

Facilities Optimization Committee

Regular Meeting Minutes

April 7, 2020, 6:00 pm

Via Zoom video conference

Attendance:

Committee Members: First Selectman Chris Spaulding, Rick Bertasi, Rone Baldwin, Ken Edgar, Steve Ezzes, Denise Harvey, Hillary Koyner, Tony Pesco, Gayle Weinstein, and Richard Wolf.

Invited Guests: Assistant Superintendent Ken Crow and Mike Zuba (Milone & MacBroom).

Members of the press and public.

Call to Order: Chairman Rick Bertasi called the meeting to order at 6:15 pm.

Approval of Minutes: Ken Edgar made a motion to approve the minutes from the March 25, 2020 meeting. Seconded by Tony Pesco. Motion carried unanimously.

Discussion regarding Weston Public Schools (“WPS”) enrollment projections: Mike Zuba reviewed his responses to questions, which were submitted by Committee members and the general public after his presentation at the Committee’s March 25th meeting. The responses (including charts and excel spreadsheets on historic enrollment, 10-year projected enrollment under three scenarios and historic net in-migration) were emailed to the Committee.

- Mike reported that since 2002-03, annual net in-migration ranged from -32 to +78 students, averaging more recently around +50. Rick Bertasi asked whether distribution across grades is reasonably consistent. Mike replied no; typically Kindergarten (“K”) and 1st grade have the highest in-migration, particularly in DRG A, where parents opt for private K and shift to public school for 1st grade.
- Mike reported that over the next several years projected K enrollment is under 130.
- Mike stated that data for Weston on other public/private school enrollment is unavailable from the State, but has minimal impact for the birth-K analysis. Denise Harvey asked Ken Crow about tracking preschool students. He said Laura Kaddis, HES principal, tracks them; current trend for fall is just over 100 students for K.
- Mike discussed the shortcomings of using American Community Survey demographic data for projections; better to use 10-year census data for births and fertility rates and housing sales for in-migration. Noted demographic trends, especially in CT, show booms followed by busts with lengthy peak to peak cycles and stability through troughs. For K, enrollment is likely in a trough, maybe being flat without any large dip going forward; decline is in larger cohorts exiting the school system.
- Discussion occurred about the uncertainty of the current environment for assessing the future impact of various factors on enrollment. Steve Ezzes questioned whether under current circumstances historical data will be as helpful in the near future. Rick Bertasi noted, in corporate real estate, there is much higher uncertainty about where employees want to live. Rick also noted increases in 6 month rentals. Gayle Weinstein noted that during the recession Weston had a huge number of foreclosures and many families had to leave Town.
- Chris Spaulding noted, even if we did this analysis before the virus, based on Mike’s information, HES, which is at 50% capacity, would not fill up given current trends.
- Mike noted his blended methodology for K projections, part of which is a regression analysis using births, medium home sale price and number of single family home

sales. For every \$100,000 change in median home sale price, the impact on K projections is modest. He said their projections since 2017 have held up very well.

Discussion regarding WPS space utilization: Ken Crow referred to facility utilization data that was emailed to the Committee and is available on the WPS website under Facilities.

- Ken Crow noted Board of Education (“BOE”) class size guidelines as a facility use driver. Rick Bertasi asked whether State class size guidelines exist. Ken Crow said no, but WPS does consider its programs and students and neighboring district guidelines. Denise Harvey asked whether the BOE reviewed class size research. Ken Crow noted that research is reviewed at times but guidelines are affirmed during the budget process. Tony Pesco added the BOE looks at DRG A and private schools and noted the importance of class size for families coming to Weston.
- Rick Bertasi and Rone Baldwin asked whether the district benchmarked square foot per student against other districts. Rone noted the facilities studies do not answer whether there is an issue around the amount of space per student; this needs to be answered, along with a comparison to other districts. Tony Pesco noted that Weston uses more space per student than other DRG A districts and there is unusable space; need to examine utilization of usable space, not total square footage.
- Rick Bertasi asked whether, at the time WIS was built, Weston set expected capacity for the number of students. Ken Crow will look into it for WIS and WHS, but it will be difficult for HES and WMS. Rick also asked whether WIS today is being used as originally anticipated.
- Richard Wolf questioned how in 2008-09, WIS could have 100 more students than in 2017 without needing half of the 2nd floor classrooms but today all are in use with 100 fewer students. Ken Crow noted changes in education, special education needs and related services, with more State requirements. WPS studied whether 2nd grade could move to WIS but Ken Crow noted there would not be enough classrooms without changing programs. Ken Crow suggested walking WIS to see how it is used.
- Rick Bertasi noted that buildings have a finite capacity, and regulatory requirements and BOE guidelines need to be taken into account. With outside assistance, the Committee can do that work and then look at how the capacity is being used, enrollment and what extra space could be given away.
- Denise Harvey noted that it is important, along with space utilization, to understand the district’s educational vision. Ken Crow would be happy to share that with the Committee, and noted the importance of the arts, STEM, robotics and science learning, and of face-to-face interaction even with distance learning.
- Ken Crow discussed briefly the current layout and space utilization of HES, and that space is being used at WMS and WHS, noting the difference from the elementary level due to the need for specialized subjects.
- Chris Spaulding mentioned that we can virtually walk the schools and Rick Bertasi mentioned looking at floor plans.

New business: None, except the Committee affirmed that it had no objection to continuing with evening meetings.

Adjournment: Denise Harvey made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:24 pm. Seconded by Tony Pesco. Motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Denise Harvey, Acting Secretary