

Facilities Optimization Committee
APPROVED MINUTES
Tuesday, April 21, 2020 7 PM
Via Google Meets

Attendance:

Members: Rick Bertasi, Steve Ezzes, Gayle Weinstein, Richard Wolf, Rone Baldwin, Ken Edgar, Denise Harvey, Hillary Koyner, Tony Pesco

Invited Guest: Assistant Superintendent Ken Crow

Members of the Public and Press

A motion was made to approve the minutes of the April 7th meeting by Tony Pesco, seconded by Ken Edgar. Unanimously approved.

Ken Crow was asked to discuss school facility utilization.

Dr. Crow discussed how the District currently delivers its education. The District feels it is important to maintain hands-on learning, inquiry-based learning, small group learning, collaborative flexible use of space. It is important to consider the “whole child” and not just the academic piece. Social/emotional environment is also important. The educational program is not just about class size, it is also about Special Education services and specialized programs such as the arts, computer, engineering, etc.

Hurlbutt Elementary School:

HES is a sprawling building with multiple additions. The Senior Center, located in South House, occupies 6 classrooms. Special Education classrooms have a wide range of square footage. It can be looked at to see if the space can be used more efficiently. Next year, there will be 3 pre-K, 7 K, 7 First Grade and 6 Second Grade classes. Gayle Weinstein asked about the potential to expand the pre-K program. Dr. Crow responded that it has been reviewed, but the District feels it would be cost prohibitive. The functional capacity of the school is 36 general classrooms. There is currently some unallocated space on the lower floor of North House. You could possibly add another grade, but you would lose a science lab, art classroom and music classroom.

Weston Intermediate School:

The functional capacity is 28 general classrooms. There are also 2 Spanish classes, a Project Challenge classroom, and a second art classroom. All general classrooms are currently being used. As class size declines, it may be possible to add a fourth grade to the building, but space would be very tight and classes like art, Spanish and health may have to lose their classrooms. Gym space and cafeteria space also become an issue. It would be problematic to bring the middle school program down to WIS, as much of their learning is inquiry based, and WIS currently does not have that ability.

Weston Middle School:

The Middle School has a central core with several wings. F, G, and H wings are tired and in need of renovation, as do the science facilities and music facilities. Another specialized music room is needed. The library was upgraded several years ago. There are currently 33 classrooms being utilized by 3 grades. By 2023, the need for 3 grades will be for 24 classrooms. There is potential for a 5-8 school configuration. The District is currently reviewing ways to adjust the teaming model.

Weston High School:

Since the addition was added 15 years ago, requirements have increased. They have added a science research lab, environmental science room, a learning lab, a community classroom, and Project Lead the Way classes. The behind the walls work to get the buildings in a state of good repair is a significant amount of money.

Rick Bertasi proposed hiring a consultant. Steve Ezzes asked What kind of consultant. Rick responded, ideally someone who has done similar work in other towns. An architectural construction firm who can look at what has already been done. Or a program or cost management firm. Tony Pesco emphasized the need to hire someone with expertise in ed spec spaces. Tony Pesco said that there are options that the committee feels they would like to understand if they are viable, it's good to discuss, BoE has probably already discussed so may be able to get some quick answers before we spend money to hire someone. Gayle Weinstein said that we spent a lot of money over the past number of years, but haven't taken any of the recommendations. We want to make sure that if we hire someone, we actually come up with a valid recommendation for the town. Hillary Koyner asked what will a new consultant provide that we already haven't gathered. Rick Bertasi responded that from his perspective, looking beyond Phase 1 and 2, it would take a lot to unpack the data. Tony Pesco added that there is a lot of data and broad range of possibilities, it doesn't have the answer. We need some more analysis and input. Phase 2 was done with a particular perspective, an important one, but only one. Need a broader perspective. Chris Spaulding added that the concept behind Phase 2 was for the schools to review ed specs, what could be accomplished, it was not supposed to incorporate money. The money comes into play when you combine the town and school together, and what savings based on a synergized program. Results depend on the questions asked, and the report doesn't incorporate needs of the entire town.

Gayle Weinstein and Denise Harvey commented about the fact that the Phase 1 report says that "any reduction could be catastrophic." Is that something the admin really feels? Ken Crow responded that speaking for himself, all options need to be kept on the table. If you could accomplish the educational goal in 3 facilities, then you should look at it. There are budget opportunities that could be had, but it needs to be driven by the educational perspective. Tony Pesco said that all configurations will require spending money. We also need to consider how you phase it, and affordability.

There was discussion about benchmarking space utilization for Weston schools compared to other DRG A schools to understand space per student variances and the drivers of the variances versus other school systems. Utilizing a consultant to do this data gathering and analysis would be necessary and should be incorporated in the potential scope for hiring a consultant.

The consensus of the committee is that we need to hire a consultant.

Agenda for next meeting: narrowing scenarios and who or how we engage.

Rone Baldwin made a motion to adjourn. Ken seconded. Motion carried unanimously.