

## BOARD OF EDUCATION

Ellington, Connecticut

### Operations Committee Meeting Minutes

A special meeting of the Operations Committee will be held on Wednesday, July 14, 2021, at 5:00 p.m. in the School Administration Building, 47 Main Street, Ellington, CT.

#### Attendees:

*Board of Education Members:* Mrs. Kerry Socha, Mrs. Jennifer Dzen, Ms. Liz Nord, Ms. Miriam Underwood, and Mrs. Angela Moser

*Administrative Team Members:* Dr. Scott Nicol, Superintendent of Schools and Mr. Brian Greenleaf, Director of Finance and Operations

**Call to Order:** The meeting was called to order by Ms. Jen Dzen at 5:03 p.m.

#### Agenda Items:

##### 1. *Windermere Elementary School*

Mr. Greenleaf began the meeting regarding the Windermere School Project. In 2018-2019 a facilities study was conducted that carried us through till the summer of 2019. At that time we determined that Windermere School was the first project we wanted to proceed with. In the fall of 2019, we engaged with Tecton to develop a design to bring forward to the town. We were able to get through multiple items with the town then COVID hit. At the time the Board decided to not proceed with the project and bring it to referendum due to COVID with a plan to revisit in the fall. We revisited the plan in the fall of 2020 and at that time determined that the enrollment projections had significantly changed that the Board decided to wait to see if the numbers would rebound after the pandemic and to do another enrollment projection.

We need to restart the project as follows:

- Do a new enrollment study that would involve the projection based on the enrollment number for the number of classrooms, number of bathrooms, etc. They have started this process and would need to continue and be refined if the scope of the project changes.
- Bond calculations and timing with the Town would need to be recalculated and reworked.
- Planning would need to be done around the referendum and the planning that is involved with that process.

This is the majority of the work that needs to be done before we can submit an application to the state.

Tentative time frame would be as follows:

- Onboard Tecton in the next couple of weeks which will require a new price proposal from them.
- Hiring an enrollment consultant. SLR is the company we wanted to reach out to in order to obtain a quote. NESDEC usually does a yearly study for enrollment. We want to use a company that takes into consideration the town, what are the developments, etc. which would allow for a more comprehensive projection. This would allow us to get the best enrollment numbers we can to plan for a large capital improvement project. If we project too low we will have a building that is too small if we project too large we could have financial implication with the state with regard to funding.

Enrollment projections for kindergarten have definitely returned to prior COVID numbers. Windermere 1<sup>st</sup> grade numbers have not recovered from pre-pandemic numbers. Fourth grade is the bubble class for Windermere which will mean that we will have 5 classes at that location instead of 4 classes. On August 1<sup>st</sup> we will make the determination of how many teachers are needed in each location.

Mrs. Dzen asked the question regarding storage space and can we include that in the plan. Mr. Greenleaf indicated that storage space would count against the maximum allowable square footage.

Mrs. Nord asked the question of whether or not we could return to the concept of housing all of the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade students at Windermere since we are offering enrichment and other programs for our 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders. This would open up the classrooms at Center and Crystal Lake for classroom space. Mr. Greenleaf indicated that we could go back to this concept if that is the way the Board wanted to proceed. The cost of doing that would be about \$600 per square footage and that would add up very quickly to the building project. This would mean we would need to revisit the facility study if that is the direction the committee wanted to pursue. Mrs. Nord indicated that this would eliminate teachers from moving around to various schools to offer these programs to our 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders. Mrs. Dzen asked if it would be a better option to make Windermere larger to absorb the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders and not have to build onto Center School.

Mr. Greenleaf indicated that Windermere has some costly items that need repairs and they should be at the front of the line with regard to updates and renovations after the facility study. The facility also gave us the option of making the high school a 6-12 grade school as well. When the study was completed in 2018 the Windermere School was the best choice for updating. With that being said, in 2021 that may not be the best option at this time and we could revisit the facility study if needed. The consensus was to update the existing Windermere School and add onto the building as that was the most cost effective way to go with the State and would give us the most funding towards the building project

rather than build a brand new school. If we were to do an entire new school, it would be an additional \$8 million dollar differential to the town with regards to funding.

We would like to report out the findings to the Committee and Board in October to see how they want to proceed and if we are going to proceed to a referendum on this project. At that time we could determine if you want to do a separate referendum in February or tie it in with the budget referendum in May. We need to get a submission to the State by June 30, 2022, regarding this project if we are to proceed with the project or will need to wait an additional year before we could begin.

Ms. Underwood asked the question if the enrollment numbers are still down are we tied to the projected project in the facility study or could that be changed. Mr. Greenleaf indicated that the Board determined that the renovation project was the best moving forward. We will only need a conceptual design to present at this time. Once it goes to referendum and approved it can then go to the state it gets turned over to the architect hired by the Town. This will then be given to the Permanent Building Committee with the Town and they will proceed with the building project. The Board will provide the educational specifications to the Permanent Building Committee and they will proceed with the project and the Board will not have a formal say as to what it will look like.

Mr. Greenleaf said it is the goal of the Superintendent, Operations Committee and himself to work on a collaborative level with the Permanent Building Committee in order for the district to get a building that they want. The State sets it up this way to instill collaboration between the Board of Education and the Town.

Mrs. Socha said it might be a good idea to look at other new elementary building projects to get a feel for what works and does not work to better prepare to forgo some shortfalls that other districts have encountered in their building projects. We are trying to make the specification as broad as possible so we can fine tune when it comes for final specifications.

Mrs. Socha indicated that we need to make sure we have another school other than the high school with sufficient auditorium space for events for our elementary and middle school students. Mr. Greenleaf said we would need to have a multipurpose space that can be used as a gymnasium and auditorium at the same time that can fit the needs and accommodate the number of individuals at the events.

Mr. Greenleaf indicated that he will reach out to the architect to set up site visits to new schools and invite the committee members and other board members that might be interested with regards to planning for the Windermere project. Mr. Greenleaf indicated that we do not need to have the educational specifications completed by the time we go to referendum but we will need to have them done by June 30, 2022. For the referendum we need square footage numbers and specialty spaces. We are somewhat locked in when we are going from renovation to new spaces. The cafeteria and gymnasium spaces are based on

the number of students and we could make them larger but we would pay more to make those locations larger.

Mrs. Dzen asked if there was an issue with the floor between the music room and the gym. Mr. Greenleaf indicated that there was some minor settling but there is no structural issue with that area. The 6<sup>th</sup> grade classes did have the pyrrhotite and that, although there is no current issue, it will need to be removed as part of the project and the State was on board with that removal.

Mr. Greenleaf said we are looking at a timeline of completion of 2026. We are looking at a project that will last 2 years with multiple phases in the project. If the architecture selection is delayed it could push out the project by 6 months.

Mr. Greenleaf discussed the options and that Option 3 was the option that was thought to be the best for the District. This option was to renovate Windermere School. This option counts the number of classrooms we would need and space wise could build. The district brought in the State of CT Department of Administrative Services. Their approach is to take a very active management of state funds in helping to decide for the town in which way to go. The state Office of School Construction and Grants eliminated Option 1 from the table, indicating a broader change was required.

Option 3 was building a two-story addition and moving the students into that wing. Then renovating the exiting building. This would allow for two bussing lanes as well as parent drop off of students. The look of the front of the building would allow us to really make it stand out when entering. Safety wise we would not have any students playing in the triangle area and are covered by the building in the back.

## 2. Old/New Business

Mrs. Socha read documentation regarding the air quality inspection, pesticides, drainage, etc. of the building. Mr. Greenleaf indicated the district has used the Tools for Schools program and will ensure its use moving forward. Tools for Schools is a checklist from the EPA of items we would use as a guidelines of items to inspect in all of the schools.

The meeting adjourned at 6:01 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Mrs. Kerry Socha, Operations Committee, Chair