MINUTES OF THE CHESHIRE TOWN COUNCIL SCHOOL MODERNIZATION COMMITTEE (SMC) MEETING HELD ON MONDAY, MARCH 2, 2020 AT 7:00P.M. IN HIGHLAND SCHOOL CHESHIRE CT 06410

Present
Committee Members: Ann Marie Kemp, Chairwoman; Rene Martinez, Vice-Chairman; Jen Bates, Matthew Bowman, Rich Gusenburg, Anne Harrigan (BOE), Andrew Martelli (BOE), Charles Neth, Sylvia Nichols (Council), Anthony Perugini (BOE), Peter Talbot (Council), Don Walsh (Council).
Ex Officio Member – Robert J. Oris, Jr. Town Council Chairman.
Staff: Asst. Town Manager Arnett Talbot; Supt. of Schools Jeff Solan; COO (Dept. of Education) Vincent Masciana; Highland School Principal Scott Jeffreys; Asst. Principal Erica Bordonaro; Richard Clavet, DOE Maintenance Manager

Ms. Kemp, called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

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. APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF FEBRUARY 19, 2020 MEETING

MOTION by Mr. Talbot; seconded by Ms. Nichols

MOVED to approve and accept the minutes of February 19, 2020 subject to corrections, additions, deletions.

VOTE The motion passed 11-2; Mr. Bowman and Mr. Perugini abstained.

4. TOUR OF HIGHLAND SCHOOL
Principal Jeffreys welcome everyone to Highland School. Mr. Jeffreys highlighted some of the information about Highland school – the school was built in 1971, it is a 100,000 S.F. facility, 50 classrooms, student population of 745, 130 employees, which totals 900 people per day in the school building working and learning. Highland School has 7 lunch waves with each wave serving 100 students. Due to lack of space the school community cannot hold events to include everyone…so events are broken down by grade levels…3 grade levels in each cycle. The school has never had an addition; student population has been as high as 1,000 in past years, and is now at 745 students. Highland School is the "newest" school in Cheshire.

Mr. Jeffreys conducted the tour of Highland School.

Gymnasium – the gym is very large, has a divided wall, and two classes at a time can be conducted in the gym. The gym is a community facility and on weekends there are
Parks and Rec sporting events taking place throughout the day; it has an upgraded sound system; and is used for larger events (6th grade promotion day). The gym floor is as old as the building, and the surface will be upgraded this summer. The gym has heating, but no air-conditioning; it has two locker rooms, large storage area, and offices for the physical education staff and coaches.

Community Lobby – This lobby is one of two in Highland School; 14 school buses drop off 600 students in this lobby (including special education buses), all under teacher supervision; there is parent drop-off on the other side of the school building; this lobby has the faculty room and two student bathrooms (girls and boys). In the morning, Kindergarten students are greeted by Instructional Assistants and taken to their classrooms; there is a crossing guard in the parking lot and on Route 10.

YMCA Programs – Highland School hosts the Y programs for before care and after school care for 100 students. Arrival time is about 6:30 a.m.; students eat breakfast and go to their classrooms about 8:45 a.m.

Classrooms – Room 50 – 6th grade Math Room is a typical classroom. Highland School was originally an “open” classroom school, but this teaching environment is no longer being used, and classrooms are now “closed”. The walls between these rooms are unable to have power outlets or data cords.

Highland School has 39 classrooms, grades K-6, and Music, Art, Physical Education, Library rooms…all of which are busy with students throughout the day.

Windows - The school windows are old, inefficient, hard to open…there is a plan in place to recycle two (2) windows a year for Highland School. The budget does not allow for more than two windows a year.

Mr. Clavet explained that the window work includes abatement, mill work, new windows, abandoning the heating units…and once done the windows will go for another 30 years. One of the major concerns for staff is the windows, particularly in an emergency situation.

HVAC – All classrooms have heating and air-conditioning; these are roof units; outside air is brought in; electrical units at the windows are not used and are abandoned in place.

Room 47 – This remedial room has new replacement windows; old electrical units were removed; the room has adequate shelving for students and teacher.

Room 40 – This 4th grade classroom has newer desks and chairs; furniture is being cycled into the intermediate level classrooms. The desks have the cubby underneath for student storage.
Ms. Nichols commented on the visits to other school districts and teachers not liking desks and preferring tables with flexible seating for 21st Century learning.

Courtyard – this area is sometimes part of the regular learning routine; staff/students can cross over/short cut to the other side of the building; in nice weather students read in the courtyard; there are tables and chairs for staff lunch breaks. The courtyard provides an open and airy environment, and lots of light.

Room 34 – This room was an open space classroom with Room 34 for co-teaching and this design was not the most secure; the classrooms are closed off by a sliding wall; and the open space concept is no longer used with walls closed.

Grades 2, 3 and 6 have smaller pod areas.

Computer Lab/Trailer – This trailer (2 rooms) is entered by teacher finger scanning; the trailer is always locked; it has heat and air-conditioning, bathrooms and water. Students (K-1-2) use this facility for computer lab; Students in grades 3-6 have Chrome carts. The trailers are used daily.

General Music Rooms (2) – The rooms are next to each other; the walls are not open; they need insulation.

Bathrooms/Sinks - Every classroom in Highland School has a sink and cabinets; the school has adequate number of student bathrooms; the school has only four (4) adult bathrooms for its large staff; K-1-2 have classroom bathrooms; grades 3-6 have hallway bathrooms.

Room 19 – Grade 2 classroom – this primary grade classroom has a “ZenZone” for students; this area is a good example of social/emotional learning.

Highland School is the home for many district special education students and the autistic program.

Entering Highland School – Mr. Jeffreys explained the entrance process to Highland School. People ring on the outside; enter the main lobby/office area, provide identification, and enter their information into the guard system for screening. They are provided a name tag w/photo in order to visit in the school. All school doors are locked during the daytime; if doors are open there is staff monitoring.

Kindergarten Wing – This wing of the school houses five (5) kindergarten rooms and one (1) first grade classroom.

Library – The Library has a rolling wall, “maker space”, lower level reading space, and is a great facility enjoyed by staff and students. Although the reading space is not
handicapped accessible, Mr. Jeffreys pointed out that accommodations are made for these students to enjoy the Library and what it has to offer. There is a chair lift on the stage (in the gym) for wheelchair accessibility and bathrooms are handicapped accessible.

Mr. Jeffreys commented on Highland School being a great school community, well maintained by staff, with great teachers and students. For consideration of a modernization plan, he cited the parking areas, and movement of buses and cars as a priority. He expressed appreciation to the Cheshire Police Department for their assistance with safety issues, and extending the traffic light by 10 seconds for buses and cars to safety and quickly exit the school.

5. DISCUSSION RE: HIGHLAND SCHOOL
On behalf of the SMC, Ms. Kemp thanked Mr. Jeffreys for the tour of Highland School.

6. PRESENTATION OF CHESHIRE PUBLIC SCHOOLS STRATEGIC PLAN
Supt. Solan gave a short presentation on the Vision for Cheshire Schools/School Modernization Focus. He noted this as critical information for SMC. A copy of the presentation is attached to these minutes.

Supt. Solan cited excerpts from the modernization focus:

_Vision of the Graduate_ – Prepare students to become lifelong learners, succeed academically, socially and emotionally; develop skills across disciplines and life worthy application. Student as Thinker and Learner(self domain); Students as Collaborator (others); Student as Community Contributor (world).

_Cheshire Performance Standards_ – complex thinker, creative thinker, self directed learner, effective communicator, collaborative/cooperative learner, community contributor. What conditions within a school facility best support the achievement of these goals?

_Conditions to achieve these goals_ – focus on opportunities for collaboration, flexible grouping(seating), provide for opportunities, differentiated to meet individual needs of students, provide spaces for teacher conferencing, design for flexibility given the pace of change, considers more sophisticated early childhood and special education needs (bring students back into the home district, provide better services at lower cost).

_Early Faculty Impressions on Needs_ – HVAC, larger adaptable spaces for instruction and collaboration; space to accommodate large scale meetings; update science facilities; provide additional storage; security conscious, but not overbearing; natural light.
Programmatic Vision – Dr. Cardona, CT Commissioner of Education, emphasizes supporting the connection between school and career. CPS has been evolving to better provide powerful learning opportunities in industry that leverage traditional classroom learning into deep application. CPS has worked to expand learning outside of the traditional classroom opportunities (i.e. internships). Supt. Solan commented on the STEAM, career and technical education, working on problem solving, the CHS TV Lab, photography studio and focus on creativity. CPS will build on this in the future with focus of a comprehensive high school environment.

BOE Chairman Perugini talked about “trades” for students coming out of high school, expansion of wood shop, machinery areas, and making things available for the middle school and high school student. The BOE plan hones in on more space used in the right way, more storage and giving rooms what they need.

Supt. Solan said a major shift is from learning being a passive experience to an active experience, applying what is learned, where to find and evaluate information and do something with it.

7. SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS

RFP Committee – Mr. Neth reported the responses to the RFP are due March 12th; presentations of 30 minutes per responder will be held on Wednesday, March 18th in Town Hall Council Chambers, and will be part of a regular SMC meeting. Questions to responders will come only from SMC members. Two firms showed up for the non-mandatory meeting (Colliers and Arcadis). To date, no questions have been received from the firms who received the RFP.

Out-of-District Committee – Ms. Nichols reported on the committee visits to North Haven middle school and high school, Platt H.S. in Meriden, Guilford H.S., South Windsor elementary schools. She said these districts had concerns about flexible space.

North Haven H.S. is now 15 years old and needs to be updated already; the middle school is 3 years old and in good condition. SMC wants to make sure Cheshire has a 30 year window for its schools. The North Haven middle school was renovated as new; it was built with sheet rock walls which the staff does not recommend; windows are an issue with so much expanded glass requiring cleaning twice a year and associated high maintenance costs.

South Windsor CT – this district has three (3) renovated elementary schools, and #4 will be completed this summer; the town had three (3) referenda for each school project with all approved by 80% of the voters; there was an active community group (separate from the BOE and committee) that supported the projects and gave positive presentations to the community. The average cost for each of these elementary schools was about $35M before reimbursement.
The school districts hired owner’s reps

Guilford CT H.S. – Project cost of $97M with 30% reimbursement; this is the newest high school visited; it is a pod style facility; it is light and airy, but very secure; and is an excellent project with awesome facility. Classrooms are average size; student break areas and cafeteria are light and bright; staff and students were very involved in the process, as were staff and students across the district. Guilford hired a consultant first and then an architect was hired. The project manager developed the RFP for the architect. This high school has a fully glassed conference room as you come into the school; it is very visible to those coming and going; and lacks privacy.

Meriden CT - Maloney H.S. Platt H.S. – Platt H.S. is a remodel as new; the interior environment is dark. Cost of both school projects $112M with 75% to 80% reimbursement.

With a new school there are maintenance cost savings; windows are designed to take advantage of the sun; average elementary school cost is $35M.

Regarding glaring mistakes or problems with these school projects, Ms. Nichols noted there were not too many. The project plans were reviewed with staff to inure they met the future educational needs. She cited the glass walled/window conference room at Guilford H.S. as one issue. There were no other serious problems or issues stated. One school would not recommend their architect. The school districts were pleased with their projects.

Budgets – Guilford H.S. was $1M under budget, so they built another turf field. South Windsor projects came in under budget, so they added more classrooms, and are on schedule. South Windsor had a long range plan of 10 years to build four (4) schools which was based on declining student enrollment in the prior 10 years. As the project started, elementary enrollment increased by 800 students…change orders were done and more classrooms were needed to accommodate these students.

Teacher/Staff Input Committee - Mr. Gusenburg reported the committee has met with all schools except Darcey which is scheduled for March 16th. Staff came out in large numbers, brought their concerns and issues to the committee, cited frustration with maintenance issues, windows, leaking roofs, space and storage issues, handicapped accessibility, and program issues at the middle and high schools. At Humiston School Alternative Education Program, staff is working in poor conditions, but provide education and support for their students. It was pointed out by Mr. Gusenburg that in seeing the newly renovated or new school buildings in other districts, and comparing to Cheshire schools, there is a huge contrast.

On March 11th the committee will meet and prepare its report for the full SMC review.
Ms. Bates commented on Cheshire teachers being passionate about what they are doing, without complaints. Their comments were just about what is needed in the schools.

Ms. Kemp noted the common theme is space, especially at the middle and high schools, and the teacher/staff turnout to meetings was very good.

8.  **PUBLIC COMMENT AND CORRESPONDENCE**
The SMC meeting packet included e-mails from the public and staff.

9.  **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS FROM SMC MEMBERS**
Ms. Kemp stated the SMC has accomplished much in the last two months with tours, out-of-district visits and teacher/staff input sessions. SMC is looking at hiring an owner’s rep within the next month, and this firm will need some direction from the committee. There needs to be some talk around the SMC table on what to do.

It was stated by Mr. Oris that there needs to be a focus on the financial side of things, including knowing what the town can afford. More time must be spent with the Finance Director Mr. Jaskot and BOE COO Mr. Masciana to understand what Cheshire can afford with additional debt service without affecting the town’s credit rating. He said there must be efficiencies to offset debt service.

There have been prior discussions about financing/what Cheshire can afford, and Ms. Kemp said there must be a look at the cost that would be passed along to taxpayers. There must also be good direction given to the owners’ rep.

Mr. Neth noted that lots of the feedback has been “more space”, and said we cannot make wide open spaces in the buildings as they are. There are budget constraints. Everything cannot be “new”…what is needed is to focus on some of the schools and make them more serviceable. Mr. Neth is encouraged by the Highland School facility, and cited it as a lower priority than other schools. The SMC must look at what can be done with the spaces we have, and not necessarily think about new buildings.

Ms. Harrigan said Highland School is the best school building in Cheshire, but needs some work. There is a window of opportunity to invest in our schools for another 30 years. She talked about investing in Highland and closing one or two other schools.

According to Mr. Perugini, Highland School has more space for renovation, get rid of the trailers, add another science room, but the school is not a priority in terms of its current condition. He said the BOE has looked at kindergarten in all elementary schools, and Birth to Three program could be moved to another school. He pointed out Chapman as the first school to look at, then Dodd, CHS, and getting things on the table.
Ms. Kemp stated the middle school and high school need to be addressed and are of
great concern. All the elementary schools have issues with students still learning in this
environment…but this cannot be said about the middle school and high school.

The issue of Dodd becoming a K-5 school with new roof, windows etc. was raised by
Mr. Neth, who considered the middle school to be in good condition to be repurposed
for an elementary school. K-5 school does not need the same community spaces as a
middle school.

Chapman School could be closed, and Mr. Perugini said these students could go to the
Dodd facility for a few years.

Mr. Oris stated everyone must pay attention to whether the new facility will be
committed to a 6-8 middle school vs. not doing this, and what this does to the plan.
Whatever avenue is taken it will open up different opportunities and SMC must look at
this. If a 6-8 middle school is not built, there may not be the consolidations needed with
the buildings…but with modernization the lead could be with the high school. For
property values, people look at the quality of the high school. The 6 through 8 decision
on a middle school is critically important; honing on what can be tolerated is an
important issue.

These discussions were held with the out-of-district school staff during visits, and
Ms.Nichols said all the middle schools were 6-7-8. This is important because the
curriculum is based on 6-7-8 grade curriculum. There has been talk about grades 5
and 6 in a separate building, and this was looked at by some of the school districts.
Some districts also looked at K-5, 6-7-8 middle school and 9-12 high school. Concerns
have been expressed by parents about older students riding buses with 1st graders, and
issues due to the age differences.

Mr. Gusenburg commented on the teacher/staff input meetings with unanimous support
of a 6-7-8 middle school for educational reasons and education standards. There must
be a decision made on what the town can offer and have a plan that works.

The teacher/staff meetings had unanimous support of a 6-8 middle school, and Ms.
Bates said efficiencies and costs will be realized. She talked about the acreage at
Doolittle School, building something on this site, and the many efficiencies of grade 6
into the middle school.

Supt. Solan informed the SMC that the grades 6-8 middle school curriculum has been
gradual over the last 10+ years. It is more now than in the past with curriculum and
resource designs. Staff looks at student development mentally, instruction design, and
maturity 6 through 8 is preferable but not absolute.
What Cheshire can afford financially was cited by Mr. Bowman as very important and the best way to use its funding. He had requested school by school costs broken down and many of the costs were taken across the district and averaged out. If we are looking at closing a school we need to know the exact numbers, not averages, of costs per school. People should be well aware that this process will move as quickly as it can…but still move very slowly. It will be two (2) years before a shovel is in the ground. In the process of selecting the owner’s rep, architect, plans drawn, out to bid for renovations or new build…some of the issue raised by the teachers should be taken care of sooner than later. Many are maintenance issues; they should not wait 2 to 4 years; some will be rectified with remodeling. The modernization plan will be a staggered program, a 10 year process…and with storage space not rectified for 10 years…the current 2nd graders will be in grade 12.

In walking through the high school, Mr. Bowman pointed out the “hot and cold spots”. He asked when the HVAC system was balanced but it was unknown. This is something which could rectify some of the HVAC situations at the high school. There could be ductless heat pumps in the classrooms, quickly and economically adjusting the temperatures. Mr. Bowman said that before any remodeling or renovation the total budget must be known. A starting point might be the prior BOE survey (2017) showing approximate renovation costs.

Mr. Masciana will present this survey to the SMC which will help with an understanding of cost savings. SMC can also look at the other options in the 2017 plan.

The issue of Chapman School windows having no caulking was raised by Mr. Walsh, who noted it is a simple job which must be done. He also saw a cup under a leaking toilet…and said these are simple maintenance things to be taken care of.

Furniture in the Schools – this issue was discussed by the SMC members, with questions about State reimbursement for furniture. Mr. Masciana advised that with renovation the rate is 46%; a new school is 36%; and furniture would be included in the reimbursement.

Supt. Solan clarified that replacement of updated furniture comes out of the BOE operating budget, but this is not being done en masse.

BOE Chairman Perugini said that by extending space and new furniture there is a question of whether this comes under the capital budget. The prior survey options can be looked at, and he said some items were not big ticket costs.

Ms. Kemp stated the operating budget will not support furniture replacement across the district.
With modernization of anything, Mr. Oris said a furniture plan must be in there, particularly with furniture that could be reused to maximize a new renovation. If not, a building should not be renovated without getting best use of what is designed with old furniture that is not efficient in the space. Furniture should be included in the project. His recollection for the Alexion budget process was for furniture to maximize the use of the new building.

An example was cited by Mr. Neth...a number of classrooms needing new furniture, and whether this would be reimbursable.

Ms. Nichols asked about the owner’s rep advising the SMC on these kinds of things and issues. She thinks the owner’s rep would help to determine capital expenditure, renovation, degree of renovation for reimbursement consideration.

From the BOE budget, Mr. Martell cited $24M worth of projects over five (5) years; $500,000 in the first year of renovation projects; following year an additional $7M; Highland School will get $750,000 worth of new windows in 2022-2023; $670,000 in kitchen replacement the following year; and additional $750,000 in other building improvements in the next five (5) years. The SMC needs to see what those planned projects are...this is bonded money.

Council Chairman Oris explained that the bonding is only in year #1...not all 5 years. Things can change as SMC does its work.

Ms. Kemp stated that SMC will continue to talk about options, work with staff to get a handle on finances, and owner’s rep will help and guide and must know our priorities.

10. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION by Mr. Bowman; seconded by Mr. Talbot.

MOVED to adjourn the meeting at 9:32 p.m.

VOTE The motion passed unanimously by those present.

Attest:

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Marilyn W. Milton, Clerk