

**HAMPDEN-WILBRAHAM REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT
MIDDLE SCHOOL TASK FORCE
MEETING MINUTES**

Thursday, September 23, 2015 – 7:00 p.m. – Minnechaug Regional High School

Members Present: Sue Bunnell, Courtney Derosia, Allison DiGrande, John Flynn, Nick Fyntrilakis, Pat Gordon, Karen Grycel, Tod O'Brien, Marty McQuade, Tricia Murphy, Eric Panasci, Sandra Sheehan, and George Semanie.

Members Absent: Lena Buteau, Lisa Morace

Ex Officio Members Present: Ed Cenedella, Marty O'Shea, Noel Pixley, and Beth Regulbuto

Ex Officio Members Absent: Peter Dufresne Steve Hale,

1) Call to Order

Superintendent O'Shea called the meeting of the Middle School Task Force to order at 7:00 p.m.

2) Chair & Organization

Mr. O'Shea explained that the MSTF is in need of a new chairman or co-chairmen. After discussing the work to be done and leadership options, Mr. Flynn made a motion that we appoint two co-chairs, one from each town. Ms. Bunnell seconded, there was no further discussion and the motion was unanimously approved. Mr. O'Shea then asked for nominations for co-chair. Mrs. DiGrande nominated Mrs. Sheehan from Hampden and Mr. Fyntrilakis seconded. Mr. O'Brien nominated Mr. Fyntrilakis but he respectfully declined the nomination. Ms. Bunnell nominated Mr. O'Brien from Wilbraham and Mrs. DiGrande seconded. Mr. O'Brien nominated Mrs. DiGrande but she respectfully declined the nomination. Mr. O'Shea asked for all those in favor of Mrs. Sheehan as co-chair from Hampden and the nomination was unanimously approved. Mr. O'Shea asked for all those in favor of Mr. O'Brien as co-chair from Wilbraham and the nomination was unanimously approved.

Exhibit(s): None

3) Public Comment

There were no public comments.

Exhibit(s): None

4) JLS Architects Report

Mr. O'Shea explained that the School Committee, as well as the public, had the opportunity to review the JLS Architects Report at their last meeting and tonight the MSTF has the opportunity to reflect and comment on the report. Mr. Fyntrilakis believes the information and numbers are clear with regards to the decision to be made. However, he expressed concern that the report as presented is confusing, especially with respect to the estimated costs. There was discussion about the information entitled "Estimate of Probable Costs – Summary." Mr. O'Shea explained that the middle column, "Renovation and Add On for Consolidation – Traditional Construction," of \$16,748,900 for WMS includes all the required renovations to bring the building up to code - \$10,429,650 - plus new construction to expand the building to house the additional population for a combined middle school at the Wilbraham Middle School site. Mrs. DiGrande noted that was her understanding as well, but as Mr. Fyntrilakis pointed out, the information as presented is confusing and more clarity will be necessary when presenting the information in the future. There were suggestions that the "Renovation" column be renamed "Renovation without Consolidation" or "Capital Needs" or something signifying that the stated estimated cost does nothing to move the District toward a consolidated middle school facility. Mr. O'Shea further explained that the renovation column tells us what it would cost just to bring each building up to code but, again, it does nothing toward solving the problem at hand. So we now know that even if we do nothing, the two towns each have buildings in need of substantial capital needs down the road. In addition, Mr. O'Shea does not think the MSBA would participate in these types of renovation projects with the two towns separately, given our enrollment. Mr. Panasci thinks the potential lack of MSBA participation is an important fact for people to know. Mr. O'Shea believes that we would be in a much better position to work with the MSBA toward the best long-term solution if we were already working toward a regional middle school. Mrs. Sheehan expressed her concern about the use of modulars being the short-term solution, but that still leaves us with a school that needs renovation and how long would that last? Mr. O'Shea explained that if we are fortunate enough to unify the two middle schools, then we would work with the MSBA to find the best long-term solution – and we would be in a better position with the MSBA having already unified or at least being on the path to unification.

There was general discussion about the MSTF making recommendations to the School Committee regarding both short-term and long-term solutions. Mr. Fyntrilakis made a motion to recommend to the School Committee that the unified middle school be placed at the Wilbraham Middle School, based on the facts presented, as a first step toward a long-term physical plant solution. Mrs. DiGrande seconded. During discussions, Mr. Flynn talked about the impetus to all of this was that the School Committee told us they could not maintain an equitable middle school model education between the two towns. Then after

the tours and facts and figures presented, this committee felt that in order to provide the best education for the students, consistent throughout the District, this committee should consider a unified middle school. This committee also discussed that before additional steps were taken, a full plan would need to be in place - either a renovation or new building at a location to be determined - because people need to know the long-term goal so that they can understand how the short-term solution is working towards that goal. There was discussion about making two recommendations - one to address the short-term solution and another one to continue to seek the long-term goal working with the MSBA. Mr. Fyntrilakis withdrew his original motion.

Mr. Flynn brought up taking the temperature of the MSBA and Mr. O'Shea thinks the BOS could assist with that, and then explained that MSBA would initially look at enrollment, plus the educational programming in place. He then revisited the potential timeline from his February presentation, which prompted Ms. Bunnell to suggest trying to move the towns to get this done sooner as the current middle school students are being underserved and it seems that we would be in a better position to work with the MSBA if we were already unified. Mr. Pixley feels that the immediate need is to get the two schools together because as someone who has worked at both schools, he can clearly see the difference between the two schools and that the students in Hampden are not getting the same opportunities as the students in Wilbraham. He believes that children are resilient and they will do fine, but he feels it is important to unify so that all students will have equal footing when they enter Minnechaug.

After continued discussions regarding the need for a long-term goal, working with the MSBA, and the importance of supporting the educational, social, and emotional needs of the students, Mrs. DiGrande made the following motions:

Motion One: In order to meet the middle school model and support the educational, social and emotional needs of the children of Hampden and Wilbraham, we recommend that the School Committee expeditiously move toward the unified school to be placed at the Wilbraham Middle School in the short term. Ms. Bunnell seconded and it was unanimously approved.

Motion Two: Recommend the School Committee pursue a long term unified approach to a facility as deemed appropriate by a partnership with the MSBA to meet the middle school model and support the educational, social and emotional needs of the children of Hampden and Wilbraham. Mr. McQuade seconded and it was unanimously approved.

Exhibit(s): HWRSD Middle School Renovations and/or Consolidation: Costs and Implications - Key Findings of the JLS Architect Middle School Report, August 2015 and Hampden-Wilbraham Regional School District Existing Conditions and Feasibility Study - JLS Architects

5) Surveys

The draft of a survey document was distributed for review. During discussions, the following was discussed:

- *Mrs. DiGrande asked if this would be accompanied by a summary of the work that has been done to date.
- *Ms. Bunnell suggested the residency question go at the end.
- *Mr. Fyntrilakis questioned the intent of the survey. Mr. O'Shea explained the purpose is to send to people in our two communities in order to gauge people's concerns, attitudes and knowledge. Ms. Bunnell added that we are looking to determine what additional information people think they need to know in order to make an informed decision when this issue comes before the voters.
- *Mr. Fyntrilakis thinks that people will not know how to answer question #9 regarding ensuring that students receive an appropriate amount and range of electives.
- *Mrs. DiGrande suggested providing some concise information before asking the survey questions.
- *Mr. Pixley suggested including information regarding what we currently have at WMS vs TWB vs the ideal middle school model.
- *Mr. Flynn suggested asking the respondents to rank the questions in order of importance to them. He also said that maybe we should have someone other than this group develop this survey, but Ms. Bunnell thinks this group should do the survey as we want to know what people need to know in order to make an informed decision. Mrs. Grycel thinks Mr. Flynn may be right - perhaps we are too close to the subject matter and she also suggested that we expand the stakeholder group.
- *Mrs. DiGrande suggested adding a question regarding how do people prefer to receive additional information on this topic - electronically, hardcopy in the mail and/or additional meetings.
- *There was discussion about getting information out to townspeople and the possible use of Survey Monkey, Hampden and Wilbraham town websites, Hampden and Wilbraham Connect Ed programs and providing hardcopies at various outlets.
- *Mr. Flynn believes this survey is geared too much toward parents - we have to get the information out to all townspeople.
- *There was discussion about revamping the survey to have respondents rank their concerns, including enrollment, educational programming, potential costs, transportation, impact on property value, etc.
- *Mr. Flynn suggested an ad hoc committee to work on the survey. Ms. Bunnell, Mrs. Grycel, Mr. Semanie, and Mr. Flynn volunteered to serve. Mr. Flynn then made a motion to form a Survey Subcommittee with Ms. Bunnell, Mrs. Grycel, Mr.

Semanie, and Mr. Flynn, Mr. Fyntrilakis seconded, there was no discussion and it was unanimously approved.

*Mr. McQuade thinks it is important that people understand what will happen if this fails.

*Mrs. Sheehan asked if this would be possible for the 16-17 school year and Mr. O'Shea said he would like to see it happen as soon as possible, but he is not sure if it can be done by then as there are issues that the School Committee and Boards of Selectmen need to work on regarding the ownership of a regional middle school.

*Mrs. Gordon requested that the co-chairs make a presentation to the School Committee at their October 13th meeting.

*Mr. Flynn is hopeful the survey can be done by the end of October and then tabulated.

Exhibit(s): Draft Survey

6) Next Steps

The next MSTF meeting will be held on Thursday, October 15, 2015, at 6:00 p.m. Mrs. DiGrande asked that at a future meeting the group discuss how would the schools transition the students in the least disruptive way. Ms. Bunnell would like discuss what steps the two towns will have to go through to move this forward. Mrs. Murphy would like to discuss transportation in more detail.

7) Adjournment

Mr. Fyntrilakis made a motion to adjourn the meeting and Mr. McQuade seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 9:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen W. Belsky
Recording Secretary