

School Building Committee (2020)
Regular Meeting
City Hall Room 335
100 Broadway, Norwich
And Virtually via ZOOM
Tuesday February 15, 2022
6:30 PM

Committee Members Present: Chairman Mark Bettencourt, Alderwoman Stacy Gould, President Pro Tem Joe DeLucia, William Hull, Gregory Ballassi, Cindy Beauregard and Christine DiStasio.

Committee Members Absent: Greg Carabine and Peter Gauthier.

Ex-Officio Members Present: Mayor Peter Nystrom.

Citizens Present: Bob Sierpinski, Tara Booker, Cheryl Hancin-Preston and Eileen Eagle.

Chairman Mark Bettencourt reviewed the rules of a virtual meeting and clearly notified participants that the meeting would be recorded.

- I. Call to Order and Quorum:** Alderman Mark Bettencourt called the meeting to order at 6:35 PM.
- II. Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes:** Alderwoman Stacy Gould made a motion to approve the January 25, 2022 special meeting minutes. Gregory Ballassi seconded. The chairman called the roll of members present and all were in favor, aside from William Hull and Mark Kulos who abstained. The motion passed.
- III. Public Comment:** None.
- IV. Update by DRA representative Jim Barrett and staff:** Jim Barrett stated the study encompassed 14 buildings in total, with a focus on the school facilities of 11 of those buildings. Jim Barrett discussed updates and changes to the study's work plan. Jim Barrett stated their new consultant's target date for demographics and enrollment projects was the end of March. Gregory Smolley stated the City of Norwich had never done student vocation mapping, which their consultant would be creating for the city to utilize moving forward. Gregory Smolley stated the mapping would assist in determining

various aspects such as attendance, riding time on a school bus and more. Jim Barrett stated the schedule adjustments would not affect the overall project end date. Jim Barrett proposed that education programming get underway in the later part of February, to carry into the early part of March, and to stack it with facilities programming. Jim Barrett stated that DRA would conduct presentations to city committees and the council during June. Chairman Mark Bettencourt stated his biggest concern was the committee having enough time to digest the report and develop a recommendation for the system to bring to referendum, as the council was expecting a report by the end of June.

Gregory Smolley discussed aspects of what DRA determined as 'more suitable' schools including Kelly Middle School, Case Street School and TM Global Studies Magnet Middle School. Gregory Smolley noted that Case Street School was far more suitable for its current use of early adult education, so there would be a caveat in the study in regards to comments on the site's playscape. Gregory Smolley discussed code issues at TM Global Studies Magnet Middle School including its staircases and elevators. Gregory Smolley discussed options regarding the staircases and suggested the city work with the state on funding such a project. Gregory Smolley continued to discuss the 'suitable' determined buildings including Veterans' Elementary, Huntington Elementary, Mahan Elementary, Uncas Elementary, Moriarty Magnet Elementary and the Bishop Early Learning Center. Gregory Smolley stated that all 'suitable' facilities could be made code compliant without an extraordinary extent of work, but some investments were needed which would add up in total. Gregory Smolley stated schools like Wequonnoc Magnet Elementary and Stanton Elementary were 'less suitable' due to the state of the buildings and accessibility. Gregory Smolley stated the cost to bring Wequonnoc up to code compliance and functionality would likely be the same as replacing the building. Gregory Smolley continued that Stanton Elementary had a good site but the condition of the building was poor. Gregory Smolley noted the roof at Stanton Elementary was already showing signs of leaking within the building, although it had recently been replaced. Gregory Smolley discussed the existing Stanton Elementary site and development options, as well as various code compliance issues. Gregory Smolley noted that Stanton Elementary was located in an integral section of the city so DRA would take its time on a recommendation for the school. Alderwoman Stacy Gould noted the dates the portions of the Stanton Elementary roof were replaced in 2018 and 2021. Gregory Smolley stated that DRA was on site during August 2021 and there were no sections that appeared new, only patched and painted, but he was unsure of the scope of work for the roof. Gregory Smolley discussed the topography and layout of the Wequonnoc Elementary site. Gregory Smolley discussed the various ADA compliance issues at the school and areas of the failing roof. Gregory Smolley stated the small child playground at Wequonnoc could be made compliant, but it was not an ideal location for the 2-5 year old

age group playscape. Gregory Smolley discussed how the layout of the Wequonnoc office should allow for a visual connection to those entering the building and noted the lack of security cameras on site, as well as the office counter being non-ADA compliant. Gregory Smolley pointed to the layout of the Kelly Middle School office as being desirable, which was one of the 'more suitable' deemed schools. Jim Barrett discussed the positives of the site including the access to playing fields. Jim Barrett noted that the Kelly Middle School field did require an ADA compliant walkway that would be more aligned with the discharge point of the school and allow for ADA access to the field bleachers. Jim Barrett concluded that each school study would be accompanied by a narrative write-up with references to various internal systems, if pertinent in the discussion of that area.

- V. Meeting schedule and progress review:** Chairman Mark Bettencourt asked that members review the report and send their comments and concerns to him to be forwarded along to DRA. Alderwoman Stacy Gould stated she felt the proposed timeline was too aggressive and worried there would not be sufficient time for the committee to review the report before passing it along to city council. Gregory Smolley noted hiccups due to COVID. Christine DiStasio stated she understood Alderwoman Gould's concern, but stated her own concerns in regards to the state of the failing building systems. Gregory Ballassi noted that regardless of the November timeline the city would need to continue to maintain and invest in the existing systems until the project was complete. President Pro Tem DeLucia stated that there was some flexibility with the November referendum deadline and agreed that the public, as well as committee members, should not feel as though the process is rushed. Mark Kulos suggested increasing the number of monthly meetings in order to meet the deadline. Christine DiStasio asked if there was a timeline on the surveys for parents, teachers and students. Gregory Smolley responded their goal was to have the surveys to the administrative office by the middle of the following week. Gregory Smolley suggested the committee conduct a progress review at the April meeting to ensure there is a good understanding of the educational direction of the project as well as public engagement. President Pro Tem DeLucia stated he felt a type of sketch would need to be provided to the public along with the report so they can visualize the project. Jim Barrett responded that the study would produce a test fit which includes a layout of the buildings, square footage and relational concepts but not a schematic design as that was not included in the scope of work. Mayor Peter Nystrom stated a special election was still an option and noted that the project would be multi-phased throughout a few years. Mayor Nystrom also noted that the state required a two year notice for an item to be put on a bond agenda. Christine DiStasio asked if there was any progress on developing on other potential sites. Chairman Mark Bettencourt responded the idea had not been investigated further than a brief discussion.

VI. Anything else to be brought before the committee: None.

VII. Adjournment: Alderwoman Stacey Gould made a motion to adjourn at 7:57 PM. Gregory Ballassi seconded. The chairman called the roll of members present and all were in favor. The motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted, Katherine Rose