

**MIDDLE SCHOOL TASK FORCE
MEETING MINUTES
Thursday, April 30, 2015, @ 7:00 p.m.
Minnechaug Regional High School
Information Research Commons**

Members Present: Sue Bunnell, Lena Buteau, Courtney Derosia, Marc Ducey, John Flynn, Karen Grycel, Marty McQuade, Tod O'Brien, Eric Panasci, George Semanie and Sandra Sheehan.

Members Absent: Allison DiGrande, Nick Fyntrilakis, Lisa Morace and Tricia Murphy

Ex Officio Members Present: Tim Connor, Peter Dufresne, and Marty O'Shea,

Ex Officio Members Absent: Ed Cenedella, Noel Pixley and Beth Regulbuto

1) Call to Order

Chairman Ducey called the April 30, 2015, meeting of the Middle School Task Force to order at 7:00 p.m. and briefly reviewed the night's agenda.

Exhibit(s): Middle School Task Force Agenda – April 30, 2015

2) FAQ Review

Mr. O'Shea showed the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document online. He explained that the FAQs are based on questions we have heard and we could add more if needed. Mr. Ducey thanked the *Wilbraham-Hampden Times* for printing this.

Exhibit(s): Middle School Initiative FAQ

3) Feasibility Study Update

The School Committee authorized \$10,000 for the study of our two existing schools to combine the two of them into one school. They also authorized another \$10,000 to study what options would be available if we do not regionalize. Mr. O'Shea discussed the proposal from JLS Architects, whose principals are John Strandberg, Architect; David Owen, SCI, CDT; and Dino D'Angelo, Mechanical Engineer. He reviewed the overview of the services that they will provide and read:

"An assessment of long term viability of any building and site must address both the short term and long term needs of the Owner as well as program requirements necessary to fulfill the buildings intended use. Architecturally, these requirements include structural, architectural, accessibility, environmental, mechanical and electrical systems, as well as site related issues of access, traffic circulation, parking and fields."

"Specific to the study of Thornton Burgess Middle School and Wilbraham Middle School, it is critical that a comprehensive investigation of existing buildings and site conditions be performed to address two primary needs. First; to assess the feasibility and potential associated costs impacting development of a single regional middle school model, with specific focus on the potential temporary use of modular construction at either Thornton W. Burgess Middle School or Wilbraham Middle School. Second, and of equal if not greater importance, investigation of existing conditions at each facility in a manner necessary to comprehensively assess long term viability of each building and their respective sites. To best accomplish these two tasks, the scope of the study must include, but not be limited to, the following minimum parameters: Site Constraints; Building Constraints; Economic Constraints."

As a side note, Mr. O'Shea explained that the term "modular" is often misunderstood. Modular is actually a method of construction which is faster and more efficient. Mr. O'Shea said he is excited to be working with JLS and they have already started their inquiries. The anticipated timeframe is early to mid-June.

Exhibit(s): Hampden-Wilbraham Regional School District – Existing Conditions and Feasibility Study – Thornton W. Burgess Middle School and Wilbraham Middle School – Proposal for Architectural Services

4) Alternative Configurations

Mr. Ducey explained that Mr. O'Shea did a brainstorming session regarding the pros and cons of each of the alternative configurations. There was discussion regarding what happens if the HWRSD does not regionalize its middle schools - what are the systemic changes that will need to take place. Mr. O'Shea explained that the alternative configurations include input from many people. He then distributed the "Plan Evaluation" document, noting this was meant to open the conversation and stressing that this was from brainstorming only and nothing is cast in stone. Mr. Semanie suggested posting this on the website so people know we are looking at other options.

There was much discussion about the various options listed on the spreadsheet. Each option was measured on 11 criteria including: *Achieves Middle School Model; Improves and expands educational offerings; Achieves savings; Alleviates need for modulars; Closes a building; Keeps cohorts of students together; Sustainable plan with sufficient room to grow; Positions district for partnership with the MSBA; Alteration of space, equipment and facilities; Achieves equity for all kids; and Reduces transportation time for kids.* Mr. Ducey reminded the members that any solution needs to be both educationally effective and cost effective for the taxpayers.

Exhibit(s): Plan Evaluation and Chart of Options

5) Town Meeting Votes on Regional Agreement

Mr. O'Shea reminded members that a unification plan cannot go anywhere without the approval of voters in both towns. This is because the Regional Agreement must be amended to allow students to cross town lines. There are other issues to be decided as well, including ownership of a unified middle school, assessments, capital upkeep, etc. Some legal legwork has already begun and he has discussed some of the issues with Steve Hemman, Executive Director of Massachusetts Association of Regional Schools (MARS). We may want to consider an ad hoc committee to study amending the regional agreement. Mr. O'Shea said that we had previously discussed a vote in the fall but he's not sure that can happen as we want to make sure we have information available to townspeople so they can make an informed decision. He had a discussion with Austin McKeon from Hampden about his concerns and Mr. McKeon asked if we had considered a "sunset provision" with perhaps a five-year window. This would mean the amendment is in place for five years and would allow a period of time to track enrollment and develop long-term plans. This would address the fears that people have who agree that unification is a good idea but want to know more about the long-term solution. Mrs. Buteau is concerned about having a five-year window how that would affect the District's budget. Mr. Ducey believes having such a provision makes this big decision more manageable. He understands this would mean that in x number of years the issues would be re-evaluated and he thinks it is an interesting concept. There was much discussion about this idea, including what would happen to the vacant building. Mr. O'Shea explained that it could be "mothballed" (similar to what was done to Memorial School) and Mr. Ducey added that it could be used for another purpose for that time. Mr. Semanie asked if anyone is aware of this provision being used elsewhere. Mr. O'Shea discussed the concept with Mr. Hemman from MARS and our attorney Mr. Toomey. Mr. Hemman was not familiar with this and Attorney Toomey said he was not aware of any legal barriers. Both were very intrigued by the concept.

Exhibit(s): None

6) Community Survey re Middle School Initiative

Let us know if you are interested in helping with the Community Survey. Ms. Bunnell mentioned a couple of the people who worked on Wilbraham's Vision Task Force and that they may be good resources to work with on this.

Exhibit(s): None

7) Public Comment

Attendees made comments and asked questions during Public Comment including:

- Mrs. Sternberg, Hampden – had questions on the capacity chart, program space, SPED spaces, current needs and future needs.
- Mrs. Pronovost, Hampden – since there are fewer students in Hampden she asked if the School Committee would allow Wilbraham parents the choice of sending their children to Hampden schools.
- Mrs. Jolicoeur, Hampden - thanked Mr. O'Shea for his efforts and had some questions on the various options, particularly interested in Plan C.
- Mrs. Zanetti, Hampden – said she would not be interested in Plan C as it moves the children in two years, she would be more interested in a minimum of three years.
- Mrs. Sternberg, Hampden – looking at Plan E and suggested making TWB more appealing with new offerings such as STEM classes, make it more of a magnet school.
- Mrs. Sternberg, Hampden – believes that the fewer transitions for students, the better and that test scores could suffer as a result of too many transitions.

Exhibit(s): None

8) Adjournment

Chairman Ducey asked for a motion to adjourn. Ms. Bunnell so moved, Mr. O'Brien seconded and the meeting was adjourned at 8:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Karen W. Belsky

DRAFT