

Town of Hull
Best Educational Use of School Facilities Committee Meeting
Tuesday, May 31, 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 Ernest Minelli at 6:13pm and he thanked everyone for coming.

2. Approval of agenda:

Judy Kuehn made a motion to approve the meeting agenda. Phil Lemnios seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

3. Approval of Minutes

Phil Lemnios made a motion to approve the Wednesday, May 11, 2022 meeting minutes. Jason Frady seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

4. Public Comment Opportunity (up to two minutes per speaker)

Ernest Minelli opened the public comment period which he said is an opportunity for the public to state their perspective on the process with a two-minute limit. Pat Finn informed the committee that he was on the School Building Committee since after just finishing the Memorial School project. The School Building Authority was created about the same time and the town was reimbursed monthly. The Building Committee dealt with a lot, including problems with the modular classrooms and the Jacobs School neighbors who did not want the big addition and at time, the members were very divided. Some people did not think the School Department was always up front about finances but he was a supporter of the schools. The administrative wing was added to

the Jacobs project but it was not part of the reimbursement and that created controversy. However, it made sense because they would no longer be leasing Hadassah Way and the government was paying 70%. The enrollment projections did not turn out to be correct – they were not what we were told and here we are 15 years later and it's time to take advantage of the extra space. He said we all assumed this would happen and now we have the consultant's report that says it's the best educational use to consolidate. The Jacobs is the biggest and best school we have and he hopes the committee advocates for the preK-7 at Jacobs and 8-12 at the high school. We can find ways to cut the transportation budget. The kids deserve the best education in our best school which is the Jacobs. It's time to take the next steps and he hopes the School Committee agrees. Ernest Minelli thanked him for sharing his perspective.

C. Anne Murray said she came to listen and to hear where deliberations would go. This has been a long time coming and it needs to be done before we are at the crisis tipping point. She hopes the process does not get dragged out and that the School Committee sets a realistic time frame. She has been pretty impressed with the process so far and only wishes it was a more public format for those who couldn't come. *John Reilly arrived.* She wants people to know how open the process has been so if it had been televised or taped they would see that. This is such an important subject for the town and she wishes it was a little more open so the public could see how thorough the process has been.

Polly Rowe said she, too, had come to sit and listen but thanked the ad hoc committee for the work they have done and the public outreach with focus groups, a public survey, etc. and she appreciates all the work that has been done. In 2014 she was the author of a citizen's petition asking for an independent consultant and that was eight years ago. It passed by a 2 to 1 vote with the citizens wanting an outside assessment. Given it has taken so long, she hopes the School Committee will be cognizant that the community has been concerned for so long. She hopes when the ad hoc committee gives their recommendation that the School Committee sets a reasonable timeframe so the process does not go on forever. She really hopes the School Committee, which hired the career educational professionals of MARS Group, will take their report and respect the foundation, authority and outcomes the MARS Group details. This committee is going to give a recommendation which is not to be confused with supporting one option over another. Phil Lemnios stated he thinks this committee is making a recommendation of support for an option. Ernest Minelli added we are going to flesh that out more but the ad hoc committee, come June 21, wants to make a concerted recommendation to the School Committee, which will include considerations on the topic and other related items but we are hoping to have a definitive

recommendation. The School Committee will decide about timing, format, etc. At that point, the other School Committee members will need to be thoroughly brought up to speed. Polly Rowe asked so when the final recommendation is made, that means this committee supports option X. Phil Lemnios said the short answer is yes. Jason Frady added the ad hoc committee will make a recommendation as a committee and after giving our report, if the School Committee calls us back, we'll go but he doesn't think this committee will be pushing the School Committee or lobbying them to make a decision. Phil Lemnios agreed the ad hoc will be available to answer questions but if the School Committee takes an alternative view, this committee is not going to go to Town Meeting and advocate. We'll make a discreet recommendation and be a resource to answer questions, that's it.

Ernest Minelli thanked the audience for their interest in the process. Ernest Minelli asked the Committee members if they feel they've had enough time to review the updated report package and did anyone need points of clarification. Phil Lemnios stated he knows Dave has asked him to comment on the FAQs. He said over the course of this committee's meeting schedule he doesn't think question #1, about cost savings, is relevant any longer because that will really be driven by the ultimate use of the building. If the Memorial becomes available, the cost to convert it for one purpose will be different from another and it is also politically charged. Additionally, he's not sure how relevant question #2 is also. We've talked about the need to form another committee to explore possible uses for the Memorial School and we've already heard many suggested uses. There needs to be a deliberative public process to determine the reuse. The Select Board, School Committee and Town need to form a committee to explore reuse of the building.

Question #3 is about whether taxes will decrease. There really isn't a scenario under Proposition 2½ that taxes would decrease. Phil Lemnios said it's not a good question and not how local government is structured. Ernest Minelli added it is outside the scope of this committee as well. Phil Lemnios said the next question logically is if the taxes should decrease when there are fewer students, but it doesn't work that way. Phil Lemnios said most of the School Department's budget goes to staffing, not buildings. Jennifer Fleming said she doesn't think we can ignore the fact that the study was driven by tax payments. It is almost disingenuous if we don't include it. What drove doing this study in the first place was members of the community who perceived waste, and sought this as a tax savings concept. It is an integral part of this discussion and what distinguishes private from public education so it's important to recognize. Renee Kiley stated the cost of living is not going down. Phil Lemnios said if you were shaving \$500,000 off expenses, perhaps the Town could not take full advantage of Proposition 2½. You're educating fewer children and as the chart shows, the school budget is

growing by 4.6%. If you want to keep the unit cost static year after year that would keep costs down. Phil Lemnios said it's not automatically a "no". Judy Kuehn said this question came up a lot in the survey results. Phil Lemnios said this committee needs to determine; what is the best educational use of the school facilities. Jason Frady said our audience is the School Committee. Jennifer Fleming stated this is a School Committee ad hoc committee but it is not just comprised of two School Committee members. She is not comfortable taking out any reference to taxes or costs. It is a huge factor in whether consolidation goes forward or not so she suggests we just leave question #3 in there and take out only #1 and #2. John Reilly said it is not a simple yes or no answer. Phil Lemnios added it's a simplistic question to a complicated matter. Jason Frady suggested maybe saying something like; in the long run it will reduce the overhead for the School Department but that may or may not lead to lower taxes or slower tax growth. John Reilly said if he were on the School Committee it would be about the best education for the children and it would not be my job to consider the taxes – that's not what the School Committee is elected to do. Jennifer Fleming stated she appreciates that but they do control the School Department budget and we cannot ignore what drove the initial impetus, which was taxes. Phil Lemnios said in that case, he would say it is possible for taxes to decrease but it is also possible for them to increase or stay on the same trajectory. Jennifer Fleming said she is comfortable with that answer. The committee will review, edit and approve the response at the June 7 meeting.

John Reilly noted there is a spreadsheet in the report that says if we maintain the status quo, there would be \$350,000 shortfall in a few years. Phil Lemnios said that leads to the question; if we don't consolidate, how would the schools address that \$350,000 shortfall. Jason Frady noted that is well outside of what we do but based on the projections, within five years the schools would be facing a serious shortfall. Polly Rowe said what the MARS report states about the enrollment continuing to decline is the status quo will not be fiscally sustainable. Judy Kuehn agreed that page 15 of the MARS report says over the long term it will not be sustainable. Phil Lemnios said maybe under considerations we refer back to the FAQs and say the annual deficit could lead to a reduction of services or a Proposition 2 ½ override. The Committee was satisfied.

5. Working Group will engage in the following structured activities:
3:2:1 Structured Discussion Method

Ernest Minelli stated the next portion of the agenda is to invite committee members to engage in the 3:2:1 structured discussion method, which allows each member to contribute and share thoughts, points of clarification and reflection. Later, the committee members will be asked to put forth their intellectual dollar.

Renee Kiley read from a prepared statement. She said this committee was tasked with determining what is best educationally and it should not be about the decreasing student population. She said this is an opportunity to take a leap of faith and to embrace a new educational model. We should look to enhance the educational experience for all of our students and our SSEC students should not be bussed out of town. Our students should be offered foreign language and band at an earlier age. She said when middle and high schools work together, students become familiar with the school culture earlier and it allows staff to identify at-risk students sooner. She said in her opinion Option 4 of the MARS report of PreK-7 at Jacobs and 8-12 at the high school has proven successful in other districts and provides a unique opportunity for the students of Hull.

Jason Frady said he, like Renee Kiley advocates for the PreK-7/8-12 model. He thinks having more teachers in the high school gives the administration the ability to provide more classes to our students, no matter what level, to meet their needs. Whether its AP courses, honors or something else, this plan offers more flexibility and more options to help students find their way. This way we are not forcing students into taking electives they are not interested in but have to take because it fits their schedule. This process should give more flexibility. Even though it's a smaller population, we need to provide all students with what they need. There will be some cost avoidance but closing the Memorial School as a school is not the primary focus, it is on finding; what is the best use of the buildings with the dollars we have. With this model some things will change but many of the traditions are driven by the parents. All those changes will impact a couple grades all at once and then the new traditions will take over. We need to be mindful of how we spend money and to do more with the money we have.

Judy Kuehn said she also is in favor of Option 4 from the MARS report. Page 42 page of BEUSF report is the result of meetings she's held with her leadership team. They did not find many disadvantages for the PreK- 7 / 8-12 model but identified many advantages such as access to band and foreign language at the elementary level as well as content teachers and an elementary library media specialist. Grade 8 students will have access to courses beyond their typical course selections and it will be one less transition for students. Grade 8 students would have more involvement and settle into the high school earlier which may increase graduation rates. The high school has 254 students now and this will add only another 60 students. The transportation barrier is removed for drama and sports and more may opt to participate in clubs after school. Keeping the Memorial School open is like having an empty restaurant and by 2026-2027 there will be only 151 students in the building and that's not enough students for a vibrant school. Judy Kuehn added if we don't do the consolidation, to save money they will have to reduce staff FTEs. People will look for full time jobs rather than staying in a 0.8

or 0.6 position so it will be difficult to retain staff. She said those are some of the reasons she's in favor Option 4. Judy Kuehn added the SSEC could stay with that option too.

John Reilly agreed that getting 8th grade students to the high school could increase graduation rates. In addition, it may prevent some from leaving for private high schools. There may be more resistance from the child to switch schools. In a perfect world of limitless funds, he still would not go with Option 1 because after the building walkthrough he observed a lot of emptiness and areas not being used. He doesn't think it's a good experience to be in such an empty place. Sometimes when you mix grade 6 and 7 with the younger grades some step up and take on a mentoring role. With Option 4, the School Department has control of the school with a MOU rather than being turned over as surplus like the Damon School. This way the School Department could have use of it later on, if needed. The MOU eliminates that fear about getting the space back if ever needed. If he were a School Committee member, he would consider the educational experience and therefore would rather see money spent on education rather than maintenance and facilities. He believes Option 4 would improve the educational experience.

Phil Lemnios recused himself from this discussion. He said when he watched the mid-April School Committee meeting he realized it is a lightning rod so whatever the recommendation, it would be best if he did not play a role in the process. That may allow the School Committee to remain focused on the best educational use.

Ernest Minelli said he values the role Phil has played in this process and from his perspective; this committee is richer because of the Town Manager, Superintendent and a variety of other stakeholders.

Jennifer Fleming said she appreciates all the work of each member. She appreciates Phil Lemnios, John Reilly and every community member's involvement. She said she has historically, as a parent and School Committee member, always been opposed to the idea of consolidating our schools because it involves closing a school building. From the perspective of its impact on the town, the optics are very hard to escape – "The Town of Hull closes a school". It does not provide a welcoming environment for parents to consider even though Hull has so much to offer. Towns like Middleboro or Abington don't have all we have to offer yet they have thriving schools. In Hull we always have declining enrollment despite the schools efforts to attract more students. She doesn't see the same effort coming from the government side so it has become a self-fulfilling prophesy. That MARS report pre-dated Covid, which highlighted the need for flexibility. In Hull we were able to get students back in school before many other communities

were because of the space. She cannot advocate for anything that could cause more disruption to our students. However, she knows Judy Kuehn has an amazing ability to produce good results. The study has disclosed some things that need to improve but not necessarily closing the Memorial School. There is an educational value in keeping grades 6-8 together. The only consolidation idea she could support would be Option 4 but she would like to see Memorial kept for creating more services like woodshop, metal shop, internships, etc. After touring the Memorial School, she agrees there is not a lot of vibrancy there but thinks this ongoing discussion has impacted the students and staff in the building. She wants the school to be able to move forward and allow the teachers to do their jobs. At this point, she is in favor of Option 1. She doesn't think declining enroll is inevitable and she would like the government to look at ways to attract families since it would benefit the town at the same time. She would love to see more young families encouraged to move here. The optics of closing this school will be a hard hurdle for prospective people to move here and believes any changes will be very disruptive to students.

Ernest Minelli thanked everyone for their views. He said the building walkthrough was a real eye opener for him. He remembers the Damon School closing and later became an educator. It would be beneficial to offer foreign language earlier and not split positions into 0.6 or 0.8FTEs since it would be spreading staff too thin and would impact our ability to retain good staff when they can find full time positions elsewhere. For these reasons he gravitates towards Option 4 and likes that some high school staff could teach 8th grade. He said with Option 4 we'd need to consider uses of Memorial School. It could be a combination of SSEC or other educational programs -- those are all conversations we could have. No matter what we do, it will be a multi-year process and will be thoughtful. When that happens, we need to make it work in our favor and preface it as moving toward something rather than away. As much as he'd love to hold on and go with Option 1, if we don't have a plan in place, in five years our hand will be forced and we'll have to do it under less favorable conditions. He can see the wisdom in both sides.

Ernest Minelli invited committee members to ask questions or follow up. John Reilly asked if the private school students are included in the enrollment projections, is it all age eligible children? Judy Kuehn said she will have to get that information. He asked if there are certain things that drive students towards VoTech schools or Norfolk Aggie. If Option 4 is chosen and we wanted to maintain Memorial School for school use, could you increase VoTech offerings so they don't keep leaving? Is there anything we could offer to bring more of them back in? John Reilly said Option 4 does not say Memorial School has to be given over to the town. What's the next trend in education? What can the schools offer to make life better for parents? Ernest Minelli said maybe we can do

some outreach and a survey of graduating seniors to find out why they made the decision to go to private school.

Jason Frady noted some families choose the Charter School because of the September/October birthday cutoff, ours is earlier. Renee Kiley said she has friends with summer homes here or whose grandparents live here. She's suggested they enroll in Hull Schools to see how wonderful they are and they say they would never send their kids to Hull Schools with nothing to base it on. Phil Lemnios said some of it just gets stuck in people's minds and it takes time to wash it out. There has been a public drum beat against public education in general. Renee Kiley noted she considered Milton Academy for her family and it was late August before the decision was made to stay in Hull. As it turned out that was the year of all the snow and it has been a great experience since then. Phil Lemnios said he thinks people also need to consider education vs. the social outcome of a small community. You have a small town feeling and neighbors who help neighbors. If a child is in private school and on the ivy track, that child may lose all socialization in Hull because of their pipeline to the ivy. A home town is a nice environment with people who care for one another. In Hull, our children can walk to the beach rather than pile in a car and drive to the beach. Jason Frady said one difficulty is trying to get the word out. Hull is not well covered by the Patriot Ledger unless it's something bad. People outside of Hull don't read the Hull Times so have no idea about what it has to offer. A lot of things make it challenging to attract new residents.

Judy Kuehn said they have pushed out a lot of press releases over the years and once in a while they'll appear in the Globe South but rarely in the Patriot Ledger. Jennifer Fleming said based on the headlines we've seen over the years, we need to be careful how we couch it. Renee Kiley agreed and suggested it be more like "Hull is investing in a new school model". It was noted Westport just added a boat building program. Jason Frady said maybe the lifesaving museum would be interested in partnering. Judy Kuehn said she recently talked to them about that. Jennifer Fleming said given the environment, she would love to see our town partner with an academic institution with an oceanography program like MIT or Woods Hole. With the rising sea levels, the Memorial School has the best location for maritime studies. Phil Lemnios reminded the committee that if the School Committee accepts the recommendation of Option 4, there is still another phase mandated by the MARS report. They'll use the money voted at town meeting to flesh out the costs and some other things the community can do with that space. Once the School Committee accepts a recommendation, the School Committee, Select Board, Planning Board, etc. should convene a vision process for the use of that space. Yes, you are going to get the news story that says Hull closes a school but to Renee's point it's what you say after that that's most impactful. We are looking at it as an opportunity and need to have an interactive process. In 2004 they had two

full days of meetings which produced a visioning document and it's time for that document to be refreshed.

John Reilly said we've talked about the Ledger's coverage of Hull for over three decades. There are also a lot of people who went to school here who are dead set against sending their kids here. When the charter school started their original purpose was environmental. On the town side, we need to do something to attract families but a lot of families have been priced out. Now we have a lot of empty nesters but maybe when those houses sell again, hopefully families will come back. When you don't have children in town, the town starts to die. There is also a negative sweet spot when it doesn't make sense to have a public school in town and it becomes a retirement community.

Ernest Minelli said the good news is there is more confluence than he anticipated, so we don't need step 3 and can go straight to the spend-a-dollar part. Ernest Minelli said he would spend 80¢ on Option 4 and 20¢ on Option 1. This will help to inform what we do in terms of specific recommendations and bullet points.

Jason Frady said he would spend 90¢ on Option 4 and 10¢ would be reserved for ways we can try to keep as many of our special needs students in town as possible and whatever accommodation that involves for School Committee's consideration.

John Reilly said he would spend 90¢ on Option 4 and 10¢ on Option 1. He said with due respect, there is some validity to Jennifer Fleming's contrary opinion. What if the population grows and we don't have the vision to see that coming. John Reilly said he appreciates her sharing her thoughts and the time she's spent on the School Committee.

Judy Kuehn said she too respects Jen Fleming's position. Judy would spend the whole \$1 on Option 4. This is an opportunity for us to look at adding band and other programs and it will be several years before this process would begin anyhow. We can get creative and she is all in on getting more experiences for the kids.

Jason Frady asked if the kids would ever go backwards if the consolidation occurs. Judy Kuehn said she and Dave DeGennaro worked out a plan a few weeks ago where the 5th grade would remain at Jacobs one year and then the two grades 7 and 8 would go up to the high school the next. She said having teachers travel from school to school wastes so much of time.

Jennifer Fleming said she would not spend the entire \$1 on Option 1 but close. She is not an educator herself but if the educator in the room supports Option 4, that is very

compelling to her. She has a hard time emotionally endorsing a change to our school structure. She hasn't gotten to the point that she wants to be part of an effort to close the Memorial School but is persuaded by Judy Kuehn's opinion. She would spend 70¢ on Option 1 and 30¢ on Option 4.

Renee Kiley said she might spend \$1 toward Option 4 but since she has a current Memorial student she might go down to 90¢. It's difficult to say since with the disruptions of COVID it has not been the same experience it would have. She would be very happy with her youngest staying at Jacobs School for a while and noted she may have the youngest children of the committee. John Reilly noted he does have grand children in PreK to grade 4.

- 6. Drafting and composing specific "recommendations" and "considerations" for our report**
- 7. Choice of "next steps" for our ensuant meeting on Tuesday June 7, 2022**

Ernest Minelli proposed, since there is more confluence than expected and the sentiment of the committee is in favor Option 4, that a recommendation of Option 4 be made with considerations and reasons why although Option 1 is a viable one it is not the most viable. Agenda items 6 and 7 are to draft and compose the recommendations for the next meeting. We've already done most of that verbally so the next meeting can be scribing of the recommendation. Jason Frady suggested it might work better if we all members put our thoughts down before the meeting. The members will put thoughts together by Friday of next week (June 3) and send them to the School Department to put together in one document for June 7 editing.

Jason Frady made a motion to adopt Option 4 as the Committee recommendation. John Reilly seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

8. Adjournment

Phil Lemnios made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Jason Frady seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously and the meeting adjourned at 7:58pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Debbe Bennett
Recording Secretary