are encouraged to use the church parking lot for student pickup, and there is staff supervision and a crossing guard.

Kristen Cheek, 4th grade Teacher, talked about the limited classroom storage for the manipulators used for instruction. There is no locked storage and with many changes in cleaning services, there are things missing. Some children need accommodations…i.e. speaking into the computer and have no privacy; research rooms are over-crowded; and more power outlets are needed.
Jessica Giampietro, 1st grade Teacher (former Kindergarten teacher) explained that her storage area is up above in the room, is slanted downward, items fall off and this is a risk to the children. She has been hit by falling equipment. There are wonderful manipulators for primary level but no place to store them. Kindergarten rooms are much smaller making it difficult for individualized learning; flexible space and seating options are needed. There are technology needs; more power outlets needed to switch equipment; classrooms have no air-conditioning but do have windows that barely open; learning is impacted in the warmer/hot days.

It was pointed out by Mr. Gusenburg that an average classroom is 900 S.F. and Kindergarten room is 1200 S.F.

Nick Gurrieri, 3rd grade Teacher, also commented on the lack of storage for teachers and classroom equipment. His room has a 15 S.F. space for backpacks, coats and other student items...there are no lockers in Norton School. Storage space for manipulators is minimal.

Michelle Earley thanked the SMC for looking into improvements for Cheshire schools. She talked about the old heating units left in rooms along with vents, heat coils, and her putting book cases in front so students will not touch these units. There are pipes coming out of the closet with a hole in the floor down to the basement. Classroom window sills were replaced with plywood board, and have concrete crumbling behind the boards. Ms. Earley concurred with comments from other staff members on the many needs for Norton School.

Sue Landisio, Special Education Teacher, said there is handicapped accessibility and Norton School has an elevator; some bathrooms are not handicapped accessible and do not have accessible sinks. The ramp to the trailer is difficult to maneuver for a child in a wheelchair. Regarding the drop-off of students, there should be another drop-off area for special education vans and buses. Ms. Landisio talked about the need for the Nurse’s office to be centrally located in the center of the building, the need for separate entrance for special needs children, and a privacy area for children requiring special services.

Katie Bennett, Instructional Assistant, expressed concerns about safety, ability to exit a room and the school in an emergency situation, not being trapped in a room, and lack of security for the safety of the children.

Deborah Manke, 6th grade Math Teacher, supports prior comments about the 6th grade curriculum and programs, and cited the difficulty of being a 6th grader in an elementary school. Ms. Manke explained that 6th graders are ready for middle school. She talked about the “temporary” trailers at Norton School, which are now 30 years old and still on site and being used. There are problems with these trailers...no air-conditioning,
animals under the trailers creating offensive odors. Storage is an issue throughout the school; kids change classrooms carrying all their belongings; cubby areas are very small; more power outlets are needed in classrooms.

Regarding school buses, Ms. Manke stated that Principal Grillo has made bus duty 20 times better and safer than before; it is still not perfect; but is the best system in place for Norton School. More outlets are needed for computers and equipment, and more flexible grouping space is needed.

Ms. Bennett commented on all 1st, 2nd, and 3rd grade special education students being in one classroom on each grade level, and changing this.

The teachers were informed by Mr. Gusenburg that this is a scheduling issue, and the SMC is looking at facility issues.

Patrick Bishop, 4th grade Teacher, also cited the lack of air-conditioning in the school. In the past, before becoming a teacher, he worked in a forge where it was very hot. He said there are days in May, June and start of the school year when the classrooms are as hot as in the forge...above 90 degrees. It is hard to teach when it is so hot, and students do not attend to what is going on. Air-conditioning is needed for Norton School.

Mr. Gusenburg explained that the new schools or newly renovated schools all have air-conditioning and separate unit controls in the classrooms. The SMC will be hiring an owner's representative to assist with the process and final decisions to be made for the school system.

In all the school districts visited by the Out-of-District Committee, Mrs. Nichols said air handling and air quality were issues. This will be one of the issues to be considered by SMC as it is gathering facts. Nothing has been decided right now on a new school building or renovated schools. She cited North Haven CT school district, which built a new school 15 years ago...and it now has many issues to be addressed compared to their school built 2 years ago.

Principal Grillo cited the need for a larger space for teachers; flexible grouping and individual grouping spaces; multi-purpose area for school events, full school meetings, performances, etc.; larger special education spaces, testing spaces, privacy space for evaluations and office space; and attention to the parking lot for safety issues. Ms. Grillo stated the need for additional security cameras on the outside of the school building, as staff is blind to what is going on outside the building.

According to Mr. Gusenburg, new schools have complete interior and exterior and security cameras to insure safety of everyone.
Ms. Grillo said the primary level playground is located on North Brooksvale Road, but students are safe because there is a large staff assigned to them on the playground site.

On behalf of the SMC, Mr. Gusenburg thanked the teachers for attending the meeting and for their important input on the needs of Norton School.

5. **ADJOURNMENT**

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

MOVED to adjourn the meeting at 5:05 p.m.

VOTE The motion passed unanimously by those present.

Attest:

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Marilyn W. Milton, Clerk