

Town of Hull
Best Educational Use of School Facilities Committee Meeting
Wednesday, April 6, 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
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 in the Exhibition room at Hull High School. Phil Lemnios informed those in attendance that this will be a working group meeting and they will not be taking any public comment.

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Phil Lemnios at 6:30pm.

2. Approval of agenda:

The meeting agenda was approved without exception.

3. Approval of Minutes

Judy Kuehn made a motion to approve the Tuesday, March 15, 2022 meeting minutes. Ernest Minelli seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

4. Working Group – Review preliminary survey and focus group trends

Judy Kuehn reviewed the preliminary data information, which she sent to all committee members prior to the meeting. She noted the first page is a draft table of contents which will be in the final report and she asked the committee to provide feedback about what should stay or go and whether there are any other areas that need to be added.

She began to review each item on the table of contents and said under #2 they are looking at trends and patterns in the data and are looking for what the data is telling

them. From this, they developed a frequently asked question list. So far she, Dave DeGennaro, Christine Cappadona and Mary Merrigan have devoted 144 combined hours to going through this data and going through every response to decide which trend or category it belongs in. She has a large binder of the survey data. The frequently asked questions list also includes misconceptions. The table of contents needs an MSBA section and noted there was a phone call with the MSBA this week. The table of contents will include a status quo financial prediction section as well as consolidation grade configuration. She noted she will have her leadership team work on this with her to determine the advantages and disadvantage of the models. Item 7 is the concluding remarks and will include a recommendation to School Committee. The addendum will include: focus group meeting dates, a copy of the survey, the link to the MARS report and the 2014 MSBA letter.

Phil Lemnios asked the Committee if they have any immediate observations about the table of contents. Phil Lemnios added the committee's homework will be to put some thought into the table of contents because it will need to be finalized at the next meeting.

John Reilly asked, with a study of this nature, is it possible to include a minority report. Phil Lemnios noted there is already a lot of information and the School Committee will have a hard enough time making a decision. John Reilly said just in case the committee is unable to come to a consensus. Phil Lemnios said typically the committee takes a vote and every member should be on record. Ernest Minelli said he agrees with John Reilly. Speaking personally, regardless of how we come to a recommendation of the ad hoc committee, all opinions should be represented. Maybe rather than a minority report, it could be called considerations and would include items the School Committee needs to take into account. John Reilly said he doesn't know how it's going to play out or if we will have a united recommendation. Jennifer Fleming agreed, and added she will not be part of the vote ultimately, but if her opinion differs from the committee's she wants it on record. As a member of the School Committee she is not likely to get a vote due to her term ending. Jason Frady said we are all looking at this from multiple angles and thinks a well-reasoned recommendation would include what we see as the drawbacks. We are not here to create a rosy report but rather provide well-reasoned advice and a recommendation; therefore we should also note any drawbacks we see. Phil Lemnios said he thinks "considerations" is good terminology to use. Jason Frady added we all come with different viewpoints but hopefully we all end up in the same place.

Judy Kuehn continued to page 3, and reviewed the statement under Purpose of Ad Hoc Committee, member's, methodology, etc. On page 5 Judy Kuehn explained the

formatting and how they've listed the pros and cons from both the focus groups and survey data. Phil Lemnios asked if after going through the data and identifying the series of bullet points, if she was also able to understand for example, for every negative bullet there was 1.5 positive one. Judy responded no, it was all qualitative and they tried to categorize and find a common theme.

Jennifer Fleming noted this is the first meeting where we are seeing this data but the public is not able to participate. Phil Lemnios stated it is now a public document because we are discussing it. Phil Lemnios said the easiest thing to do is make copies of this draft document for the audience. He added the committee is not taking public comments tonight because this is a working group meeting to review the preliminary survey responses. The Committee's objective is to deliver a recommendation to the School Committee in May. An audience member asked if there is a timeline after this committee makes a recommendation to School Committee. Phil Lemnios responded there is not any statutory timeline for the School Committee. They will have the latitude to accept, in whole or in part, or reject the recommendation of this ad hoc committee. The audience member said he has a 4th grader and wonders if this is something that will happen in a year or two. Judy Kuehn said it would not occur before the 2023-2024 school year. She added the School Committee will need to do a feasibility study as the next step. Jennifer Fleming added there has been a push to get this process done and it would be beneficial to the schools to have a final decision so we are not going to perpetuate it.

An audience member asked why the School Committee is doing this. Phil Lemnios responded in 2014 a Town Meeting vote was made to begin to look at this because of declining enrollment. Jennifer Fleming added it was a non-binding referendum and the School Committee has been aware of the declining enrollment for some time. They are doing this from the angle of "what is in the best interest of students". The School Committee hired the MARS group to do an independent study and we agreed to follow the recommendation of MARS, which was to create this ad hoc committee but the School Committee will make the final decision. The recommendation of the MARS report was temporarily derailed due to the pandemic.

Judy Kuehn added the MARS group is made up of former educators. We've done internal space needs/consolidation studies several times in the past but the enrollment has continued to decline. In 2017 school educators did a presentation that consolidation was not in the best interest of students at that time. Phil Lemnios added part of the issue at that time was they were too close to home and that is why an independent group was hired. The next step in the process is for this group to make a recommendation and if the School Committee chooses anything other than status quo,

then they hire consultants for a feasibility study to determine what needs to be done to adopt the recommendation. Ernest Minelli noted for those members of the public who have come out tonight, you are welcome to contact any of us on the committee with questions. This process is not going to go on in perpetuity; however we just need to make sure we have all the information.

Copies of the draft document were distributed to audience members and Phil Lemnios stressed that it is a draft document and the committee reserves the right to change anything in the draft. He would not expect to see anyone here at a future meeting saying we said one thing tonight and now say something else. Anne Murray wanted to set the record straight that this process dates back to 2010 when many of us were calling for a study and that is why the citizen's petition came about -- it was because nothing had been done.

Judy Kuehn continued reviewing the document. Phil Lemnios noted we need to figure out what weight we are going to assign to this. It will provide commentary but it is not quantitative data and asked, is there a value to going through each bullet and discussing? Judy Kuehn said she doesn't think it can be weighted. When you read through the pros and cons of option 1, for example, you get a feel for themes like room for future growth. Judy Kuehn reminded the committee that under options 2 and 3 the School Committee gives up control of the Memorial School and the only difference between the two is grade configuration. As we go through the data, the pros and cons of options 2 and 3 are, expanded educational experience, efficient use of building space, balanced enrollment between schools, while the cons for options 2 and 3 are that the School Committee loses control of the Memorial School building. Phil Lemnios asked what that means. Judy Kuehn said there is concern that if we gave up the building, it would impact and limit future growth. Under option 4 they liked that there would be an MOU and it would be a mixed use facility – we would still have the building if enrollment expanded.

Ernest Minelli asked about overlapping credentials for teaching certification requirements. Judy Kuehn responded a secondary license can usually teach 8th grade. Phil Lemnios asked about someone with a 3rd grade certification. Judy Kuehn responded someone with an elementary certification can teach up to grade 6. Judy Kuehn said some licenses are grades 5-8 and others 6-9 so that is why each individual certification needs to be looked at. Ernest Minelli asked if there is any benefit for teachers to pursue a national board certification, does that provide portability between buildings. Judy Kuehn said she needs to look into that. Ernest Minelli said he is trying to understand the portability. Judy Kuehn noted she would not recommend teachers traveling between buildings due to the time lost from a person's day due to travel

time. Ernest Minelli said it could be an alternating day rotation like Monday, Wednesday, Friday vs, Tuesday and Thursday. Judy Kuehn noted that is part of the work we still need to go deeper into.

Judy Kuehn noted that in her opinion, option 4 is seen as the best option and received the most favorable responses. It is seen as the best choice option due to efficient use of space, the expanded learning experience, it addresses declining enrollment and the respondents like the idea of a MOU. The focus group liked that the School Committee maintains control of the building and the negatives were “nothing”.

Judy Kuehn noted the Frequently Asked Questions were created from the survey and focus group responses. The first three questions are town-related. Phil Lemnios said the answer to #3 is no. He asked that any references to the Town of Hull be changed to general government instead since there is already some degree of partisanship.

Question #6 pertains to building capacity and we’ve created a corresponding chart that includes that information. Phil Lemnios noted one question that may be asked is, why was the Jacobs built for 785 students when it opened with 538. He said that has to do with the process the state requires. One of the first steps was a feasibility study which included enrollment projections approved by the state. At the time of the original study which was done in the late 1990s, that enrollment was projected. John Reilly noted that in 1985 there were 1587 students and if you read the Hull Times, occasionally they will mention an enrollment figure of 2,700 kids in a town of less than 10,000 residents. This gives you a sense of how the enrollment has shifted over two generations. It was noted the MARS report also includes enrollment projections prepared by NESDEC which bottoms out at 660 students from the current enrollment. Phil Lemnios noted that Hull, as a community, does not have large tracks of land like other towns such as Franklin, where twenty years ago when the commuter rail came through, they had to build three new schools in five years. Hull is different, it took a long time for enrollment to decline and likewise it will take a long time for it to increase because it’s a one off sale. These are things that the committee needs to consider as a totality.

Jennifer Fleming noted that even if the building capability was 700 students but it wouldn’t accommodate 700 kindergarten students. Therefore it would be helpful to know the number of classrooms in each grade level. So if the recommendation is for prek-7, how many of those classrooms would be used for each grade level. Jennifer Fleming said it also would be helpful to know the configuration, if the building can support 785 students and we are adding two or three grades to the school, what will it look like to the students. It’s important to know where those grades will go with a chart of the Jacobs School that has marked classrooms by grade level. She noted there is a

middle group of 5-7 graders who will be impacted most. Phil Lemnios asked if there is a standard you want to find. Jen Fleming said she just wants to know. She added the School Committee will need to know how this is going to work and consolidating is tougher than just how many people can you fit in a building. Phil Lemnios said if we are looking at the current layout what is the link to the educational outcome? Jen Fleming said the end result is; this is how the classrooms are laid out with four Kindergarten classrooms, they couldn't easily accommodate 7th grade students. That type of information will impact the School Committee's decision making as well as what it means in terms of staff. Phil Lemnios said he believes the information is necessary; he just wants to understand how it is linked. Jen Fleming said there are enough studies that say it's better for children to have class sizes of X. We have to look at what we have vs. what we want to do. We want to have a clearer vision of how the Jacobs School is going to realign to accommodate each grade.

Jason Frady suggested looking at the 2019 configuration, when it was a normal time, for comparison purposes. He noted the middle school students change classes during the day so we need to put thought into where it can happen, based on the requirements of the rest of the school. Judy Kuehn noted she plans to work with the leadership team to work those things out. Judy Kuehn added MARS was here before the pandemic. Jennifer Fleming said if she was not on this committee, she would want it to vet all of the potential outcomes. Jason Frady noted the MARS report envisions that would come in the next phase (feasibility). Jen Fleming said the School Committee will want to see a map of the school. Phil Lemnios said he views this committee's role to be softer. It will make a recommendation of an option for the School Committee to further consider, which is why the MARS Group put bullets which includes a feasibility study after the recommendation. That study will look at what is needed to convert the square footage to what's been recommended. The study would also assess the impact of adding staff and students to the facility. Phil Lemnios said that is why we have the article on the Town Meeting warrant. Jason Frady noted a floorplan will help them visualize since overcrowding is a concern. Jennifer Fleming noted we may be making a decision that could be harmful to students. Jason Frady added flexibility will be needed since some years you may have fluctuating enrollment in grade levels. Judy Kuehn stated they can do that and they have already put a lot of thought into these types of concerns. She added if prek-7 were the recommendation, that would still leave three extra classrooms; floorplans can show current versus the two options.

Renee Kiley stated it would be helpful for the members of this committee to do a walkthrough of the buildings to see how many classrooms are available and how they would be used. The committee members agreed. Each committee member can arrange with the superintendent to take an escorted tour of all schools. It was noted the square

footage of high school classrooms is smaller than elementary classrooms. Ernest Minelli said he's concern that if we all get together it would be a public meeting. Phil Lemnios said he will work on the tour idea but we are not going as a committee, maybe two or three at a time. Judy Kuehn said she'll have the layout ready for the tour groups.

John Reilly asked if there are any more current enrollment projections. Phil Lemnios noted there are some in the MARS report. John Reilly noted last year there were only 32 births in Hull, what is that going to look like, can we get more current projections than the December 2018 ones in the MARS report. John Reilly noted there were about 1,000 kids in the high school at one time and someone might ask why 1,000 would fit 40 years ago but now only 785. He knows the Massachusetts standards have changed. Phil Lemnios noted the MSBA also tended to overbuild a little bit. John Reilly said it does show there is room in the building if needed, but if in five years ten or twenty new students are added, you may need to add a classroom at two different grade levels. It seems like as we age out, the population is dropping because a lot of retirees are coming into town. Jason Frady added the pandemic may have had an impact on the birth rate the last couple years.

5. Next Steps

Phil Lemnios noted the Committee's homework is to consider the table of contents and consume this data. Phil Lemnios said when he first looked at this report he thought it would be hard to assign a weight but he would also caution against cherry picking a bullet point. The task of this committee needs to be looking at it in a more comprehensive fashion. He added you are not going to find the perfect answer and you will have to use your intellect and analytical skills but it will not be perfect. Additionally, he stated no good deed goes unpunished and the ones making the decision will be open to criticism.

John Reilly stated when dealing with the schools, it's important to note we've been through a lot of tough times in the past like double sessions. It's part of life that this town, in particular, is geographically limited.

John Reilly added he thinks we need to start looking at the framework of the MOU. Phil Lemnios responded he thinks it should be kept simple. If the School Committee calls for use of the building back in two years, it then is up to the town to determine what is next. If they are calling for the building back, it is because there is an educational need for it.

John Reilly said what if the make-up of the School Committee changes in the future and they say we want the school back now. Phil Lemnios said the MOU would call for a reasonable amount of time to take the building back. Based on the town's history and since it is a multi-member board, it would be hard to get an unreasonable board. Phil Lemnios said if you try to craft an agreement for every possible outcome, it could take three years. He suggests making it as simple as possible. If the School Committee needs it back for educational use, they should be allowed to do that with reasonable notice so the town can find another option for the occupants. Jason Frady added if we had to move the town offices out of there, that is a less daunting task than building a new school, there isn't much we would take out. Phil Lemnios said if the town offices do take over the space, each department would likely assume a classroom and add petitions but no real reconstruction. John Reilly said there will be some things you did not want to move there, what do you do with the senior center, the light plant, what is the contingency plan? What if there is a major influx like there was with bussing? Phil Lemnios said one of the things we learned on the call with the MSBA on Monday was we may be ahead of the curve on this. It seems many communities are seeing drops in enrollment across the Commonwealth. This is an issue they, as an agency that works with cities or towns, are seeing a lot. Their role is to provide grants to cities and towns that renovate or build new schools. Based on our conversation with the MSBA, there is also a process to follow when a city or town wants to take a school out of service. They will look at whether they loaned the town money for the school. During our call we gave them an update on the status and they want a follow up letter from the superintendent with a copy of the MARS report and that will satisfy the six month notification window although we made it abundantly clear that no decision has been made at this time. If you close a school, they reserve the right to investigate future loan applications. Based on the totality of our situation, he doesn't think there is a risk of that. The MSBA liked the MOU idea and we need to keep them in the loop on our progress. Judy Kuehn added there may be other impact; they have to look at the Jacobs and High School projects as well if we are moving more grade levels in. They will consider what impact that will have on the intended population to ensure nothing is being taken away from them educationally. As an example, if the original ed specs included a space for industrial arts but due to the new school population you had to eliminate the industrial arts program, they would look adversely on that. Phil Lemnios said from his perspective, people are looking for someone else to make the decision but this is all a local decision and we are following a rational process that includes public participation, focus groups, a public survey, etc. Jason Frady asked if we reviewed any contracts from when the MSBA originally funded the building to make sure there isn't something we are missing.

Jennifer Fleming asked about the MOU process when that will be drafted, who does it, etc. Phil Lemnios said they've only had an MOU for the L Street field which was under Park and Rec authority. That MOU was created to show it was used for school use so it could be included as part of the MSBA project. That MOU said it was under the School Department authority during regular school hours. However, the MOU can be as complicated or as simple as you want. Jennifer Fleming said as an attorney, she thinks we should have some input.

The next meeting is scheduled for April 20 at 6:30pm and will be held in person. Phil Lemnios noted that there is no requirement that a committee takes public comments and since the next meeting will be a working group, it is unlikely they will.

6. Adjournment

Ernest Minelli made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Jennifer Fleming seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously and the meeting adjourned at 8:05pm

Respectfully submitted,

Debbe Bennett
Recording Secretary