

Ad Hoc School Facilities Meeting Minutes
November 22, 2011
Newtown Municipal Center, 3 Primrose Street, Newtown
5:30 p.m.

Present: Bill Hart (BOE), Debbie Leidlein (BOE), Keith Alexander (BOE), Bob Merola (LC), Kathy Fetchick (LC), Janet Robinson (Superintendent), Linda Gedja (Assistant Superintendent), Ron Bienkowski (School Financial Director), Sharon Epple (Reed School Principal), Barbara Gasperine (Head-O-Meadow Principal), Joanne Peters (Hawley Principal), Dawn Hochsprung (Sandy Hook Principal), Chris Geissler (Middle Gate School Principal), Jen Steinholdt (Assistant Principal at Reed School) and Fran Pennarola (Moderator).

Meeting was called to order at 5:40 p.m.
The October 12, 2011 Meeting Minutes were approved.
There was no public participation.

New Business:

The Committee then turned to a presentation by the District Staff of the potential conversion of the elementary schools to Pre-K through 6 in the 2019 time frame.

After brief introductory remarks, Superintendent Robinson requested the four elementary school principals and Dr. Epple to discuss the feasibility of the conversion of the elementary schools into Pre-K through 6. It was assumed that eight years from now, the District would be offering all day kindergarten.

Each of the principals spoke and also provided written summaries of their views. The general thrust of the comments by the elementary school principals was that, while it would be possible to accommodate the Pre-K through 6 grade population in the elementary schools based on 2019 projections, there would be impacts on music programs, physical education, lunch rotation, recess, science, health instruction and other areas. Rather than summarize the presentations, they are annexed hereto and made a part of the Minutes.

Dr. Epple spoke to the benefits the Reed School offers on the fifth and sixth grade population and the concerns that the move under consideration would be a step backwards. Members of the Committee and the District Staff present discussed the particulars of each school, the need to provide adequate computer and science training and the requirements of a 21st Century education. Both Bob Merola and Bill Hart pointed out that computer technology eight years hence would be substantially different than that today. Superintendent Robinson noted that the State was looking to require that the standardized CMT Tests be done by individual students on computers, emphasizing the need for development of keyboarding skills.

Doctor Robinson raised the possibility of moving the 5th grade to the elementary Schools and the 6th grade to the Middle School, returning Reed back to the town. Kathy Fetchick asked how this was possible, if the Middle School is only 10,000 square feet bigger than Reed. Janet indicated that it had not been fully researched, and would need further analysis to see if it was possible.

Debbie Leidlein suggested that perhaps the Committee had taken the wrong approach in considering various closures and movement options and suggested that the District should present its plan for dealing with the expected decline in population.

Bob Merola shared his research that suggests the projections that have been relied on have been universally optimistic, suggesting that the 2019 projections might be high. He pointed to slow growth in housing starts as one indication of this. It was noted that 2019 was the low year for school population projections by Dr. Chung. The consensus was, however, that projections eight years into the future are somewhat speculative.

The consensus was that the Committee had been presented a fair amount of data and needed some time to synthesize it in order to be able to make a recommendation to the Board of Education. Further, as a number of the members were absent, it was decided to meet again in early to mid-January. It was suggested and agreed that a compilation of the various scenarios considered by the group would be helpful in focusing discussions. Bill Hart also requested that electronic versions of the materials provided by the principals should be supplied.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Francis G. Pennarola