

Board of Education Minutes
Tri-Board Meeting
January 21, 2016

DRAFT

A joint meeting of the Boards of Selectmen, Finance and Education was held on Thursday, January 21, 2016, at 7:00 p.m. in the Wheeler High School Shaw Media Center. Present for the Board of Selectmen were Mr. Murphy, Mr. Donahue, and Mr. Mullane; present for the Board of Finance were Mrs. Howell, Mr. Pavlovics, Mr. Pelland, and Mr. Hundt; and present for the Board of Education were Mr. Karpinski, Mr. Carlson, Mrs. Wagner, Mr. McCord, and Mr. Mathwich. Also present were Mr. Nero, Mr. Lord of the Permanent School Planning and Building Committee, members of the Ad Hoc Building Committee, and Mr. Malik of Quisenberry Arcari Architects. The meeting started at 7:05 p.m. Mr. Donahue welcomed everyone. He explained what would be covered during this meeting.

2. Public Comments – M. Donahue (BOS) – None.

3. Ad Hoc Committee Plan Updates – M. Urgo – Mr. Urgo explained there would be some other speakers to go over different aspects of the project. He reviewed the objectives given to the Ad Hoc Committee. He reviewed the glaring needs of the schools including safety issues, maintenance/energy issues, and educational upgrades. Mr. Urgo reviewed the steps taken to date. They decided on a “Renovate as New” option for the elementary school and an “Additions and Alterations” option for the high school. He elaborated. Mr. Urgo said that a number of committee workgroups would be giving updates this evening. Mr. Urgo said they believe they can bring the cost of the project down. Mr. Urgo went over the site plan. He said they would be reviewing whether to demolish the middle school wing. He reviewed the first floor plan for the elementary school. He explained the shift of location for the first grade classrooms. He reviewed the second floor plan for the elementary school. Mr. Urgo reviewed the main level floor plan for the new middle/high school wing. He reviewed the second floor plan of the new middle/high school wing. Mr. Urgo introduced Tyler DiBrino.

4. Effect of Facilities Updates on Academics – T. DiBrino – Mr. DiBrino has been a student in North Stonington for his entire school career. He went over how the plan would improve academic performance. He explained this project is a need and he elaborated. He commented on the changing job scenarios. He did research on modernized schools. He reviewed some of the statistics and the reasons a modern building improves academic performance. He spoke of the benefits of being a small school. We are able to offer a lot and compete with larger schools. He spoke further of the benefits. He said from a student’s perspective, the plan makes sense. He had further comment. Mr. DiBrino introduced Mr. Anderson.

5. Updating Facilities and Impact on Local Economy – M. Anderson – Mr. Anderson spoke of the economic benefits to the district. He said North Stonington was ahead of the curve and it showed in the schools. He said the town needs to do this and the town will thrive if we do this. He said people come to town for the schools. He had further comment. He spoke of the article that was in the paper recently on regionalization. He said officials chose to educate our students here. He reviewed some items supporting smaller communities having schools. He reviewed statistics of towns having schools and towns that didn’t have schools. Mr. Anderson

reviewed statistics by the National Realtors Association of towns that had schools and towns that didn't have schools. He said the research is clear that homes in higher-performing school districts sell for a higher price than homes in lower performing districts. He reviewed similar items. He went over reasons that businesses would want to locate in the area. He said all of our schools are the foundation of the community.

Mr. Urgo had further comment. He said this is a minimalistic project. He said a lot of work has gone in to this. He said the cost to North Stonington after state reimbursement would be 21.47 million dollars. He said the committee unanimously voted to bring this project forward. He spoke further on the project. He said it was an 11% tax increase. He said the committee understands that no one wants their taxes to go up. Mr. Urgo reviewed towns tax-wise similarly populated to North Stonington. He said North Stonington is fourth from the bottom. Mr. Urgo said the committee went over all the options to make sure this was the best approach including converting the elementary school to the middle/high school and a capital improvements projects approach. Mr. Urgo went over the project rationale. He said there is very little debt on the town's books and it is a good time to finance. He reviewed the benefits of the project.

6. General Discussion/Feedback on Updates – Boards - Mr. Urgo told the Tri-Board that they have worked hard. They would like to move toward public hearings and were looking at some dates in February. There was discussion. Questions were asked and answered from members of the Boards. Mr. Urgo had further comment. There was further discussion. Mr. Mullane said the Ad Hoc Committee was charged with coming up with the most cost effective thing for the town. Mr. Mullane said for the last 20 years it has been status quo. Taxes have gone up. He had further comment. They have provided the information necessary to answer the question as to why to do this. He said the outlook is better for them in the future. He elaborated. He had further comment. He spoke of the type of young adult that we want to send out and gave Mr. DiBrino as an example. He elaborated. Mr. Murphy thought the Tri-Board needed to have more conversations about the current high school building. He doesn't think we can count on our high school building being occupied and maintained by someone else. He thought we needed to consider including roofs in this project for the current building. He elaborated. He thought we should include in our operating budget taking into consideration that they will go up accordingly. We can't just board up the building. It doesn't do any good to have them empty. Mr. Urgo had comment. Mr. Nero asked Mr. Malik if the cost of the roof could be included in a project and he said it would have to be listed as a separate project. There was comment about the savings with the new buildings. Mr. Urgo said their eye was on an eco-friendly environment. Questions were asked about the ball fields and soccer fields. Mr. Urgo explained they minimized the additional parking so it would not infringe on the fields. Mr. Murphy commented on the school project and the emergency services project would be maxing out the town's borrowing power. He again reiterated having that conversation. Mr. Urgo mentioned again that they can drive the costs down. He said they are ready to go to hearings. There was further comment. A question was asked

about if the two projects went at the same time what it would do to the mil rate and Mr. Pavlovics said they don't know that yet. Mr. Murphy also spoke to that question.

8. Public Comments – Jason Mancini, director of the Mashantucket Pequot Museum and resident of the town, spoke about the space at the museum. He said they have about 60,000 square feet that could be used as classroom space. He elaborated. He said they have a state of the art facility. They could have a school setup in place by August of 2016. He elaborated. He said the Tribe has put together a team to work with towns and to look into this. Mr. Urgo said the committee weighed this option. He said they didn't opt to go with this option. He explained a lot is the shared spaces with the community. He had further explanation of why they didn't opt for this. He said it is not a direction they wanted to go in. Brian Rathbun, citizen, spoke about the project and the burden. He said it will end up coming down to a black and white figure. He spoke of people on fixed incomes. He had further comment. He felt they needed to come up with better figures. He felt they needed to put pressure on our state representatives. Mr. Urgo said his comments are heard. He understood where he was coming from. He elaborated. A citizen had questions on the fields and playgrounds. She wanted to make sure they were looking at things other than the classrooms. Mr. Urgo said they were not looking at those things and he elaborated. He said there are conversations they have to have. He had further comment. A citizen asked about the early lunches and if the cafeteria was large enough so this would not have to happen. Mr. Urgo said that yes that was taken into consideration. Further questions were asked about transporting the food to the school. A citizen asked about the deed restrictions and if it were just for North Stonington education or for any education. Mr. Urgo said they have met with representatives from Wheeler Library and they are willing to work with us on that. Mr. Rathbun asked if anyone had approached descendants of the Wheeler family. Mr. Nero had comment. Gary Annino of the library board said there is no reverter clause on the deed. Mr. Urgo said we all want what is best for the kids. Mr. Annino said the land was actually given to the board of education in the mid-1940's. The school and library deeded the land back to the school for education. A citizen asked about the lighting in the gym parking lot. Mr. Lord said that was upgraded two weeks ago. Mr. Donahue said there were a lot of good questions this evening. He said the intent was the Ad Hoc Committee would come up with a project to go to the Board of Education. The committee has asked for public hearings. Mr. Carlson felt they should begin the public hearings. After those hearings the Tri-Board could still have discussions. Mr. Donahue had comment.

7. Next Meeting - R. Carlson (BOE) – February 25th at 7:00 p.m. in the high school media center.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:53 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Roberta T. McCarthy, Secretary to
The Board of Education