

Minutes of the Little Compton School Building Committee

October 28, 2009

The new-member workshop meeting of the Little Compton School Building Committee was called to order by L. Brousseau-Lebreux at 7:00 p.m. in the Wilbur/McMahon School Commons. A quorum was present.

Members Present: T. Alder, T. Arkins, B. Borden, H. Devine, B. Gauthier, D. MacGregor, M. Manning, R. Mushen, C. Osborne, BG Shanklin, J. Talbot, and M. Rapp

Others Present: Consultant G. Smolley of JCJ Architecture, and members of the public

Members Absent: D. Gomez, D. Freeman, P. Golembeske (alternate), M. Harrington, R. Racette, M. Shapiro, D. Wordell

Review of Project to Date:

The Superintendent summarized the history of the project, beginning with his arrival at the school in July of 2005. The following month, the

school received a report from the local Fire Department citing numerous areas of non-compliance throughout the school facility, including the lack of required exits in the cafeteria, concerns with the kindergarten stairwell exit, and the absence of a total coverage system in the building. Minor issues were remedied where possible, and temporary accommodations and compromises were made for other situations while a facilities study was to be undertaken. In November of 2005, an ad hoc Facilities Committee was formed. That December, the School Committee voted to bid a facilities study. In January 2006, Mt. Vernon was awarded the contract and a Building Facilities Study Committee was formed. In the spring of 2006, J. DaSilva, of Mt. Vernon, visited the building. He estimated over \$11 million in work to be done. Throughout June and July of 2006, repairs to the school continued, such as sprinklers in the boiler room, replacement doors, emergency lighting, and removing carpet. In the summer of 2007, the Facilities Committee concluded that rehabilitating the existing school would not be cost-effective and recommended new construction. An RFP was issued which cited the reasons for the decision to build new and JCJ was ultimately selected as the project consultant.

Questions from Members:

BG Shanklin asked for confirmation of where we are in the process. The Superintendent reported that the Stage I Application has been submitted and we are waiting for a response from the Rhode Island

Department of Education (RIDE). J. DaSilva of RIDE indicated to the Superintendent that the application looks good and he is going to try and fast-track it. Once RIDE has reviewed the application, they will meet with us.

T. Arkins asked if we can design for what we need, keeping in mind codes, and then consider whether grants would be advantageous. He introduced the concept of a “not-so-big school” in keeping with the character of the town. It was pointed out that classrooms comprise approximately 2/3 of a school, and further, that classroom sizes are governed by RIDE’s educational programming requirements. Actual class size as determined by a particular school’s student-teacher ratio is not a determining factor in RIDE’s square footage requirements. The Superintendent noted that Wilbur-McMahon has a very low teacher-student ratio -- on average 15 students per class. Enrollment is presently around 315 students and new school construction would plan for an enrollment of 350 students. With regard to the adequacy of current classrooms or rather, as he said, spaces that are being used as classrooms, G. Smolley said that right now we are teaching to the building instead of the building supporting the way we teach. A smaller school would require a different educational program. The Superintendent believes the state is inflexible on classroom size.

J. Talbot asked whether different regulations apply if we don’t ask for state funding. According to G. Smolley, if we don’t pursue RIDE

funds, there is the chance that programming funding is in jeopardy. Grant guidelines drive the size of building. The state has minimum sizes for educational program spaces.

When asked whether we are working for the town or volunteering for the state, G. Smolley said he believes RIDE is our client, and the town and state are funding sources. The Superintendent added that not everyone agrees with that interpretation.

D. MacGregor stated that he felt it was important that this committee design a school that will meet our needs for 50 years, so we are not back at the table in another 10 to 20 years. He mentioned the roof leaks evident on the way in to the meeting tonight, and said that's just a hallway - there are problems with teaching spaces as well. G. Smolley mentioned having to turn off heating unit in the room during the meeting due to noise.

The Superintendent brought up that Wilbur-McMahon is part of a special education regional consortium. Little Compton is the only town in the consortium that does not presently contribute space for regional special education needs. In a new school building he expects that this need would be accommodated. This would not only satisfy our duty, but alleviate the travel burden on our students and enable us to receive discounts on tuitions. In addition to the lack of special education spaces, L. Brousseau-LeBreux noted that our school does not provide a private room to meet the physical therapy

needs of students. B. Borden felt that it is important to consult with the special education consortium on its needs and specifications. The Superintendent agreed and said that these are the kinds of discussions we will have more in-depth as part of Stage II. It was noted that we need to review and refine the existing educational program in order to make sure it reflects our needs, such as these mentioned here.

B. Gauthier referenced a recent newspaper article on no-interest loans that were recently awarded by RIDE. He noted that some districts received money for urgent repairs. He asked whether there are pieces of our package that are competitive for the next round of loans if we structure it right. G. Smolley said we can expect to see criteria for the next round in 1st quarter 2010. B. Gauthier asked if there are additional funds available if the gym is used as a town shelter space. G. Smolley thought that would mostly apply to supplies such as generators, cots, etc.

A member of the audience asked whether there are site plans available from the past, with any delineation of wetlands or setbacks. The Superintendent said that the school custodian has binders with information available on the 1970s and 1990s school additions/renovations.

There was a discussion of community use of spaces in the new school. A question was asked about why the stage in the gym is not

used. The Superintendent replied that the school doesn't have drama as part of its curriculum; a former teacher did this as part of his contribution to the school. Furthermore, the stage is not used because it is not handicapped accessible. In response to whether school resources such as a shop room would be open to the public, G. Smolley said it is important to think about what the school can do for the community. As part of planning the roll-out to the community, we will want to make this part of the presentation. BG Shanklin asked how operational cost is determined when there is co-use between the community/school, and the Superintendent replied it is determined by school committee policy.

A member of the audience recommended the RIDE website as a useful tool for the committee:
www.ride.ri.gov/finance/funding/construction

J. Talbot asked whether one of the next steps for the committee was deciding where the school is going to go. G. Smolley answered that that is indeed an elemental question, but he wants to know what to build first. The need for a site plan/survey was underscored.

A member of the audience asked whether everyone on the committee had seen the RGB independent estimate report and what the committee planned on doing with it. He cited RIDE 1.00 construction regulations, indicating that grants are available for renovations as well. He also asked whether we have to meet the same classroom size

criteria if we renovate. G. Smolley replied that the state reserves the right not to participate because it may not consider it to meet adequate educational needs. He also pointed out that the state won't participate in neglected buildings or those that were allowed to wear-out. When the state comes to meet with us, it will be a good time to ask questions such as this on the guidelines. G. Smolley recommended that committee members submit questions for J. DaSilva to the Superintendent in advance of RIDE's meeting with the committee.

There was a discussion on the merits of hearing lessons learned from other architects and building committees, etc. T. Arkins indicated he would like to invite an architect to share his experiences on a building committee from a town that faced similar challenges.

There was also discussion on site visits to schools. The Superintendent said that while there may be reasons to look at private schools, to keep in mind private schools are not required to pay prevailing wages for construction. G. Smolley noted that we have a different labor pool and far fewer bidders in Little Compton and Tiverton than on Aquidneck Island. There was a brief mention of a design-build approach and whether RIDE allows that.

T. Arkins made a motion to invite an architect, Don Powers, to come and talk to the committee. Several members expressed an openness to the value of hearing lessons learned and were in favor of the

opportunity to ask questions of as many resources as we can. There was general reticence at this early stage to hearing sales pitches or specific feedback on any plans. There was also concern about attendance if there were too many meetings. R. Mushen suggested that we hold another workshop at later date, where committee members could seek input on what other professionals learned from school construction projects and how decisions were made, etc. A workshop format would be less-structured, optional for members, and not in the middle of a voting agenda. B. Gauthier underscored the value of asking others what the decisions they made were and how they made them. J. Talbot expressed his favor at looking at other experiences and examples as case-studies.

The discussion turned briefly to the next meeting's agenda. It was noted that the Building Committee will be given a charge at the School Committee meeting on November 10. The Superintendent recommended that the Building Committee wait to conduct further business such as electing officers and establishing subcommittees until after the charge has been established.

The motion on the table was revisited. T. Arkins said that his feeling is that he wants to be sure the committee is steering the project. T. Alder praised G. Smolley for his consulting work to date and said that the committee has relied heavily upon JCJ's report. T. Arkins said that he wanted to be open-minded and get educated from as many places as we can and share that with each other.

G. Smolley stated that in 9 years he has done 81 schools and been on every side of process. He advised if we want to hear from someone who's been on our side of table, bring them here. If we want to know about what the building is going to look like or how it is going to function, that's our role, and let's wait until we get there.

BG Shanklin agreed it was important to bring anyone who will make us feel more comfortable and confident about doing a better job for Little Compton and to inform our work as members of the Building Committee. The most important thing is to ask smart questions, and toward that end, he is concerned about having someone here too soon. He felt we need to do our homework first. He agrees that the next meeting is too soon for this, and the workshop format would be best. B. Borden mentioned a school in Connecticut that she felt would be a great resource for the committee. It was agreed to think about who we would like to hear from and pick a workshop night after the next meeting. T. Arkins took the motion off the table.

There was a question from the audience as to whether the state must approve the committee charge. The Superintendent and G. Smolley stated that they do not believe that to be the case. The Superintendent added that the state will let us know if anything is missing from our application.

Next Meeting: On a motion made by L. Brousseau-Lebreux and seconded by D. MacGregor, it was voted to reschedule the next

meeting from November 4th to November 19th, 2009.

Adjourn: On a motion made by M. MacGregor and seconded by L. Brousseau-LeBreux, it was voted to adjourn.

Respectfully submitted by M. Manning, Secretary pro tem