MINUTES OF THE TEACHER/STAFF INPUT SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE CHESHIRE TOWN COUNCIL SCHOOL MODERNIZATION COMMITTEE (SMC) MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY, MARCH 11, 2020 AT 6:30 P.M. IN TOWN HALL, ROOM 207, CHESHIRE CT 06410.

Present
Rich Gusenburg, Chairman; Jennifer Bates and Ann Marie Kemp
Staff: Dept. of Education Asst. Supt. of Schools Marlene Silano

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. DISCUSSION OF STAFF/TEACHER INPUT AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES
Mr. Gusenbury submitted a draft report of the committee meetings at schools which cited the major findings from the school discussions. The report included details of the findings, #1 through #6, and detailed information on teacher/staff concerns and issues for each of the school (except for Darcey which is scheduled for March 16th). The committee reviewed the report with the following comments.

Doolittle Elementary School – February 5, 2020
With regard to Doolittle School, Ms. Kemp felt the issues are maintenance and not predominantly maintenance issues. This is one of the nicer schools; teachers felt classroom sizes were adequate; main issues cited were HVAC, moisture, storage, mice and bats; and the question is whether the district maintenance issues are so big that the normal BOE operating budget is not addressing these issues and unable to handle them.

Mr. Gusenburg pointed out that during all the school visits the committee heard about maintenance issues across the board, which could be a result of squeezing the maintenance budget over a number of years. The choice was doing something other than laying off teachers, which directly affects the children…or take money out of maintenance budget…and this is what has been done. He talked about replacement of only three (3) windows a year in a school, and there not being enough maintenance money to replace more windows.

As part of the committee Ms. Bates talked about Doolittle School…is it renovated or build a new school…and if renovated there must be a look at the ongoing issues. If this was a school to be renovated there must be stated things that must be addressed. The question is whether the renovation would be part of the committee or part of regular maintenance.

The timeline will matter too, and Mr. Gusenburg said there are many needs out there due to older buildings, and it could be 10 years before getting to a school like Doolittle.
Maintenance cannot wait 10 years and things would have to be done during this time before a renovation of full replacement of the building. He noted some issues are more serious than others, and some affect programming.

Ms. Bates said the committee’s job would be to prioritize the issues and state what must be done now as part of maintenance.

The job of the subcommittee was to hear specifically what things in the buildings are preventing teaching, programming and learning, and Ms. Kemp said the committee will bring this information back to the full SMC.

The committee reviewed its findings for Doolittle School.

- Overall, the school seems to be functioning adequately for an elementary program.
- An important concern was getting Kindergarten into the school; and this should be addressed as one of the committee’s recommendations.
- Moving 6th grade to the middle school was strongly supported by the teachers.
- Doolittle has many HVAC issues and concerns to be addressed.
- Teachers supported outside speakers to insure announcements are heard outside, especially if there is an emergency situation.
- SMC must insure all schools have outside speakers.

MOTION by Ms. Bates; seconded by Ms. Kemp.

MOVED that the committee accept and approve the minutes of the February 5, 2020 meeting at Doolittle School, subject to corrections, additions, deletions.

VOTE The motion passed unanimously by those present.

The committee’s recommendation would be to move Kindergarten to Doolittle School. Darcey School would then have just the pre-school and Birth to Three programs.

Consideration of redistricting for the elementary schools.

Humiston School – February 6, 2020
Mr. Gusenburg commented on the teachers and staff at Humiston School being proud of their students and programs they are providing to them. This school houses 25 to 30 high school students who cannot function in the large high school. These staff members work to provide a complete program under some of the worst conditions.

The committee reviewed its findings for Humiston School.

- This school has a Science program without a lab; staff must borrow things from the high school.
• The gym is inadequate; students cannot run or throw a ball in the gym due to low ceilings and disturbance to classrooms below the gym.
• Bathrooms are between the rooms with doors that do not closed or locked.
• The office is in the basement with no sight lines to the front of the building.
• The art room has minimal supplies.
• The school does not have a music program.
• There is no handicapped accessibility.
• The school does not have a nursing office.
• And…there are a number of other problems to be addressed at Humiston.

Ms. Kemp stated there should be universal support that this is one of the school buildings to be closed. There are too many limitations, and it could never be brought up to code. It would be a matter of new space/new home for the alternative high school program. From a financial standpoint, Ms. Kemp said the district cannot keep this building open, and the alternative high school needs to be self sufficient.

It was pointed out by Mr. Gusenburg that the school district does not want to lose this program. These students do not want to return or go to the high school as they have had negative experiences in that environment.

Some of the Humiston students go to the high school for band and football, and Ms. Bates said this is their being close, but not too close. The alternative high school program is unique, and should be moved to another space, even in a leased building.

Supt. Silano stated this is part of the plan…i.e. does the district lease space now for this program.

Humiston is an old, historic building…and decision on what will be done with this building is the decision of the Town Council.

Mr. Gusenburg explained there were amendments to the Humiston School meeting minutes, which are attached.

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

   MOVED that the committee accept and approve the amended minutes of the February 6, 2020 meeting at Humiston School, subject to corrections, additions, deletions.

   VOTE The motion passed 2-0-1; Ms. Kemp abstained.

**Dodd Middle School – February 10, 2020**

There was much staff discussion on programming at the Dodd meeting, along with maintenance issues about water leaking through windows, roof leaks, inadequate
programming space and storage. The layout of the building does not accommodate all the teaching teams, and it is a 7-8 grade level school. The middle school should be 6-7-8 grades. The physical location of the school is inadequate.

At the Dodd and CHS meetings, Ms. Kemp commented on the physical buildings preventing our teachers from teaching the programs. The elementary school level has many wish things and some larger things, but these do not prevent teachers from teaching. Ms. Kemp stated the Dodd site is not a middle school campus, and the location was not well chosen to be a middle school.

Mr. Gusenburg reported that the Out-of-District Subcommittee visited North Haven Middle School, and this is a well laid out middle school...open and bright.

As a member of the SMC, Mr. Gusenburg has questions about whether Dodd could become an elementary school and closing down some of the older schools. He commented on Dodd being in decent shape, and this should be kept in mind.

Supt. Silano talked about the size of the Dodd classrooms as an issue of consideration. They do not work for middle school students. We must be careful to not renovate a school without better classroom size. Elementary school classrooms are larger than the middle school rooms.

At Dodd some of the walls are sheet rock, not cinder block, and Mr. Gusenburg said some walls could be ripped out to make double sized rooms. He said Dodd is a well built facility. Elementary rooms are 800 to 900 S.F. and Kindergarten rooms are about 1,200 S.F.

Dodd also has problems with the bus drop-off and parent pickup, as do all the other schools. The committee agreed Dodd parking and fields would work well for an elementary school.

The committee reviewed its findings for Dodd Middle School
- Dodd is not designed as a middle school...it is a small junior high school with several additions.
- The middle school should be 6-7-8 grades.
- Renovation would require larger sized classrooms.
- Dodd has many maintenance issues to be addressed.
- The Dodd staff talked about the athletic fields and their inadequacy for student sports.
- There is lack of an auditorium; the stage is small, and shares space with the cafeteria. For the drama club 120 students came out and only 45 could participate due to lack of space.
- Due to the small cafeteria there are four (4) lunch waves over a 3 hour period.
Band Room does not accommodate the whole band; instruments are stored in various places throughout the school.

Parking is a major problem.

There are problems with bus drop-off and parent pickup.

Fields are of poor quality; there are no outside bathrooms for the sports facilities.

MOTION by Ms. Kemp; seconded by Ms. Bates.

MOVED that the committee accept and approve the minutes of the February 10, 2020 meeting at Dodd Middle School, subject to corrections, additions, deletions.

VOTE The motion passed unanimously by those present.

Cheshire High School – February 13, 2020 (A.M. and P.M. Meetings)
At the CHS meetings there was a good turnout of teachers and staff, and some attended the morning and afternoon meetings.

Ms. Kemp commented on this building being physically unable to accommodate learning; there is no flexibility in the classrooms; there is no space for breakout rooms; Science labs are in bad condition; and the school has many limitations.

The committee was informed by Mr. Gusenburg that the Out-of-District Subcommittee visited Guilford H.S. This school had science rooms with instructional and lab space; space is divided into pods; there are two gyms, connected, so there could be a larger and small gym next to each other for many activities. It was a well thought out building.

The committee reviewed its findings and the issues at Cheshire High School.

- CHS has had many additions over the years.
- The auditorium is too small.
- The building is accessible but the layout is not acceptable.
- Handicapped access is not a reality, was added on later, but does meet some of the code requirements.
- Drama programs have inadequate space.
- The workshop area is inadequate without room for working on projects.
- There is no room for added programs, i.e. a Culinary class.
- CHS has numerous maintenance issues; the tunnels have been remediated.
- Throughout the school there is lack of power outlets and data connections.
- After school hours, there is no security of the building with students and the public present.
- Some of the CHS furniture is too small and inadequate.

Mr. Gusenburg cited Guilford H.S. as having a side entrance leading to the gym and auditorium, with large middle area (cafeteria) as a gathering space. There is no public
access into the rest of the Guilford H.S. facility. Public use has been accommodated without making the entire building accessible to the public.

While waiting to hear what the full SMC thinks, Mr. Gusenburg stated he went into this process being open to a renovation of the high school...and has come out of it thinking CHS has reached the end. It is not just an older building needing renovation...it is a poorly designed older building at this point in time.

CHS is also the Town’s emergency shelter facility, and this must be kept in mind when discussion or making plans for the high school building.

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

MOVED that the committee accept and approve the minutes of the February 13, 2020 morning meeting at Cheshire High School, subject to corrections, additions, deletions.

**VOTE**

The motion passed 2-0-1; Ms. Bates abstained.

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

MOVED that the committee accept and approve the minutes of the February 13, 2020 afternoon meeting at Cheshire High School, subject to corrections, additions, deletions.

**VOTE**

The motion passed 2-0-1; Ms. Kemp abstained.

**Chapman School – February 19, 2020**

Ms. Kemp is a former Chapman parent, and stated Chapman School is a great school with a small environment. When the committee visited Highland School she realized the shortcomings of Chapman School, i.e. the classrooms, library, gymnasium, and the other amenities. If the decision is made to close Chapman, people should visit Highland School to understand what is needed to keep Chapman School open.

As the Chapman tour was taking place, Mr. Gusenburg said former students on the tour reflected on wonderful memories of the school. His reaction during the tour, as an former elementary principal, was the lack of handicapped accessibility, a library more like a dungeon, small rooms, inability to access rooms throughout the school without going up and down stairs, small gymnasium with inability to hold school functions and activities.

The committee reviewed its findings for Chapman School.

- Classrooms are too small.
- Library in the basement.
• Small gymnasium/cafeteria; inability to hold school functions due to lack of space.
• Chapman School location is not the best; too close to Route 10 for playground and recess activities; concerns about student safety.
• Inability to access rooms and services (i.e. nurse, school psychologist, O.T., P.T.) without going up and down stairs.
• No handicapped accessibility, which is a major issue.
• Numerous maintenance issues.
• HVAC issues and concerns.
• Chapman School is at the top of the agenda for consideration of what should be done with this school building.

MOTION by Ms. Bates; seconded by Ms. Kemp

MOVED that the committee accept and approve the minutes of the February 19, 2020 meeting at Chapman School subject to corrections, additions, deletions.

VOTE The motion passed unanimously by those present.

Highland School – February 20, 2020
The committee members commented on Highland School, built in 1971, as holding up very well over these 50 years. Highland School teachers support moving 6th grade to the middle school, with courses taught by certified staff (math, science). With the way the school is divided up and structured...in pod format...it is a well planned/modern building. Highland School is totally air-conditioned (except for gymnasium).

Teachers and staff at Highland School commented on some of their issues and concerns, bringing the school to a more modern look, more open spaces, need for more faculty bathrooms (have only 4 bathrooms), better lighting, updated furniture.

Mr. Gusenburg commented on prior school district discussions and plans to move preschool students to Highland School, with an addition to the school. The original plans called for closing Chapman and Darcey; moving 6th graders to the middle school; preschool at Highland, and redistricting grades K-5.

The committee reviewed its findings for Highland School
• Highland School has held up well for a 50 year old school.
• Need for window replacements throughout the school/classrooms.
• HVAC issues and concerns.
• Teachers support 6th grade move to middle school.
• Parking – there is a separate area for student drop-off and pickup; another driveway should be considered; this is a traffic study issue.
• More power outlets and data connections; more outdoor learning space.
MOTION by Ms. Bates; seconded by Mr. Gusenburg.

MOVED that the committee accept and approve the minutes of the February 20, 2020 at Highland School, subject to corrections, additions, deletions.

VOTE The motion passed 2-0-1; Ms. Kemp abstained.

**Norton School – February 27, 2020**
The committee discussed the visit to Norton School and issues and concerns for this school. Mr. Gusenburg pointed out there is no entrance way to gather students waiting for buses; there are security issues with a person buzzing in, getting access, possibly bypassing the office…or going to the office for sign-in and visitor pass.

The committee reviewed its findings for Norton School
- Consider a more secure entrance for students.
- Improved heating system; improved air quality.
- Put in place security for visitor entrance and accessibility to the school building.
- Gymnasium was acceptable size.
- Art room is located in outside trailers; something must be done about these outside trailers.
- Library is too small and around and off to the side of the school; elementary library should be central to the school and easily accessible.
- Norton has many maintenance issues; need for more power outlets in classrooms.
- The school has lack of storage; has various sized lockers throughout the building.
- Classrooms have old types of heating units; rooms are sometimes too hot.
- Security issues – windows are meant to be open, but do not open; they should open for emergency exiting.
- School Buses – there are safety concerns with student drop-off and pickup/students walking between buses; a safe area is needed for students to exit buses or cars and enter the school.
- Conference Room needed for private meeting space
- Remove trailers from the site.
- Take a look at special education spaces.

It was pointed out by Mr. Gusenburg that these older schools were not built at a time when education had the present groupings, science programs, storage and space needs, etc. Now, there is lots of “stuff” and no place to put it.

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

MOVED that the committee accept and approve the minutes of the
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February 27, 2020 meeting at Norton School, subject to corrections, additions, deletions.

VOTE The motion passed 2-0-1; Ms. Kemp abstained.

4. PLANNING PRESENTATION FOR FULL SCHOOL MODERNIZATION COMMITTEE MEETING

The draft report is attached to these minutes. The Committee reviewed the draft report of the subcommittee prepared by Mr. Gusenburg, and discussed how to present the report to the full SMC.

Ms. Kemp talked about how to conduct the full SMC presentation on the work of the subcommittee. Following discussion, it was agreed that a short power point presentation (with some visuals) would be the best way to go. The six (6) points in the report would have a bullet and be highlighted by one or two sentences. The school visits and issues to be addressed in each school will have a picture and short narrative, i.e. programming, classroom sizes, Kindergarten moving into Doolittle School, teachers being positive about the school visits and being able to provide a good educational experience for their students.

Mr. Gusenburg will update the report, send a final draft to the committee and Supt. Silano.

The committee discussed the time line for presentation of its report to the SMC. The decision was made to put the presentation on the agenda for April 6, 2020 meeting.

Supt. Silano will work with the committee for visuals and preparation of the power point presentation.

5. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION by Ms. Kemp; seconded by Ms. Bates

MOVED to adjourn the meeting at 7:55 p.m.

VOTE The motion passed unanimously by those present.

Attest:

Marilyn W. Milton, Clerk