

MIDDLE SCHOOL SPACE FEASIBILITY COMMITTEE

Friday, February 13, 2009

3:00 pm

First Floor Conference Room

Independence Hall

Revised Final Minutes

The meeting was called to order by William Sapone, Chair, in the First Floor Conference Room of Independence Hall at 3:10 PM.

Members Present: William Sapone, Chair; John Convertito, vice Chair, Sue Brand, Robert Stone, Ken Brachfeld (Alt.), and Ex-officio Mary Hogue.

Members Absent: Paul Engemann, Sheryl Santiago, John Vazquez

Others Present: FPS Director of Operations Tom Cullen, Principal Greg Hatzis (until 4:00 PM), Judy Ewing,

I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 3:10 pm.

II. Approval of Meeting Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held February 6, 2009 were distributed, reviewed, and approved.

III. Discussion and Review of Existing Middle School Spaces

Ken Brachfeld distributed a handout on a tour he and Bob Stone took of the East Ridge Middle School in Ridgefield CT. He then made a presentation and there was a general discussion about the tour and the information provided by the principle of East Ridge Middle school (ERMS). ERMS school has a capacity of 800, but had previously experienced a student population increase from 800 to 1300. To accommodate the increase, they relied on an annex, portable classrooms and a staggered schedule, among other strategies, to accommodate the additional students. Questions were asked about the capacity at that time, and Ken agreed to inquire and report back to the committee.

There was a general discussion about how ERMS handled their lunch scheduling. They needed six shortened lunch periods to accommodate the 1300 students, starting at 10:15 am. They are now down to three lunch periods. As to bussing, they used a staggered schedule, but their site seemed to have ample space for handling the bus traffic. Also, it was reported there were no cutbacks in providing access to art, music, shop, etc, this was handled by a detailed scheduling plan.

There was an open question about the capacity at East Ridge Middle school at the time the of the peak enrollment of 1300 because it had different space and portables.

The average class size was 26, but could go up to 28. The principal reported that it was over-crowded but manageable. They used an 8 period schedule, and eliminated some small classroom uses such as small music classes. They were at this high capacity for 3-4 years. They have no contract restriction on team size. The principal reported that he was in favor of using portable classrooms for handling a population bubble, that they were popular with students and faculty, and he recommended having enough portables to support a full team to keep the team together.

In response to a question, Tom Cullen said a portable classroom now costs about \$150,000.

There was a continued discussion about the differences between Fairfield Woods and ERMS, such as cafeteria size and auditorium size.

Mr. Sapone then distributed a projection chart showing the current projections for the next ten years, and there was a discussion about changing conditions that could affect the projections. There was a discussion of how operating over 100% of capacity would affect the core and scheduling for art, music and cooking rooms.

Greg Hatzis spoke about the problem that will be encountered at Roger Ludlowe next year, and John Covertito indicated that cooking classes will have to be split next year so half a class will cook while another half will be in a classroom. Sue Brand asked about special education at ERMS when it was operating with 1300, and Ken reported that he was advised that "it suffered".

There was a discussion about team size, and Bob Stone asked about contract restrictions. There is no team size contract restriction at East Ridge, while Fairfield is limited by contract to 112 students, but Greg Hatzis indicated that they did have restrictions on class size and that team size be reasonable.

There was a discussion on whether there should be an effort to revise the contract to remove the "112 student" limit on team size or to negotiate to allow adjusting the team size during the bubble period. Sue Brand said that class size is a priority of the Board of Education and is one of the most single important factors in education. There was then another discussion on class size, and Greg confirmed that in Fairfield, the average was 21 per classroom. Sue Brand indicated that the Board of Education wants class size to remain the same. It was discussed that some years ago, class size was likely higher. There was a discussion that this could help with the core curriculum classes but could cause scheduling problems for the specialized classrooms, such as art, music, shop and cooking.

There was a discussion concerning the increase in busses needed, and whether the existing busses were full. Tom Cullen reported that they were required to provide seats for every enrolled student, and a voluntary opt-out program generated no savings.

There was then a review of classrooms available at Fairfield Woods. Greg indicated that he may be able to free up 2-3 classrooms by switching some smaller group activities to some smaller spaces. He indicated that for one team, you need four core classrooms, then 2 more for non-core classes, so to add space for another team, a minimum of 6 classrooms should be provided. When taking an 85% utilization, it seemed that an 8 classroom addition would be the optimum size for a single team.

There was then a discussion on the BOE's previous calculation on the need for a 16 classroom addition. It was discussed that the BOE estimated that they needed space for 190 additional students, and because this was more than one team, that space for two teams should be provided. It was then discussed whether 16 classrooms were needed.

There was then a discussion on the use of portables, and their cost, and then a discussion of the likely cost of instead installing an annex. Tom Cullen reported that the six classroom addition for Sherman will cost \$1.64 million, and last 50-70 years, while 6 portable classrooms would cost about \$900,000 and last 5-7 years.

Tom also advised that the boilers at Woods need to be replaced, and there was a discussion as to whether that was part of the committee charge. An annex would preferably be self contained and not need tie in to the existing system, and so it was felt that the need for new boilers was not necessary for us to include in our recommendation, as the boilers were already on a schedule for replacement.

There was then a general discussion on what number of students should be used to determine how many classrooms were needed. John Convertito referred to one calculation and Bill Sapone to another and there was some discussion as to what would be the right size for an addition.

It was discussed that using 110% of capacity as a maximum, then an increase from 2225 to 2340 (115 students) would provide sufficient capacity to operate within 10% of the maximum of projected students, 2608. There was a discussion that using this 10% number would likely cut it too closely, and there was a discussion that we needed to be more conservative in case the projections were off.

After some additional discussion, the chairman closed the discussion and opened the floor for public comment at 4:55 pm.

IV. Public Comment:

One person, Tim Kery, spoke about the reliability of the projections, and the likelihood that the bubble will extend beyond 4 years, he also stressed that it is important to consider the size and capacity of the core facilities.

Judy Ewing was concerned with the accuracy of the projections, and also that some classrooms, like the cooking rooms, can only hold so many students, and also about whether it was possible to negotiate some of the items we spoke about with the union, and also with the economy, whether there will be enough teachers. She stated there she believed there were too many unknowns to make a recommendation.

Meg Grosso spoke about a "pod" they had in Westport and about possible mold problems that were experienced, and to be sure that steps were taken to avoid those in any annex/addition.

V. Scheduling of Meetings

There was a discussion among the members as to the next meeting and it was agreed to change the time of the meeting, originally set for 7 - 9 pm on Thursday, February 26, to an earlier time, 5-7 pm on February 26, the meeting to be held at Town Hall. It was discussed that a vote on recommendations may occur at the next meeting. Sue Brand indicated that she would be unable to attend.

VI. Adjournment: The Chair asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. John Convertito made the motion to adjourn; it was seconded by Sue Brand. The meeting was adjourned at 5:18 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

William Sapone

Recording Secretary