

**Town of Hull**  
**Best Educational Use of School Facilities Committee Meeting**  
**Tuesday, March 15, 2022**

**Committee Members In attendance:**

Judith Kuehn/Co-Chair  
Phil Lemnios/Co-Chair  
Jennifer Fleming/Committee Member  
Jason Frady/Committee Member  
Renee Kiley/ Committee Member  
Ernest Minelli/Committee Member

**Committee Member Absent:**

John Reilly/Committee Member

**Others Present**

David DeGennaro/Support Staff  
Debbe Bennett/Support Staff

The Best Educational Use of School Facilities Committee meeting was held virtually via GoToMeeting.

**1. Call to Order**

The meeting was called to order by Phil Lemnios at 4:06pm.

**2. Approval of agenda:**

Jason Frady made a motion to approve the meeting agenda. Judy Kuehn seconded the motion.

Roll Call Vote: Ayes: Ernest Minelli, Judy Kuehn, Renee Kiley, Jennifer Fleming, Jason Frady, Phil Lemnios

**3. Approval of Minutes**

a. Jason Frady made a motion to approve the Tuesday, February 15, 2022 meeting minutes. Judi Kuehn seconded the motion.

Roll Call Vote: Ayes: Ernest Minelli, Judy Kuehn, Renee Kiley, Jennifer Fleming, Jason Frady, Phil Lemnios

**4. Update of Focus Group and Survey data compilation**

*Dave DeGennaro arrived.* Judy Kuehn informed the Committee that since the last meeting they have looked at so much data and she sent the link to the committee. She said Mary Merrigan and Christine Cappadona also volunteered over April vacation to work with her and Dave to help determine which category each of the responses goes into. So far they have completed the pros and cons for Option 1, the pros and cons for Option 4 as well as the pros and cons for the focus groups. They made a strategic decision to skip Options 2 and 3 because they address the grade configuration issue. They are now going back to Option 2 looking for trends about configuration. There is so much data and sometimes they have to eliminate an answer if it does not fit the questions. Dave DeGennaro added there have been no real surprises. There are concerns about the financial aspect, low enrollment, efficiency, etc. but he is not surprised by the data results. Phil Lemnios asked if the committee members have any questions or comments. Jennifer Fleming said she is looking at the data now and it is what we expected. From some participants there is definitely a concern expressed about the ramifications of consolidation. She said it will be helpful to have all other data but it is a lot to get through. Dave DeGennaro added there are a lot of people who want the status quo but overall it is across the board. Judy Kuehn noted it is just one tool and one piece of information but they will keep going. Judy Kuehn said she would like to meet in person next time so she can share posters, tally marks, etc., which will allow her to review it better. She and her team have been meeting two times a week for six hours each day. They are looking for themes, strengths, pros and cons but it is time consuming. Phil Lemnios said the next meeting will help inform the recommendation but it will not be determinative. Judy Kuehn said they are also considering the status quo, how long the School Department can continue if only getting 2% each year but they also have to think about the overall school experience. Phil asked if there are any other questions from the committee. None noted. He said this will be the topic at the next meeting - to give a more in-depth explanation about the process and the results. Phil asked if there were any public comments. None noted.

**5. Town Meeting Warrant Placeholder:**

Ernie Minelli informed the Committee that at the February 28 School Committee meeting the members were alarmed when they heard about the prospect of a warrant placeholder from a pragmatic standpoint. The concern raised, and echoed by the majority, was having a specific warrant article may lead to the presumption that we, as the Ad Hoc Committee or as the School Committee, are moving in a specific direction and that having spending in place is painting them into a box. The School Committee sentiment was to table it and deal with it later if we need to because we have not crossed that bridge yet. There was a strong sentiment by the School Committee that this was putting the cart before the horse.

Jennifer Fleming agreed and said the topic came up when Judy Kuehn gave them a brief update and mentioned our last meeting and the placeholder. The School Committee members were

taken aback because so far the School Committee has not been involved in the decision making and they believe it is premature to have a placeholder setting aside funds because the decision has not been made yet. Phil Lemnios said he begs to differ because we can always vote no action. If we don't do it now, a special town meeting will be needed, at an additional expense to the town. But as a practical matter no one knows how the School Committee will decide but the MARS report says this is the next step. If the School Committee says they want the status quo, then there will be no additional expense. However, if Options 2, 3 or 4 are chosen, the funds will be in place to go to the next step. The funding source is free cash and has no impact on the School Committee's budget. To delay it, we are telling the community that we are kicking the can down the road because otherwise we are just spinning our wheels. We need to have it on the warrant. Jennifer Fleming said she agrees that the sense among the community is that we (the School Committee) need to make a decision now, but this is a very impactful decision and not one that should be forced at any time. If the School Committee feels boxed in and forced to make a decision, we need to do what is best for our students. By having this article appear on the warrant it presumes, when you read it, that if approved at Town Meeting the School Committee is onboard. It forces the hand of the School Committee to make a decision that's consistent with the warrant article. Otherwise we will get push back from the Town and community. It does not give the School Committee members an opportunity to properly deliberate. Phil Lemnios asked if the School Committee has set any schedule or have they defined a process to make a decision? Judy Kuehn said they are waiting for the recommendation of the Ad Hoc Committee which we'll probably make at the May 23 meeting. They will then likely have more questions. Phil Lemnios said he would never expect them to take a vote that evening and asked what will be their deliberative process? Judy Kuehn responded they have not gone into detail about it yet and asked if we need to have a joint meeting when we make the recommendation?

Ernest Minelli said when we embarked on this in 2021 his expectation was we said we would have something done in June 2022 even though there is overlap with the May elections. So maybe if the Ad Hoc presents their recommendation in May, the School Committee can utilize the two June meetings to have some deliberation -- assuming we don't have to come back for further study. We do want to get it done in a timely manner and he is hopeful they will have a decision before the end of the school/fiscal year -- that is his personal goal.

Jennifer Fleming said she likes the idea of possibly doing a joint meeting so the members of the School Committee can become more privy to the data available, so we would have to schedule that sooner rather than later.

Phil Lemnios said that is a fine idea but he thinks he'll still leave the article because it can always be pulled. Otherwise it gives the appearance that it is going to take another year or two to get

an answer. Jennifer Fleming noted everyone needs to be aware that a decision like this has huge implications for students and for parents and some people will pull their children from our schools. We have not kicked the can -- we had a pandemic and we have now been focusing on this and Judy Kuehn and Dave DeGennaro are dedicating 12 hours per week on it while running a school system. She is not comfortable feeling rushed because some people feel they are delaying the process.

Judy Kuehn asked isn't there another funding source that we can go through without going to Town Meeting. Jason Frady said if the School Committee has the money to spend from their budget, that could be reallocated but it could be a concern and he would not suggest doing that. We don't want to hide this from the public; we are not that kind of town. A great place to discuss this would be an Advisory Board meeting. The Advisory Board would/should want to discuss this with the School Committee and this Ad Hoc committee. It would be a great meeting to have because it will have capital implications across town. He said he understands it feels like putting the cart before the horse and to force the School Committee's hand to do something but the School Committee also said that when the time is right, they are going to go through this process. Everyone recognized it is now time and the horse is already out of the barn. He doesn't think that putting this article on should put more pressure on the School Committee for a decision, this is just part of the process -- the cost of implementing it is part of the process. That is an important part of the equation and we need to understand what that is going to be. Don't need to wait for an October special town meeting to fund another study.

Phil Lemnios asked for any final comments from the committee. Ernest Minelli asked Phil Lemnios what is the final due date for including this warrant article. Phil Lemnios responded a week from tomorrow night, they are signing it on the 23<sup>rd</sup>. He added you can always put an article on and move no action on it. Phil Lemnios said what he is not trying to force a decision; this is the needed expenditure to further tease out whether it makes sense to move to another step. If the School Committee decides on the status quo, we don't spend a penny of it. However, more analysis is needed to see if they proceed with any of the other options and this is the next step of that process. It preserves that flexibility and we can always vote no action but if we don't have it on the warrant, it means calling a special town meeting or waiting until next May. His sense is he thinks we just need to get to some finality on this question in short order because that will drive what will happen to the other town buildings since this has been a discussion since 2014. The next step is the committee assigns a weight to the public sentiment before making a recommendation to School Committee who will then take the ball.

Jason Frady said he is wondering; if this money is not going to be spent by School Committee to study consolidation, is there a way to write the article which will allow us to use the money on a town building revitalization plan. It could be rewritten to allow an evaluation of space needs

whether school or town buildings, which takes the pressure off School Committee because people's next question will be, what are we going to do if we are not moving any town functions to the Memorial. We don't have answers to "what are we going to do" because we are waiting on this decision of School Committee. Phil Lemnios agreed he could change a few words to read something like "sum of \$100,000 to pay for the cost to study the consolidation of town services and any buildings owned by the Town of Hull". He thinks that would also help with Jim Richman's citizens petition to investigate where the best place is to offer services to seniors. They are looking for a place to build a new one or offer services in an existing. Phil Lemnios said he would tweak it to make it more general. Judy Kuehn said she really likes that compromise. Jennifer Fleming said she likes it too. Phil Lemnios said this will allow us to get to the goal we want. Judy Kuehn said they spoke with the MARS Group to get a cost estimate. Dave DeGennaro said it was \$70,000-\$75,000 but they kind of stopped MARS from giving a firmer number due to School Committee's feeling. Phil Lemnios said they will make the language changes and make it more general, which will allow us to have funds available for whichever purpose we need them.

Phil Lemnios said he doesn't think a joint meeting is needed yet since we don't have the survey information yet. It is all qualitative and will be assigned appropriate weight but we won't be able to say 67% of the community said X, we will not have that ability. He added there will be a lot in the eye of the beholder. Judy Kuehn noted the information from the focus groups is very similar to the survey results.

C. Anne Murray said she can appreciate where the School Committee is coming from with this giving the impression of a decision having been made. We are all waiting for the same conclusions to be made but from a citizen's point of view, she does see the value and supports the idea of a placeholder so that the process is not waiting another year and without the added expense of a special town meeting. If enough explanation is given to the public about the reasons, it makes perfect sense to put it in. Phil Lemnios agreed he would amend it to make it more general but said he still thinks there is going to be pressure to have a decision. They'll need to make a decision fairly quickly.

## **6. Next Steps**

Phil Lemnios recapped the meeting for anyone who joined later. The committee approved the meeting agenda, February 15, 2022 meeting minutes, received an update of the survey data and the next meeting will be held in person. That meeting will be to hear how the work product is coming along. The committee now has to pick a date for the next in-person meeting. Several dates were discussed and all committee members agreed on Wednesday, April 6 beginning at 6:30pm and will be held in the High School Exhibition room. Phil Lemnios said the expectation at this meeting will be to review the work to date so he thinks School Committee members can

attend the next meeting if they want but it is not a presentation of results. Phil Lemnios asked what Judy could send to the committee members in advance of the meeting to review. Judy Kuehn said maybe something about the trends, the working document.

Anne Murray asked if Judy would be kind enough to provide a brief update on her process, she connected late and missed that part. Judy Kuehn said she is working with a group that includes Mary Merrigan and Christine Cappadona and they have a very large amount of qualitative data to review. They are being as objective as possible and the team reads each one and puts it in an appropriate category in order to find trends and patterns. So far the pros and cons for Option 1 and Option 4 are done as well as the focus groups pros and cons. The next meeting will be a working group meeting to review preliminary survey and focus group information.

Phil Lemnios asked Judy Kuehn when she starts reading commentary like I'll take my child out of the school system or I can't afford to live in town, how does this factor into a recommendation. We are going to see responses that are that strident. Judy Kuehn responded some comments are anomalies so they don't get on the board but if several people say they are in favor of Option 4 because it enriches the experience, we tallying how often that comes up. It is good information for the community to have. We are also looking at how long we can maintain the status quo as well as the benefits of an 8-12 high school and PreK -7 Jacobs School. We'll consider the building capacity because that would involve moving 120 students to Jacobs, which means additional staff and more parking spaces. We're determining how many parking spaces are now used by Collaborative staff, etc. all to help this committee make an informed decision.

Polly Rowe thanked everyone for the update. She said at the February 15 meeting you mentioned you would be studying how long the Hull Public Schools can sustain a 2% budget, when will we have your completed information? Judy Kuehn said the goal is to have all the data done by the end of April. Dave DeGennaro said they are shooting for the end of April/beginning of May so the School Committee has that information as well. Judy Kuehn added when we have our working meeting in April, we can share that information then. Dave DeGennaro agreed they could show the committee where we are at that time. Polly asked if the goal is to have the financial information simultaneously with the survey data. Dave DeGennaro said they have been working together on that. He added they also have to think about what other costs will be involved like what changes will need to be made to the other schools, etc. Judy Kuehn added we are looking even deeper at things like staffing, certification considerations related to reconfiguring grade levels, custodians, etc. - it is complex. Polly Rowe said she's interested in the financial assessment which is solely about how long the Hull Public Schools can maintain the status quo, which is separate from the other things. Dave DeGennaro said he is still working on that and will bring it forward at the next meeting.

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**7. Adjournment**

Judy Kuehn made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Ernest Minelli seconded the motion.

Roll Call Vote: Ayes: Jennifer Fleming, Jason Frady, Renee Kiley, Judy Kuehn, Phil Lemnios, Ernest Minelli,

Meeting adjourned at 5:08pmpm

Respectfully submitted,

Debbe Bennett  
Recording Secretary