

**Town of Hull
Best Educational Use of School Facilities Committee Meeting
Wednesday, May 11, 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

Debbe Bennett/Support Staff
Dave DeGennaro/Support Staff

The Best Educational Use of School Facilities Committee meeting was held in the Exhibition room at Hull High School.

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Phil Lemnios at 6:35pm.

2. Approval of agenda:

Jason Frady made a motion to approve the meeting agenda. John Reilly seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

3. Approval of Minutes

Ernest Minelli made a motion to approve the Wednesday, April 26, 2022 meeting minutes. Jason Frady seconded the motion. The motion was approved with Renee Kiley abstaining.

4. Working Group

- **Review changes/additions within the preliminary survey and focus group trends**

Judy Kuehn reviewed the changes made to the Table of Contents since the last meeting, including spelling out New England School Development Council (NESDEC), added floor plans for the high school and Memorial School. The two MSBA letters were removed

from section #4, MSBA, and added to the Addendum and the Focus group dates were removed from the Addendum because they were added to the FAQs.

On page 5 more information was added to the Ad Hoc Purpose and it was put into past tense. The focus group dates were added to this section, they added the survey collection date information and the Ad Hoc meeting dates were added as well as the school building site visits. John Reilly thanked the superintendent for escorting the committee around each school building. Everyone agreed it was helpful. Judy Kuehn noted no changes were made to pages 7-11. In the frequently asked questions, a Memorial School capacity chart was added on page 14, as the committee requested. On page 15 the rental income from SSEC was added. Dave DeGennaro reviewed this chart stating this is using FY23 proposed rental income for SSEC. They are planning to use 11 rooms throughout the district for an annual rental income of \$159,500. Additionally, during the summer they will use approximately 10 rooms for an additional \$14,500 for a total revenue of \$174,000. Phil Lemnios asked how many rooms SSEC is currently using at Memorial Middle School. Dave DeGennaro stated two rooms. Phil Lemnios asked how much it costs to heat, light and maintain Memorial Middle School. Dave DeGennaro stated he would have to look at the numbers. Phil Lemnios asked him to have that for the next meeting. John Reilly noted the 2nd floor of Memorial School is about 13 rooms and includes the auditorium. Judy Kuehn added the SSEC could use the office spaces off the auditorium for OT and PT too, as well as the large group room. John Reilly asked how much the district is saving on tuition and transportation. Judy Kuehn stated the tuition remains the same, approximately \$68,000 per child. The transportation cost is separate and we have six students that still need to be transported whether to Hull or elsewhere -- we still have to pay that in Hull.

John Reilly said he's trying to see a balance. If we look at the town having use of Memorial School's 1st floor and 3rd floor, it would be difficult for the town to have a flow and the public would have to go by the second floor. Phil Lemnios said the gross revenue to the town is \$174,000 and you still have to pay \$68,000 x 6 (\$408,000), plus transportation. In order to host the SSEC, there is also an associated cost. If the School Department loses the Memorial Middle School, you would not have the cost of maintaining the building and utilities. Whatever that value is, it might be close to the \$174,000 revenue. Judy Kuehn noted there is also the added benefit to students. John Reilly noted they currently use two classrooms at Memorial Middle School and of their 98 students, 92 are from other communities. Phil Lemnios said to him there is a

revenue stream which is made up by the loss of the utilities cost which could make the School Department whole. Judy Kuehn noted our six students would have a different experience. She added that is not for our committee, we have been tasked with determining what is in the best interest of all students. Phil Lemnios said there are opportunities to look for. Jason Frady agreed with John Reilly that it would make more sense for them to use the 3rd floor rather than the 2nd floor. Judy Kuehn noted they would need to use the auditorium and gym. John Reilly said that could be addressed with scheduling protocols in the agreement that include hours those areas would be available. Phil Lemnios said when we get into that discussion, the net cost of not having the SSEC in Hull is the transportation. He believes there is a discussion to be had, when everything is said and done but we'll see how the numbers go. Judy Kuehn noted if we're able to keep students in the building it may impact how the MSBA views the change. If we don't have children in the building for a number of years, we may need to go through MSBA again.

John Reilly said he read that if we ever need to do something like put an addition on the high school after a school closure, the MSBA would not fund it. John Reilly asked if the school keeps use of the gymnasium for activities and keeps an office in the gym, would that still be considered part of the school. Phil Lemnios said until you have a plan, they are not letting you do a sub defuse but we need to know what the threshold is. John Reilly noted it should be listed as a consideration in the report. Phil Lemnios said keep in mind that could be an aspect of the professional services. Those are not the type of responses we could generate; they're too hypothetical, what needs to be done to maintain it as a school.

C. Anne Murray stated from the public point of view many may think you can take those six kids and stick them all in one van but she understands it does not work that way. She wonders if you had an adult education or Wellspring program in there, would that help qualify it as a school. Judy Kuehn said she also thought about Wellspring. Phil Lemnios said he suspects adult education would not qualify, he doesn't think the MSBA would fund that. Judy Kuehn said she would ask the SSEC if they would be interested in the 3rd floor instead.

Ernest Minelli said he thinks there is going to be healthy debate back and forth with our committee as a whole. We can consider whether we want things like computer training, outreach programs, GED classes, courses from Bridgewater State, etc., there are so

many different creative options. He noted the building walk helped shift his thoughts a lot. He was leaning in a different direction prior to the site visit. He said, we need to consider, for example, what advantages do we have if selecting option 4, rather than splitting teaching roles into 0.6/0.8 positions. Those are the things the School Committee will ask. Phil Lemnios said we should identify questions that should be explored more completely in the considerations section but we need to be careful to not overstep our authority. Ernest Minelli said he doesn't think it's right to speculate, but he would welcome it if the Ad Hoc committee had considerations and thoughts that would include tangible information for the School Committee to have. Phil Lemnios said he watched the April School Committee meeting and thinks some members feel they are being pushed to make a decision. The School Committee members, for whatever reason, feel they are being pushed into some kind of outcome and he doesn't want this committee to do that, only what it has been asked to do. We are listing questions that come up with the hope that the School Committee will, relatively quickly, establish and define how they are going to process this report. Jen Fleming stated it would be up to the School Committee to determine what they want to do with that space if it will no longer be used by Hull Public Schools students. You could come up with hundreds of ideas, many of which are beyond the charge of this committee. Jason Frady asked, as a tenant or owner, does that have an impact on the School Committee or town if we have kids in there? What does that cost look like vs 1/3 of the cost to keep it open (e.g. electric, heat, water, sewer, etc.). Phil Lemnios asked who would the occupants then be a tenant of. Jen Fleming said one justification for closing the building is the financial benefit, so she really wants to know whether it saves us money. Jason Frady said certain uses will cost more than they make up in income. As an example, if you wanted to renovate it for senior housing, the cost is too massive. Certain proposed uses don't make sense but we need to focus on what the schools need in terms of space.

Judy Kuehn said we don't have to include the SSEC information but it kept coming up as a question in the survey and focus groups. John Reilly said it should be presented factually. Phil Lemnios said it should be included if we can add the second point which is the actual cost to house them (utilities, building maintenance, etc. including labor costs of custodial and maintenance staff). Phil Lemnios said once we have that, it may prompt a different question. Those costs shift but the cost to maintain the building may just shift to the general fund.

Renee Kiley asked if the six Hull students are integrated or self-contained. Judy Kuehn replied, it's a mix. Renee Kiley noted last year 16 students were outplaced. Judy Kuehn confirmed and said we cannot care for them. She added years ago it was 32 students but we were able to bring some back by enhancing our programs.

John Reilly noted it is not his intention to put the School Committee into a corner but from his point of view he wants to see them say either yes or no so we, as a town, can make our plans. To do that, we need to know whether the building will become available in two years. The interest rates are low right now so we could be more aggressive in making town building repairs but we're in a holding pattern. If they don't think it is in the best interest of students or whether it is better to transport students out of town is not our concern. The town side needs to prepare. Phil Lemnios said at the last meeting we discussed that first the School Committee needs to make a determination. It is not our role to tell the School Committee how to configure their buildings. It is also not for the School Committee to say we'll only consolidate if you do x, y or z. The town will need to have a deliberative process to determine what to do and that should be done by an independent contractor. This is the result of continued declining enrollment and we have to figure out, at what point it is robbing resources from other schools.

Judy Kuehn continued to review the draft document. She noted question #15 has been added based on Jen's question last meeting. The MSBA section is relatively unchanged except for relocating the two letters to the addendum. Phil Lemnios noted there were questions last meeting on page 35. Judy Kuehn said that is the enrollment count comparison of the two NESDEC reports 2018-19 vs 2021-22. On the 21-22 report they have 805 kids but on the 18-19 report, the projection was 787, it went up for FY22 but we don't really know why there is such a difference in the two. Judy Kuehn asked how it helps our report. Dave DeGennaro stated he thinks it is better to include the latest report. Phil Lemnios said it's all trending the same way anyhow. Jason Frady added the numbers are not so far off. Phil Lemnios recommended using just the latest one and removing the notes 1 and 2. Jason Frady asked if these are updated annually. Dave DeGennaro said they are. John Reilly asked whether they consider charter and private school students. Judy Kuehn said she's not sure. Jennifer Fleming added it makes sense to use the most current numbers. Phil Lemnios added the MSBA relies on NESDEC enrollment figures. He asked what the actual enrollment was in 2021-22, the latest

NESDEC report has it at 805. Judy Kuehn asked if we should include actual enrollment for the last 5 years.

Section 6 of the report is the status quo financial predictions on page 37. Dave DeGennaro explained this forecast or prediction assumes we keep the same number of teaching staff and buildings but receive only a 2% budget increase each year. It begins with previous years, going back to FY19. He said the assumptions took into consideration retirements, etc. but beginning in FY24 the School Department will need \$17,264,194 or a 2.58% increase to maintain status quo. But as the Town Manager has mentioned, we should plan on 2% increases going forward. Because of this, FY24 will be short \$97,757, and we need to find room in our budget to balance. The deficit continues and worsens each year. Phil Lemnios noted that number is 2% but with declining enrolment it's really like 3-4% based on per pupil expenditures. The subtext of the MARS report is if we maintain the same overhead, something has to give. You could wipe out the utilities cost of Memorial Middle School if you gave it up but at some point you're robbing Peter to pay Paul. Dave DeGennaro agreed it's not sustainable. Judy Kuehn added even if we reduced FTEs it makes it harder to get and retain people.

Phil Lemnios said you could take those savings and put them in a stabilization account to create an endowment. This would allow you to become a School Department that is able to address shortfalls over the years. It could be used to pre-pay special education tuition, which is something that is done each year from the School Department's budget. John Reilly asked if, say \$100,000 were left over at the end of the year, could that be put into a stabilization account. He was told, no, it goes back to the town. John Reilly noted there are always purchases made at the last minute; it would be nice if that could go into stabilization instead. Dave DeGennaro stated that would require a vote by Town Meeting. Phil Lemnios added the stabilization is different. If the consolidation occurred, the dividends could create an endowment for the Hull Public Schools that would last many years. Jennifer Fleming asked if the numbers reflect whether this deficit could still happen even if we do consolidate. Phil Lemnios said if you want to continue to operate with the same number of people and same course offerings, here is what it is going to cost over time. If you assume a 2% growth regardless of the configuration, there will be a \$97,000 deficit beginning FY24. One strategy to mitigate that is to close the building and then take whatever saving that creates (e.g. the value of maintenance and utilities) and park those in an endowment. Jennifer Fleming said she needs to see those numbers. She asked if the School Department budget is going to go

down if they close the building. Phil Lemnios said there is a great opportunity to create an endowment that will allow the School Committee to have enrichments programs they haven't been able to in the past and a resource that is banked. Jen Fleming said it sounds wonderful but she wants the numbers to be reflective, so if this is not really a cost savings exercise, she wants that to be clear. That's why we need to know what portion of Memorial Middle School's budget is for maintenance. Dave DeGennaro asked if this spreadsheet should remain in the document. Ernest Minelli said he thinks the more information the better as long as it's pertinent, the more that comes from the Ad Hoc committee the better. Phil Lemnios said we are not going to comment on what happens to staff. This report will be included and reexamined during the next meeting.

Renee Kiley asked that a pie chart of the school's budget be included showing what portion of the budget is salaries, building maintenance, etc. Jason Frady said we've seen that before. Phil Lemnios added that does not cut evenly across all schools. Phil Lemnios said we know what it costs to light and heat Memorial Middle School; that is easy to get. Dave DeGennaro asked if the feasibility study would look at the financial aspect. Phil Lemnios said yes. He said when you read the MARS report it says if a recommendation other than Option #1 is made; the next step is to engage appropriate services before a final decision is made.

Polly Rowe said her recollection of the MARS report, is that it specifically stated that to keep all three schools open is not fiscally sustainable so she thinks that's important for the public to know but it's also important how you frame the issue.

Judy Kuehn noted page 39, of the document has been added and includes the pros and cons of the grade configurations. The floor plans were reviewed and it was noted the high school and Memorial School plans were added. Renee Kiley asked if there is any way to remove the emergency exit access points. She said it is disconcerting to see these access points. Judy Kuehn said they can do that and remove the teacher names from the original floor plan and just keep the grade level. Judy Kuehn noted pages 42 and 43 are an illustration of a possible layout of what it could look like.

Section 8 is the Concluding Remarks which the committee needs to write together. Phil Lemnios said he would like to propose a meeting of this group. We need to have two meetings well before the June 21 joint School Committee meeting, to have that discussion so it can be written up. The committee needs to first deliberate and come to a conclusion and the second meeting is to review the draft recommendation verbiage.

We need to say this is our recommendation and here is why. We have the next two meetings to get it done.

The first meeting will be held on Tuesday, May 31 beginning at 6:00pm. Jennifer Fleming added if her daughters have any playoff related activities, she won't be here. Phil Lemnios said we are not leaving this next meeting until we have a vote or decision. It will be an open vote. It was noted that each member would be asked to provide their impressions from the site visits and maybe 2-3 bullet points on the pros and cons. Phil appointed Ernest Minelli as facilitator for the meeting on the 31st. Judy Kuehn agreed. Meeting #2 will be held on Tuesday, June 7 beginning at 6:00pm.

Polly Rowe asked if the ultimate recommendation will be done like the Advisory Board, with the majority of the board feels this way. Phil Lemnios said yes, it is going to give every member a voice. There could be a majority and minority/considerations report. That would make sense because our job is to examine the question and provide a recommendation but not necessarily be advocates. John Reilly requested that on page 5 of the report the Board of Selectman be changed to Select Board.

5. Adjournment

Ernest Minelli made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Renee Kiley seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously and the meeting adjourned at 7:49pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Debbe Bennett
Recording Secretary