

MINUTES ~ APRIL 20, 2005 ~ INFORMATIONAL MEETING

Ponaganset High School Auditorium

1. Call to Order

Mr. Gregory Laramie, Chair of the Foster Glocester Regional Building Committee, called the informational meeting about the new school building project to order at 6:40 PM in the Ponaganset High School Auditorium. It was estimated that roughly 100 people from the community were in attendance.

2. Roll Call

Mrs. Kecia Pierce asked for the roll call. In attendance were Mr. Gregory Laramie of Glocester, Mr. Raymond Fogarty of Glocester, Mr. Warren Ducharme of Foster, Mr. William Abt of Foster, Mrs. Patti Fountain of Foster and Mrs. I. Lorraine O'Connors of Glocester. Mr. Dennis Chretien of Foster and Mr. George Jacques of Glocester were absent.

3. Presentation of Issues

Mr. Laramie informed the audience that several presenters would be providing information regarding the new school building project and after the presentations the building committee members would answer questions from the audience. Also, Mr. Laramie informed the audience that the information in the Necessity for School Construction Application will be available on the Foster/Glocester Regional website at www.fg.k12.ri.us.

Mr. Fogarty explained the process to this point as follows: Over two years ago, Mr. George Jacques submitted a proposal to the grants committee for an addition of a field house for physical education and athletics. This request was then brought forward to the school committee. After hearing several issues regarding physical needs throughout the facilities, the school committee appointed a panel of members from both Foster and Glocester to review the demographics of the high school and middle school and assess the feasibility of the current facilities. The committee met monthly for two years and reported to the regional school committee at almost each of their meetings. The feasibility studies group initially estimated construction costs for everything the district needed to be about \$65M, but rejected that amount as too expensive. After review of the project, the feasibility study committee, with its consultants, estimated that a \$45.7M proposal is more appropriate for the district. The school committees voted to go forward with this, submit the proposal to the Rhode Island Department of Education, and consulted with the town councils from each town who also voted to go forward. After both town councils and the state legislators supported legislation to have this issue on the ballot, in November of 2004, the issue was put forth to the voters and approved. In the first week of January 2005, the 8 building committee members were appointed: 2 members from the school committee (one from each town), and 3 members appointed by each of the two town councils. During the March 2005 school committee meeting, the committee voted to authorize the district

treasurer to borrow up to the \$45.7 so the building committee could proceed with the project.

Mr. Gary Martinelli discussed the physical education, athletics, health and recreation issues. He cited several issues with the facilities as follows: overcrowding of the indoor facilities which has led to intramural teams being limited and limited usage by outside organization such as recreational leagues and adult education programs. He also noted that there is not enough space in the locker rooms. Some students need to double up on lockers and for sporting events there are not enough lockers for visiting teams and no changing rooms for female officials. Mr. Martinelli also explained that the outdoor space is limited.

Mr. Shane McConnell informed the audience about accreditation issues. In 1998, the school was issued a warning based on building violations as well as teaching/learning issues. In 2001, the teaching/learning issues had been corrected but there were still facility issues. In 2003 the NEASC accepted the 5 year progress reports and noted the school as a high performance school however there were still building concerns as far as ventilation, roof leaks, inadequate science labs and overcrowding. In June 2004, NEASC reviewed the progress report and continued accreditation but there were still concerns with the building which led to the need for a special progress report on renovation plans. In December 2004 the bond issue passed and this information was provided to NEASC.

Mr. Laramie provided information on the overall physical assessment and cited the following issues: space constraints throughout the school, the site is surrounded by wetlands, inadequacy of buildings, parking lots and playing fields and the site does not support enough water for the school-water is trucked in. Also, the high school is 38% over recommended capacity and the middle school is 20% over capacity. Mr. Laramie informed the audience that spaces are over-used and cited the example that the auditorium is used as a study hall. The size of the library, cafeteria, kitchen, bathrooms, offices and gyms are all inadequate. The infrastructure is too small to handle the school population. The recommended average square footage of a classroom is 750-850; the average classroom in the old section of the school is 630 square feet. The recommended cafeteria square footage is 5,000-7,000; the current facility is 4,400 square feet. The standard is to have 2-3 lunches per day, the high school has 5 lunches with the first beginning at 10:40am and the last being held at 12:30. The library is 3,000 square feet; it should be 5,600 square feet for the number of students. Other issues are the use of inefficient electric heat, limited fresh air and asbestos issues.

Mr. Ross McCurdy discussed the conditions of the science labs as being a disgrace due to a leaky roof, cracked floor tiles, inadequate ventilation and inadequate oxygen levels in the classrooms. In addition, they are not handicapped accessible. Mr. McCurdy also explained that regular classrooms are being used to teach science labs and some of the teachers do not have a regular classroom.

Ms. Deidre Spadazzi spoke regarding the middle school music program saying the program/students have outgrown the middle school facilities. The recommended number of students in a class is approx 23; her average class is 50 students. She noted the following issues for the music rooms: there are no outside windows, leaky roof and inadequate space in the band room. The high school and middle school share the performance site and often rehearse at the same time. Also, while the auditorium is being used for study hall, the band is on stage rehearsing for concerts. Due to new fire codes the risers are no longer allowed on the floor in front of the stage therefore the band and chorus cannot perform in concerts together.

Mr. Joe Cordone talked about the conditions of the cafeteria stating that the 20 minutes lunches weren't long enough as it took 10 minutes to go through the line to get a meal leaving only ten minutes to eat. Mr. Cordone also informed the audience that the physical education classes were limited too; there were too many students in a limited area which resulted in only 15 minutes of activity time.

Mr. Abt spoke regarding the deferred maintenance issues as follows: the roof needs to be replaced, mortar is coming off the brick, the middle school windows leak, and the HVAC system in the middle school is 1960's technology which is now inefficient

Mr. Ducharme informed the committee about handicapped, OSHA, fire and building code violations. The following issues were discussed: there is only one handicapped accessible area, wider doors and corridors are needed, there are asbestos and questionable air quality issues. Additionally, the new fire code changes need to be addressed. There are new standards that the building needs to meet.

Mr. Fogarty discussed the demographic projections. Since the addition to the high school in 1991, there has been an increase of 400 students for a total of 998-1010 student. 800 is the education maximum for the current facility, with 670 being the education preferred. The year 2028 prediction is 1,100 students for the middle school and 1,400 for the high school. Mr. Fogarty explained that overcrowding is an issue now and will continue to be an issue in the current facility.

Dr. Cirillo discussed the Elementary Schools Capacities in terms of the misinformation that the old junior high configuration could be used rather than the middle school. Dr. Cirillo explained that based on research and educational theory, grades 6, 7 and 8 is still the best combination as is seen in the middle school. Also, if the grades are shifted there would be overcrowding in the elementary schools. Dr. Cirillo also informed the audience that he was impressed with the feasibility and demographic study and the package prepared for the state. He urged people to look at the work done -- not the misinformation.

Ms. Pat Marcotte discussed middle school needs. She explained that this is the seventh year in a row that the middle school has exceeded the maximum number of students. 500 students is the maximum, this year there are 700 students. Ms. Marcotte also informed the audience that the middle school building was initially built as a high school and the set up is not conducive to middle school learning. Young adolescents should be broken into smaller teams so that they will be better known and easier to serve. Ms. Marcotte also highlighted the following concerns: students do not always get four years of unified arts due to space constriction, students do not always get to participate in gym, the music room is too small and some of the classrooms are too small for the furniture.

Mr. McConnell discussed the high school needs citing space as a major issue. A closet and the school store are now used as special education rooms. Physical education programs are not adequate; sometimes students don't get to participate. Some programs such as print shop have been eliminated. More technological areas are needed. Digital portfolios are required for graduation however it is hard to get into the computer lab to finish these. Also, the auditorium only holds 500 people, yet there are 1,000 students in the school.

Mr. Laramie informed the audience about the facilities study plan presented to the school department and the Rhode Island Department of Education. He explained that different options were looked into such as different grade configurations and breaking up the schools. However, it was determined that the new school would be the best way to create adequate space for the programs of the district.

Mr. Abt spoke regarding construction costs. Although construction costs will increase over the next few years, the project funds are limited to \$45.7M and the committee is committed to stay within this budget. There will be cost control throughout the project. There will be an estimating company, Mr. Abt will do his own estimating and there will also be a 3rd party estimator. Mr. Abt also explained that vertical construction on the existing buildings is not an option as this cannot be done without virtually tearing down the whole building and starting over.

Mr. Laramie discussed the land and the site process. The requirements used in selecting the parcel are as follows: the site must be two miles between the Foster/Glocester border, greater than the recommended min acreage (31 acres), a single parcel rather than a large parcel to be broken up. It must be in a suitable location, close to PHS, sufficient roadway access and not affecting other properties. The environment must be free of pollution, have a favorable watershed and no wetlands. The land must be flat or slightly sloping, and favorable for the building, parking lots and playing fields. The price must also be reasonable as well as the legal fees. Mr. Laramie identified the recommended site as an 86 acre lot located at the intersection of Route 102 and Snake Hill Rd. This parcel best met the criteria and preliminary site and soil evaluation is taking place.

Mr. Winsor spoke regarding the financial aspect of the project. He explained that the State reimbursement is currently 56%; however, if full regionalization takes place then reimbursement would be at 70%. The cost of the project is capped at \$45.7M. The initial financing will be through bond anticipation notes. Once substantial completion is achieved the bonds will be available. Within the next two months, we expect to borrow \$9M to cover current costs. The interest on this \$9M will be \$254K. The impact on the tax rate based on a \$250K house will be approximately \$300-\$400 per year.

Mr. Ed Juare informed the audience of the website which will help people estimate the tax rate. The site is WWW.Glocesterri.org.

Mr. Laramie informed the audience that the building committee is organized with eight sub-committees: Architecture & Engineering, Athletics, Ed Spec, Energy, Finance, Resources, Technology and Site. The eight building committee members take all the formal actions but are advised by the subcommittees.

Mr. Fogarty informed the audience about the elevator pitch event to be held on May 17th. This will be an opportunity for people to present ideas for projects which will help reduce the cost of the building project. Currently there are 25 projects being looked into.

Mr. Laramie informed the audience that there were several more presenters scheduled to speak, however due to the length of the program already, the question and answer period would begin.

4. Question and Answer Period

- Q. Ron Cervasio of Foster: What will you do if the building construction costs increase?
- A. Mr. Laramie: The size of the building, cost of the project would need to be reduced.
- Q. Joe Floria of Glocester: Was operating cost ever mentioned to the school committee?
- A. Mr. Fogarty: Yes and the school committee accepted the report that we sent in to the state and one of the things included was a five year projection of what the new school would cost and there is a section which includes operational costs.

- Q. Lea Niles of Foster: Why are schools allowed to be in this condition and why build a new one if we can't keep up with the old ones?
- A. Greg Laramie: Budget cuts have been made in capital improvements over the years. For future buildings, the resources committee would like to set up a renewals and replacement fund. We will be fundraising for an amount of money to be used just for the purpose of maintaining the building.
- Q. Grace Fisher of Gloucester: Why is the town opposed to the free land that was offered?
- A. Greg Laramie: FM Global offered land near its facility however it exceeded the statutory requirements of being within two miles of the border of both Foster and Gloucester as required. The committee looking into the possibility of changing that requirement but the cost to develop that piece of land would be more expensive than the purchase price of the new parcel.
- Q. Grace Fisher of Gloucester: Maintaining the buildings has not been done. How do you expect to maintain the buildings? If can't maintain this, how maintain new building?
- A. Greg Laramie: Many members of the facilities study committee and the building committee got involved in this project precisely because of the concern for the conditions of the building. We are committed to making sure this doesn't happen again.
- Q. Ms. Ryder. Is it possible to take the bond money and use it for repairs and renovations, is that legally possible?
- A. Greg Laramie: The bond issue received approval from the state because we are addressing space issues; but a portion of the money is for renovations and repairs while the other portion is for the enlargement of the facilities as required by the population. This portion of the funds cannot be used for repairs.
Ray Fogarty: The people voted for the funds to be used for a new school.
- Q. Lisa Jones of Gloucester: What is full regionalization?
- A. Greg Laramie: Currently there are three districts, Foster preK-5, Gloucester preK-5, and regional 6-12. Each operates with a separate school committee, separate superintendent and offices. The full regionalization would combine everything to one district, one operation. The state would reimburse an additional \$10.6m for the project if we are fully regionalized.
- Q. Lisa Jones of Gloucester: Would we be able to separate completely into two districts?
- A. Greg Laramie: The State reimbursement would drop to 36% and one of the towns would still need to build.
- Q. George Charrette of Gloucester: How does this committee expect to complete this project without cost overruns especially considering there will be 15-20% inflation over the next 2 years?

A. Greg Laramie: We have built some inflation into the budget and we will also be hiring a construction manager at risk. The construction manager at risk will be part of the project from the beginning to help us stick to the budget.

Q. Ted Burlingame of Chepachet. Is the \$254k of interest on the bond anticipation notes going to be in the budget every year? What will be the amount for next year?

A. Ray Fogarty/Steve Winsor/Greg Laramie: Yes, and the amount will increase over the next 5 years. The number for next year will be just under \$950K. As we go to bond the amount will be approximately \$1M for Glocester and \$500K for Foster.

Q. Frank Flynn of Glocester. What will the affect be on the students if we lose accreditation?

A. Dr. Cirillo: Loss of accreditation will affect college selections & placement. College applications ask if the student attended an accredited institution.

Q. Karen Ferenti of Glocester: Will PHS lose accreditation if the new high school is not built.

A. Dr. Cirillo: Yes, eventually. This would not happen overnight, there would be a probation period but eventually it would come to loss of accreditation.

Q. John Florio of Glocester: Who is responsible for cost overruns on the project? Building process and cost overruns, who is responsible?

A. Greg Laramie: Contractors are responsible for anything that they may have mis-bid on.

Q. Lisa Jones of Glocester: What happens if enrollment is down when the new school is built?

A. Greg Laramie: What we are finding in the state is that people are leaving the suburban areas and moving to rural areas. Although building permits may be frozen or limited, people with kids can still move into existing properties in town.

Q. Walter Steere of Glocester: What is the bond interest rate?

A. Steve Winsor: Bond anticipation notes are 3-3.5%. The bond rates are unknown as we don't know what the market will be in 2 years, we are estimating 4-5%.

Q. Walter Steere of Glocester: Is the 55% reimbursement guaranteed?

A. Steve Winsor/Greg Laramie: What we were told is when the state obligates itself to the bond, that rate of reimbursement would continue for the life of the bond. Steve discussed this issue with Celeste Bilotti from the Department of Education and her opinion is that the rate will not change. She has never seen that happen.

5. Adjournment

Mrs. Fountain moved and Mr. Ducharme seconded that the meeting be adjourned at 9:00 PM. So voted, 6-0.

Prepared by: Kecia Pierce, Building Committee Clerk

Approved by: Foster Glocester Building Committee, May 10, 2005

