

Warwick School Committee Minutes  
Meeting May 5, 2015 – Open Session

The Warwick School Committee met in Open Session at the Toll Gate High School Cafeteria on Tuesday, May 5, 2015. Ms. Ahearn called the meeting to order at 7:35 p.m. with the five school committee members in attendance.

Mr. Edward Frenette began by outlining the agenda: who we are; what we have been doing; purpose of the workshops; building trust; goal for the evening and goals for future meetings. He provided background on SMMA and the work they have done. The firm has completed 21 master plan studies, 55 additions and renovations and 32 new construction projects in Massachusetts and Rhode Island. Regarding the study for Warwick, the firm has completed 36 interviews, interviewing approximately 107 individuals from faculty to staff to administration, 26 facility visits, both during and after school, and has engaged in comprehensive demographic studies. The purpose of these workshops is to understand the criteria to be used in evaluating the master plans and to understand the alternative master plans under consideration. The goal for the evening is to understand the criteria used in evaluating master plans: excess capacity; parity across schools and sub-districts; technology parity and enrichment; effective educational delivery; sixth grade enrichment; ninth grade transition; as well as to investigate more and better criteria.

There are three levels of master plans: the base level, which at a minimum would provide protected and safe facilities; what you want to do beyond that; and what you really want to do. There are a number of master plan alternatives to consider, which include ●asset health and safety protection; ●consolidate secondary schools; ●consolidate primary schools; ●consolidate primary and secondary; ●creation of middle school and 2 magnet high schools with 9<sup>th</sup> grade academies (6-8); ●creation of broad-band middle school and 2 magnet high schools with 9 grade academies(5-8); ●create 3 magnet middle-high schools with 9<sup>th</sup> grade academies (6-8 and 9-12); ●explore more and potential master plans.

Mr. Frenette said you are losing four to six classrooms every year. There is a more dramatic loss in secondary than primary, but overall it is dramatic. Your excess capacity is at the outer limits of what I've seen. Population of Warwick is decreasing and stabilizing as a function of an aging population. When asked about the airport expansion having any effect, he said that is miniscule compared to aging population. Capacity of schools are reported every year as part of an asset protection plan. The sixth grade is suffering because it is still part of the elementary system. You need to start thinking about a middle school model. With respect technology parity, he said you do not have parity; there is quite a difference from school to school; more so at the elementary level. Mr. Frenette said Warwick has six to eight too many schools. When asked which middle school model is better 6-8 or 5-8 he indicated research shows 6 through 8 is the best option. Fifth through eight is usually done to solve facility problems, such as overcrowding. Ms. Mederios said no matter what the committee decides; someone will be concerned. How many teachers need re-certification for middle school endorsement; how many would we use and how long will it take to get the new endorsement? Mr. Frenette said if the community doesn't embrace the politics, as well as the needs, goals and objectives of teachers, the plan would fail. A master plan should not live and die on a middle school. Every master plan comes with a price tag, including cost of repairs, additions or remodels, as well of the cost of doing nothing.

Mr. Frenette remarked you will want reimbursement from the state and you won't get it to repair buildings that aren't being used. You need to start addressing issues; you want to do it methodical, organized, and educationally sound; not being forced into it.

The following are questions and answers brought up during the meeting and which were posted by SMMA:

**1. Will the school grounds and athletic fields be evaluated during the Facilities Assessment? What about the sewer lines?** *Fields and grounds will be evaluated, no assessment of sub-grade utilities or destructive testing.*

- 2. Will the District's curricular offerings be evaluated against those of other school districts?** *SMMA can provide the District with an opinion, but such evaluations are beyond our scope of service. So long as Warwick conforms to Common Core and RIDE standards one can assume your students are receiving adequate offerings. (Such services are provided by SMMA as "Visioning Sessions" separately or as an added Master Plan component. Visioning has little effect on the major facility issues facing the City)*
- 3. Will SMMA be assessing technology at each school? Will there be a budget figure for technology purchases and upgrades?** *We will include a rough program and conceptual estimate of annual costs to upgrade your technology. This will need to be programmed in consultation with the District.*
- 4. You spoke of moving the 6th graders into a middle school. Are you aware of the additional certification requirements for middle school teachers? Will you be including the costs for re-certifying those teachers in your master plan? You mentioned both 6-8 middle schools and 5-8 middle schools. Which one is better?** *Yes we are aware of the cost. Most of the research tends to favor the 6-8 model, but both are workable. We have worked with districts where moving to the 5-8 model has worked for the students and has also relieved over-crowding at elementary schools.*
- 5. You mentioned that Warwick has excess capacity of between 8 and 10 average schools. If we have to close schools, which ones will they be?** *At this point we do not know the end result as we have just begun. We do not make decisions alone. We are here to investigate and discover alternative options, make recommendations and then help Warwick representatives make their choice.*
- 6. Will the Master Plan alternatives have a cost assigned to them and will that cost capture everything?** *We can include the direct costs for work on your facilities. We will need to speak with the Superintendent about any costs for transportation and staffing. There are a lot of issues to consider.*
- 7. What about 5-8 or 6-8 middle schools? There's teacher re-certification required if elementary school teachers have to teach in middle schools. We should make the least possible amount of change.** *These issues are all part of this process. How we will factor this in to the Master Plan is not yet clear. We will need School Committee input.*
- 8. You can look online at RIDE to see who is certified and in what area.** *We are not trying to sell a middle school to Warwick, but part of our job is to help the school district focus on the future of education, not on the past.*
- 9. Will you be closing schools and building new ones?** *Again, at this point, we do not know the end result of the planning process.*
- 10. To get a Middle School teaching endorsement takes passing 3 courses at RIC (Rhode Island College).** *Whether Warwick decides to go with a Middle School now or in the future should not be the "be all and the end all" of the master plan.*
- 11. Full day Kindergarten will probably be a State mandate, Pre-K is coming.** *The capacity numbers will include the Pre-K and the Kindergarten.*
- 12. What is the cost to the City if we do nothing?** *There is a cost of doing nothing because you're paying for more school facilities than you need. It's a city-wide issue and we need to engage city leadership. When a city decides to improve their schools property values very often stabilize or go up.*
- 13. What about the declining population?** *Most cities in Rhode Island are gaining population and most towns are losing residents. Warwick is an exception, a city that is losing population.*
- 14. Are we losing population because of the situation with the schools?** *Our demographers tell us that the major cause of Warwick's population decline is your aging population. We asked about what effect the airport expansion might have on population and it turned out to have only a minor impact.*
- 15. When you suggest keeping one school over another will you consider proximity to city resources like the pool, the ice rink and the library?** *Yes, to some degree, but these factors will probably have only a small effect.*
- 16. How do you know if there are enough school facilities in Warwick?** *As explained in the presentation, we use four different methods to determine capacity, then we meet with RIDE to review our numbers and negotiate an agreement on capacity. SMMA looks at your capacity as the number and size of spaces it actually takes to educate the children of Warwick.*
- 17. If Warwick has too many school buildings now, how do you know there will still be too many in the future? Ten years out, twenty years out, how far out can you plan it?** *Since the future is truly unknowable, the state only allows ten year projections with facility decisions based on conditions five years out. Whichever alternative Warwick selects, even the most minimal plan will take three years to fully implement.*

**18. How can we maximize the curriculum and educational enrichment?** *There's a complex choreography to implementing any master plan and there are many components that will figure in to predicting the outcome. Facilities are predictors of educational outcomes, class size, teachers and other factors. We will try to maximize the positive effects of all of these "predictors".*

*Richard D'Agostino speaks to emphasize that the District is exploring on-line courses, is introducing chrome books to the schools at all levels, and that doing so will lead to enrichment of education at all levels.*

**19. Will this presentation be available to the public and will we be able to make comments?** *Yes, this presentation will be posted on the school district's web site and you will be able to respond to it, probably using e-mail. We know this is a efficient process, but this is the schedule that was given. It's always nice to have more time, but often studies can go on too long.*

**21. You say that you interviewed 107 people, but that's not enough, not even 10% of the staff. How do we know you're getting the real story?** *We found that in doing these interviews, patterns emerge. For the first third of interviews we were just trying to keep up with what we heard. In the second third we found patterns of agreement on many of our questions. For the last third we essentially got confirmation of those patterns. Based on our experience, it's fair to say that if we had interviewed another 100 people, the information would not have changed in any meaningful way.*

**20. When you visited our schools were any of them in session? You need to see them when students are there to really understand them.** *In fact, I toured your schools when they were in session, along with my partner, Phil Poinelli. Members of our facilities assessment team made visits to the buildings when they were in session. We will be looking at traffic while school is in session, but only after we have selected a master plan option.*

**22. You said that it would take at least three years to implement a master plan. What about the current code violations in the Warwick schools?** *When I said three years, it was for the complete implementation of a minimal plan alternative. We will be meeting with the State Fire Marshall later this month to discuss the current situation.*

**23. What about walk-ability? Will the plan take that into account?** *We will deal with those details when we get down to a more manageable number of master plan options. We're not there yet.*

**24. The elephant in the room here is the three years of heated discussion we've had over this issue. Now SMMA is here. There's lots of mistrust in the room. You need to publicize these meetings better so that people will have the time for mental preparation.** *At some point, Warwick will have to make a decision about excess capacity. It may be with this architect, School Committee and master plan or the next architect, Committee and plan. But, at some point you will need to decide. There are just too many school buildings for the number of children in Warwick, and you're paying money to heat and power and maintain these excess buildings and those dollars are not going to educate your children. No matter what you decide now, the next time you ask for reimbursement from the state for your facilities (as part of a RIDE Stage I and II master plan submittal), the state will insist that Warwick resolves its excess capacity issues. It is better to do it now in a planned way rather than be forced to do so after a building failure or a state mandate.*

Future SMMA workshops scheduled are May 11<sup>th</sup>; May 18 and May 21, May 26 and May 27.

MOTION 2015-116: Moved by Ms. Furtado, seconded by Mr. Nadeau, to adjourn.

**MOTION PASSES (5-0)**

Bethany A. Furtado – Aye    M. Terri Medeiros – Aye  
Eugene A. Nadeau – Aye    Karen Bachus – Aye  
Jennifer Ahearn – Aye

Meeting adjourned 9:15 p.m.