

**MINUTES OF BOARD OF EDUCATION  
PLANNING COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MEETING  
HELD AT DODD MIDDLE SCHOOL OCTOBER 13, 2021 AT 7:30 PM**

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Board Members Present: Anthony Perugini-Chair; Adam Grippo-Vice Chair; Faith Ham, Anne Harrigan, Andrew Martelli, Timothy White

Board Members Absent: Kathryn Hallen-Secretary

Administrators Present: Jeffrey F. Solan, Ed.D., Superintendent of Schools; Marlene Silano, Assistant Superintendent of Schools; Vincent Masciana, Chief Operating Officer

Public access made available through live streaming the Cheshire Public School's YouTube Channel at [www.youtube.com/cheshirepublicschools](http://www.youtube.com/cheshirepublicschools). Public comments were accepted at [CPSCovid19@cheshire.k12.ct.us](mailto:CPSCovid19@cheshire.k12.ct.us).

1. **CALL TO ORDER – 7:30 P.M.**

A. Roll for Quorum. The roll was called and a quorum determined.

B. Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America.

Mr. Perugini led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag. He welcomed members of the audience. He noted there is only one agenda item tonight and that is to discuss school modernization. He turned the meeting over to Mr. Martelli.

Mr. Martelli said this has been a multi-year effort. He said the Board would ultimately make a recommendation to the Town Council. The Town Council is the only governing body in the community that can put a project through referendum. The last time the Board of Education recommended a 6-8 Middle School plan to the Council, the Council never put the project out for a referendum. They started the process again a few years ago jointly with members of the Board, the Town Council and members of the community to form the thirteen member School Modernization Committee (SMC). The Committee recommended to the Council a two-elementary school plan, which the Council is now considering. The Council is analyzing the financial cost to the community. He welcomed members of the audience to speak.

2. **AUDIENCE**

Terry Terzakis, 226 Mixville Road. Mr. Terzakis spoke in favor of a new 6-8 Middle School for two reasons. He said Dodd is too small and will be over capacity. He said parents want a new middle school and will not support the two-elementary school plan. He asked the Board to please talk to the parents and give the taxpayers the choice of the two options that the SMC presented.

Matt Johnson, 75 West Ridge Court. Mr. Johnson spoke in support of a new 6-8 Middle School. He said he does not want to support a plan that will put them back in the same position eight years from now when they are over-capacity. He said, when you renovate

a school you get a 20-year school, when you build new, you get a 50-year school. The cost of this plan versus the two elementary school plan is a “no-brainer.” He added that this issue has been ignored for too long and it is time that we get a new middle school.

Jim Jinks, 244 Academy Road. Mr. Jinks is a Town Council Member and a member of the SMC. He said he sent out a Google survey to his constituents and in just a few weeks was able to get over 300 responses. He asked the Board to do something similar to get feedback from the community. He said his concern is that we are growing and we have already exceeded our enrollment projections for this year and the projections we received did not include the new developments in town. He suggested that the Board look at new projections. He said let us find out what people want, and make sure it is the right project.

Mr. Perugini said Colliers would present new enrollment projections at tomorrow’s Town Council meeting. Mr. Martelli turned the meeting over to Dr. Solan who gave a presentation.

3. **DISCUSSION REGARDING SCHOOL MODERNIZATION PLAN**

Dr. Solan shared a presentation that gave an overview of the Board of Education School Modernization (presentation on file). He reviewed the School Modernization Committee’s objectives. They were tasked with collecting facts for all school facilities, selecting an Owner’s Project Manager, establishing preliminary high-level scenarios and then paring down the scenarios to two refined scenarios, based on enrollment projections, budget detail, cash flows, and preliminary feedback for the Office of School Construction Grants & Review (OSCGR). He covered reason for to modernization along with sharing recent projects in surrounding districts.

Regarding enrollment projections, Dr. Solan said enrollment is expected to increase. We have already exceeded the projections for 2021-22. He said the State requires a 10-year enrollment projection. Enrollment is not only based on new housing developments, but also on an increase in birth rates and the quality of our school system. He reviewed enrollment projections in relation to facility space. He said his fear is that if no plan is passed, we may have to install portable classrooms to accommodate the increase in enrollment.

Dr. Solan reviewed the two scenarios, Preferred and Alternate, including preliminary test fits and the estimated phased financial overviews.

Preferred - Phase 1:

Two new K-6 Elementary Schools. (1) Located at North end of Town and (1) located at South end of Town – possibly on the Norton Site

- Existing Darcey and Chapman buildings are taken offline
- Norton is demolished (pending South-end school location)
- Redistricting to be addressed as required

Phases 2 and 3:

- Renovations to Doolittle and Highland (as K-6)\*
- Renovations to Dodd Middle School\*
- Renovations to the High School\*
- Humiston and BOE Offices are TBD (possibly addressed as CIP)

Alternate - Phase 1:

New 6-8 Middle School; New K-5 Elementary School to replace Chapman (potentially on the existing site, based on a test fit)

- Existing Darcey building is taken offline and the existing Chapman is demolished
- Redistricting to be addressed as required

Phases 2 and 3:

- Renovations to Doolittle, Highland, and Norton (as K-5)\*
- Renovations to the High School\*
- Humiston and BOE Offices are TBD (possibly relocated into vacant Dodd)

Dr. Solan compared the preferred and alternate scenarios:

- Projected enrollment for the new middle school in the Alternate Scenario is beyond the recommendation provided by the State (1,174 projected enrollment; 900 is the recommended size).
- Projected enrollment for the two (2) new elementary schools in the Preferred Scenario is within guidelines provided by the State of Connecticut Office of School Construction Grants & Review (653 and 669 projected enrollment).
- Schools taken offline in both plans are similar, which will allow the district to eliminate costly Capital Improvement Projects to several of the older school facilities.
  - In the Preferred Scenario, Darcey, Chapman, and Norton are taken offline.
  - In the Alternate Scenario, Darcey, Chapman, and Dodd are taken offline.
- Currently, the elementary school enrollment is unbalanced, which creates different learning environments at each of the elementary schools.
  - In the Preferred Scenario, the 8-year high projected enrollment at the elementary schools are closer to balanced (653, 669, 612 & 780.)
  - In Alternate Scenario, they remain unbalanced (515, 570, 463 & 751).
- Redistricting impact between Preferred Scenario (18%) and Alternate Scenario (15%) are similar.
- Estimated district share for the Phase 1 projects identified in each scenario differ by approximately \$37 million.
- The tax impact for an average taxpayer for the Phase 1 projects over the next five years differs by approximately \$223 per household annually.
- The Preferred Scenario is calculated to be a cost of \$389/year for the average Cheshire taxpayer including a home (market value \$303,720) and two cars (\$13,214).
- The Alternate Scenario cost is \$612/year for the average Cheshire taxpayer.

Dr. Solan said Mr. Perugini has asked him numerous times, what would be the best scenario for education. Dr. Solan said they are both good scenarios, although he and his

Grade 6 teachers see a benefit and prefer a new 6-8 Middle School plan, but there are many variables and it is not only his decision.

He noted that there is a suggestion from members of the Town Council that a new Central Office and the Humiston School be added to the north end elementary school proposal.

- Estimated gross cost to add a stand-alone Humiston replacement on the north end property: \$12 million
- Estimated gross cost to add a “wing” on to the north end elementary school: \$9 million
- State reimbursement would need to be verified, but it would be 42% on the school portion and 21% on the office portion.
- The estimated cost of a renovate-like-new overhaul of the existing Humiston/Central Office building would be \$7 million.
  - State reimbursement would need to be verified, but it would be 46% on the school portion and 23% on the office portion IF the state would permit us to renovate a 109-year-old building.

Dr. Solan said when they look at the financial estimates from the town, it does not appear that Darcey and the students are factored into the equation. He said, if they are planning to close that facility, we have to be sure that the students and programs are considered. The Early Intervention Program is essential at Darcey. There is a Birth to three program, two Preschool programs and Kindergarten classes at that school. Those programs cannot be split up. The Superintendent reviewed the current use of space at both Humiston and Darcey.

The Superintendent reviewed critical questions that will need to be answered:

- Is replacing Darcey a greater priority than updating Humiston?
  - Would the state reimburse code compliance improvements of existing Humiston/Central Office?
  - Where is Darcey’s program being housed and in which phase?
- What are the definitive costs after the previous questions are answered?
- What are the implications for and timing of future phases?
- Does the Board of Education have all of the information it needs to endorse a plan?

Lastly, he reviewed next steps:

- Finalize Test Fits for North End Property
- Develop Educational Specifications
- Board of Education Vote to Approve a Plan
- Town Council Vote to Approve a Plan
- Town Council Vote to Appropriate Needed Funding
- Voter Referendum
- June 30, 2022 – Deadline Date to Submit School Construction Grant Application

Discussion:

Mr. Perugini asked, if the Darcey programs could be moved to Highland School. Dr. Solan said no, there is not sufficient space in Highland. He said if Darcey is closed in Phase 1, we need to address the financial impact of moving those programs to a different location. He said the services delivered at Darcey are excellent, but the building is not. Ms. Harrigan asked, if we go with the new middle school and move the sixth graders to the middle school, could Darcey students be moved there? Dr. Solan said there still would not be enough room, you would still need a new elementary school.

The Board discussed the two scenarios and asked many questions which will be raised with Colliers at the Town Council meeting.

Public Comment:

Terry Terzakis urged the Board to consider the 2A Scenario that includes the new 6-8 Middle School and includes a new Chapman School. He again asked the Board to allow the community to choose between the two scenarios.

Braxton Kerrigan, 317 Wood Pond Road. Mr. Kerrigan, a mathematician, asked the Board to consider the educational aspect. He is in favor of a 6-8 Middle School and renovation. He asked, what is the educational cost? Dollars is one thing, but the educational cost is more important. He said there is only a 2% difference in cost if you do all phases now, which is a difference of an additional \$2.00 per month per household. He said he would vote for whatever plan is put forward, but urged the Board to consider the educational aspect because the financial difference is negligible.

Jim Jinks. Mr. Jinks said the SMC knows it is not just one phase, and they want to be sure we are doing enough in the first phase. That is why he wants to be sure we have a successful referendum. He is concerned that we may have to add onto schools again in the future.

Anisha Dinsmore, 550 Woodpond Road. Ms. Dinsmore said that the community should decide on the scenario to be put forward for referendum. The decision should not be based solely on what the Committee decides.

Patricia Cramer, 189 South Brooksvale Road. Ms Cramer thanked the Board for their work on this endeavor. She said the learning environments affect both the staff and students. She said our students are excelling now, but imagine how well they would do with a better learning environment. She prefers a 6-8 Middle School model and suggested a tax subsidy for those residents who cannot afford the tax increase.

Eric Gillis, 245 South Main Street. Mr. Gillis suggested a ranked choice referendum so one of the plans must go forward, and he said we want to get as much accomplished in the first phase as possible, in case there are no other phases approved.

Chuck Neth, 1355 Notch Road. Mr. Neth, a member of the SMC Committee, said the Committee chose Scenario 6 (two elementary schools) not because of cost but because it stands on its own. He reviewed some of the advantages for Scenario 6. One advantage is redistricting, where you are moving students from an old school to a new school in every case. He pointed out that school sizes would be equal in all the elementary schools in Scenario 6. He also touched on enrollment and building capacity.

Mr. Perugini said this is not an easy process. He said it has taken 10 years to get to this point. He has spoken with many parents. He also said there is a lot of information out there; on the town website there are meeting minutes and documents. He said it is up to the Board to get the facts out. It is not just about Phase I - he is very concerned about what happens after Phase I. He said he is encouraged because the Board and Town Council want to get something done. He asked, if we miss the spring deadline, what happens? Dr. Solan said we do run the risk of running out of space and may have to buy portable classrooms. Mr. Perugini said it is imperative that we get the word out to voters and that they have enough information. He encouraged the public to continue to ask questions.

1. **ADJOURNMENT**

On a motion by Ms. Ham, and seconded by Ms. Harrigan, the meeting was adjourned at 9:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

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Andrew Martelli, Planning Committee Chair

Attest:

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Carol K. Jesensky, Board of Education Clerk

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