

**BOARD OF FINANCE  
MINUTES OF SPECIAL MEETING  
February 24, 2010**

A Special Meeting of the Board of Finance was held in Seminar Room 300, Board of Education Administrative Offices, 501 Kings Highway East, Fairfield, CT on Wednesday, February 24, 2010 at 7:30 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Chairman Thomas Flynn, Robert Bellitto, Jr., Ken Brachfeld, James Brown, Christopher DeWitt, Kevin Kiley, Mary LeClerc, Robert Stone, Michael Tetreau

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

None

**ALSO PRESENT**

Paul Hiller, Chief Fiscal Officer and Clerk of the Board of Finance  
Kenneth Flatto, First Selectman, Town of Fairfield  
Roger Autuori, Registrar of Voters, Town of Fairfield  
Ann Clark, Superintendent of Schools  
Jack Boyle, Deputy Superintendent of Schools  
Tom Cullen, Director of Operations, Board of Education, Town of Fairfield  
Sal Morabito, Manager of Operations, Board of Education, Town of Fairfield  
Greg Hatzis, Principal, Fairfield Woods Middle School  
Doreen Keegan-Battimelli, William Sapone, Fairfield Woods Middle School Building Committee  
Randall Luther, Tai Soo Kim Architects

**ACTION TAKEN:**

Approved to postpone a vote on the FWMS expansion and renovation project to a date certain of Wednesday, February 24, 2010 at 7:30 PM.

Chairman Flynn called the meeting to order at 7:32 p.m.

Chairman Flynn stated that at the last Special Meeting to consider these items the following presentations were made: BOE overview, Building Committee overview, BOS overview, CFO financial analysis, and public comment. Mr. Flynn noted that the financial analysis from the CFO was not presented at the last meeting so that will be the first item to be presented tonight.

**AGENDA**

1. To hear, consider and act upon a recommendation from the Board of Selectmen to appropriate \$13,686,000 for certain costs associated with the expansion and renovation of Fairfield Woods Middle School and authorizing the issuance of bonds to finance such appropriation. (Bond resolution attached)

**The above item was tabled from the Special Meeting of February 11, 2010.**

2. To hear consider and act upon a recommendation from the Board of Selectmen to appropriate \$6,033,000

for the Auditorium addition and associated renovations to Fairfield Woods Middle School and authorizing the issuance of bonds to finance such appropriation, and that no funds hereby appropriated shall be expended nor costs incurred prior to January 1, 2012. (Bond Resolution attached)

**The above item was tabled from the Special Meeting of February 11, 2010.**

Mr. Hiller reviewed the handouts with the Board relating to the financial analysis of these projects. Mr. Hiller remarked that the State reimbursement for projects is usually less than anticipated by the Town. Mr. Hiller stated that there are currently 19,000 single family homes in Fairfield. Mr. Hiller also reported that the Town debt service is currently exceeding 10% of the General Fund and 10% is a benchmark figure that is used by the rating agencies.

Mr. Luther, when asked what impact the changes recommended by the Board of Selectmen would have on this project, stated that the auxiliary gym would be lost and the number of classrooms would be decreased. Mr. Luther stated that the Building Committee had considered an option very similar to the one suggested by the BOS but that option was rejected because it made it almost impossible to present an educational program utilizing the team concept that is currently in place at all of the middle schools in Fairfield.

Mr. Flatto distributed some handouts to the Board and reviewed them. Mr. Flatto stated that he still has some concerns about the level of debt service in Fairfield and he noted that there is still about \$20M of debt that has not yet been financed. Mr. Flatto also reviewed a list of additional project proposals to be considered over the next four years.

Mr. Kiley stated that it is important to decide how to move forward with this project and maintain the quality of education in Fairfield.

**Mr. Kiley moved and Mr. DeWitt seconded to amend Item #1 to appropriate \$24,203,000, use the plans as described in Option D, and move the project forward at one time.**

Some discussion ensued about the correct way to word the motion so that both item #1 and item #2 are combined as one project. Dr. Clark reported that the best way to present these two items, for State purposes of processing and State reimbursement, would be to combine them and present them as one item.

**Mr. Kiley and Mr. DeWitt withdrew their amendment at this time.**

**Mr. Kiley moved and Mr. Bellitto seconded to amend Item #1 to read:**

**To hear, consider and act upon a recommendation from the Board of Selectmen to appropriate \$24,203,000 for certain costs associated with the expansion and renovation of Fairfield Woods Middle School as recommended by the Fairfield Woods Building Committee Option D, and authorizing the issuance of bonds to finance such appropriation.**

Mr. Hiller noted that Bond Counsel will redo the Bond Resolution and the RTM will receive the amended bond resolution for action so this Board does not have to act on rewriting the Bond Resolution.

Mr. Stone read the following statement to the Board:

I have been diligently studying the school space situation at the middle school level and specifically Fairfield Woods Middle school for over a year. As a member of the committee that was formed to study the school space needs at the middle school level, I toured all 3 of our middle schools plus I studied how other towns are coping with their space needs. I even personally visited some other schools in other towns and spoke to their principals

and staff. As a member of the board of finance I felt it was my fiduciary duty to study all options and keep an open mind.

I agree that there will be a temporary bubble of middle school kids coming into the system. But this is a temporary situation with the middle school population gradually declining. The population of Fairfield has actually stayed steady for years at around 59,000 people. We also have to face the facts that there is very little space in which to even build new homes

I certainly agree that we need more classroom space at this juncture, something I must say, that should have been thought about when the school was renovated and expanded just a few years ago. Obviously we relied on experts at that time to point the way and tell us what our needs were, just as we are relying on experts today. As someone who will remain nameless said to me "experts designed the Titanic". Since that time this town has opened another high school, did renovations and expansions at Warde, built a new state of the art middle school, renovated Tomlinson Middle school plus built a new McKinley and Burr elementary school. We have also done renovations and expansions at several other schools including Sherman, Osborn Hill and now Stratfield. As a member of the RTM for 6 years and a Board of Finance member for over 2 years I have voted for and supported each and every one of these projects. In addition I have supported every Board of Ed Budget for 8 years.

Now I am faced with the issue of what to do and what to approve with regards to Fairfield Woods. I have decided to reluctantly support the addition of classrooms

And the renovations to the Cafeteria. However I would much prefer an annex or pod be built instead of a new brick and mortar addition something we did successfully and at a lower cost at Sherman and Osborn Hill. I can not support any other renovations or additions to this building specifically a 2nd Gym and especially a new auditorium.

As a member of the board of finance I cannot in good conscience vote for any more bonding or in lay mans terms I don t want to put anymore debt onto the citizens of Fairfield. We have an economic tsunami lurking in the future if we do not get our pension and benefit system under control, which is a different issue for another day. We must control our spending not only on education but throughout the town and in every department. It cannot be business as usual as we have too many future financial obligations we will have to meet. We cannot keep borrowing and putting the burden of paying these debts on to the next generation or our seniors. We cannot keep raising taxes! We must keep Fairfield affordable so we can all stay in our homes. We have to get our house in order and very quickly

Yes we can borrow money today at low rates. That is a valid argument. The problem is we still have to pay the debt back. I think it is totally irresponsible for this board to approve anything but the bare necessities especially in this uncertain economic climate. People in Fairfield are being foreclosed on, people are losing their jobs and many others are under employed. Everyone is doing with less not because we want to but because we are forced to. We cannot afford the luxury of a 2<sup>nd</sup> gym or a new auditorium especially when there are others in town.

As a member of this board I represent the whole town, all its citizens, not just one area, or one group of people. I have to think of what's best for everyone. I also have to keep in mind future projects and maintenance issues that will be coming down the line. As a sidebar all 3 of my kids attended Fairfield Woods. There was No auditorium, no second gym, no smart boards, but there were several portables. They did just fine. I understand the views of the parents who are advocating for this expansion but now we must all sacrifice and really think hard what is truly needed to give our kids a quality education. In other times I would be supportive as I had in the past. But this is now; times are tough and very, very uncertain. Furthermore we also can't rely on the state to help us out. Ct. is in big trouble financially. CT has the highest per capita debt in the nation, CT is actually loosing population, we have lost almost all industry, we have no tourism and even the casinos are in trouble. And finally the stimulus money is not coming back. Therefore at this time I believe it is the responsible financial decision for this town to draw a line in the sand and unfortunately say we just can't do everything on our wish list.

**The amendment to Item #1 was carried with a vote of 7 yeas, 2 nays (Brachfeld, Stone), 0 abstentions.**

Mr. Bellitto stated that \$24M is a lot of money but it is important to look at the long term. He noted that this is a very opportune time to bond projects with interest rates at all time lows. Mr. Bellitto also stated that according to all projections from the experts, Fairfield needs additional middle school space immediately and for the near future so this is a necessary project to approve.

Mr. Tetreau noted that these are tough times for all of us and it is at times such as this that we need to pull together. Mr. Tetreau stated that we all must share and sacrifice but this project should be supported so that all middle school students in Fairfield receive the same quality program and, in his opinion, parity is important. Mr. Tetreau further commented that the FWBC did what they were asked to do and they did it well.

Mr. Stone said that the economy is ruling his judgment in this matter.

Mrs. LeClerc stated that she agrees with Mr. Stone on some of his points but she feels that this project needs to go forward and we should be considering this as a long term investment that will be utilized for the next 50 years.

Mr. Flatto added that the BOS acted in the best interests of the Town and the BOS was unanimous in their decision that FWMS needed to have renovations.

**Public Comment**

Charlotte Leslie – President, PTA Council

She thanked the BOF for changing this project to Option D and restoring the required funding.

Mrs. Leslie noted that PTA Council voted to support Option D and all schools in Fairfield are represented on the Council.

Mr. Flynn read the following statement to the Board:

My colleagues and I have tried to organize the meetings to discuss the Fairfield Woods Middle School project in such a way that we would lay all the facts and opinions surrounding this project open for consideration.

I believe we have accomplished that.

I would like to thank my colleagues – who have attended two special sessions – as well as the Board of Selectmen, the Board of Education, the Education administration and, in particular, Principal Hatzis, for their preparation, their presentations and their thoughtful consideration in answering our questions.

I would, most particularly, like to thank the members of the building committee – for their time, dedication, professionalism and thoroughness in the way which they are approaching their assignment – which is just beginning.

In the course of my five years on this board, many of you have heard me speak of the difference between ‘need’ and ‘want’ – and that, sometimes, we need to make difficult decisions based on differentiating between the two. I approached this decision in the same manner. Further, I did view the decision in three pieces:

The number of classrooms

The auditorium

The auxiliary gymnasium

The number of classrooms – I do not believe that it would be prudent to go forward with this project without funding the maximum number of classrooms recommended by the building committee. This project was born out of the need for more space – for students that are already over-crowding the system. To undertake this project without supporting the classrooms requested would, to me, be short sighted.

While I hope that some current projections are right – and that this may be a bubble that will slowly ‘burst’ over a period of years --- I believe the prudent decision would be to hope for the best – but plan for the worst. I also want to provide for as much future flexibility as possible in terms of classroom space for this school.

The Auditorium – In my view, the case has been made that the auditorium is essential to delivering the same level of programming as is being delivered in our 2 other middle schools currently. Parity across the schools – not in terms of the buildings – but in terms of the educational program – is the appropriate goal. I believe that Principal Hatzis made a compelling argument that – while the school presently does the best that in can in delivering a solid program – it is a lesser experience as compared to the other schools. In addition, according to some information provided, the lack of an auditorium does not just impact the delivery of music programs, student assemblies, team meetings, orientations, etc.....but it adversely impacts the physical education program by approximately 35 days a year by taking over the gymnasium. If true, 35 days a year represents approximately 19% of a 180 day school year.

The Auxiliary Gymnasium – After having listened to the presentations, toured the facility, spoken with students, listened to facility members, toured our other middle schools and considered what the addition of 200 students would do to the present facilities, I am also convinced that this is a necessary part of delivering the full middle school curriculum on par with our other two middle schools. I also believe, based on my observations at the school, that the corridor requested as part of this particular phase of the renovation is essential within the facility.

I fully respect those who will view the same set of facts and reach a different conclusion as to whether some of these items are ‘wants’ as opposed to ‘needs’. I have come to my personal conclusion only after careful consideration and countless hours of effort. Reasonable people can disagree.

After reviewing the financial impact on the town, considering our future bonding levels, the softness of the current construction market, the advantageous interest rates and the cost to the average taxpayer, I find the price of supporting this proposal – as recommended by the building committee, **a worthwhile investment** for the town.

In conclusion, I would ask that the building committee be mindful of their charge, stay true to the design and, if we do find the soft construction market allows us to save money on the construction – do not allow scope creep but, rather, return the funds to the taxpayers of the town.

Mr. Brachfeld stated that he is in favor of the basic concept with the exception of the auditorium.

Dr. Clark reported that the auditorium would enhance the instructional program immensely.

Mr. Brown stated that the auditorium uses were defined in detail in the presentation by the BOE and he is supporting this project because it is really needed.

**Mr. Kiley moved and Mr. Bellitto seconded to approve item #1 as amended.  
Motion carried with a vote of 7 yeas, 2 nays (Brachfeld, Stone), 0 abstentions.**

**Mr. Kiley moved and Mr. Stone seconded to approve Item #2 as presented.  
Motion failed with a vote of 0 yeas, 9 nays, 0 abstentions.**

The meeting was adjourned at 9:35 p.m.