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Town of Weston, CT

Facilities Optimization Committee

October 20, 2021

Via Zoom

Draft minutes

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Bertasi at 7:30 PM.

**Attendance:** Rick Bertasi, Gayle Weinstein, Steve Ezzes, Rone Baldwin, Denise Harvey, Ken Edgar, Richard Wolf, Superintendent Lisa Wolak, Facilities Director Phillip Cross, Town Administrator Jonathan Luiz, Tecton Architects (Jeff Wyszynski, Justin Hopkins, Antonia Ciaverella, Derek Bride), members of the public

**Approval of minutes:** Ms. Harvey made a motion to approve the minutes from the September 9th meeting. The motion was seconded by Mr. Ezzes. The motion carried.

**Discussion concerning the facilities optimization project:**

Mr. Wyszynski reviewed the attached presentation[are you attaching it?]. He began with an update of work completed and the revised schedule. Completed to date are the conditions and needs assessment, and a first draft of the communications plan with the public. Mr. Ezzes asked to see the communication plan ahead of it being mailed to the public.

Mr. Baldwin asked when, according to the milestone schedule, do estimated costs factor into the options? Mr. Wyszynski said that when the plans are developed around December there will be order of magnitude costs with the options, and costs will be refined and considered throughout the process.

Review of the existing conditions of Weston Intermediate School- The building is in relatively good condition and has been well maintained. After 16 years, there are some minor areas of wear and tear around the building envelope and in laminated services in classrooms.

Review of the existing conditions of Weston Middle School- The original 1961 wing as well the 1971 wing were well constructed. There were additional additions in 1996 and 2010. The exterior condition of the building has been well maintained with recent roof and window replacements. No major flaws were evident in the exterior. In the interior of the building, there have been some recent upgrades such as the learning commons and the Project Lead the Way space. The “new” gym is showing expansion and contraction cracks in the vertical wall joints, as well as humidity concerns in that space. In the older portions of the building, the unit ventilators are at or past the useful life and will require addressing.

Some of the challenges with this building are addressing accessibility, particularly given the fact that portions of the building were built with block walls. The challenge is that it has been built in so many phases that it may be difficult to modify. The building was built without underground plumbing. Injector pumps were placed in cabinetry that have been removed as they failed. Humidity is a major concern throughout the building. Electrical panels and lights are old.

Mr. Ezzes asked about the condition of the pool and of the lockers. Mr. Wyszynski responded that there is a locker replacement program in place, and it is about 50% done. The pool is in good condition. Mr. Ezzes inquired about the conditions of the bathrooms. The response was that the bathrooms in the original wing and the 1971 addition need to be replaced. Accessibility does not meet compliance and the age and condition are fair to poor. Ms. Harvey asked about flooding. Drainage in pool locker rooms and in the pool area are not great. There is visual evidence of flooding and persistent water infiltration.

Mr. Baldwin said this review is high level. The Silver Petrucelli report had many items and he would like to know if Tecton was putting together a report stating whether they agree or disagree with each item in the Silver Petrucelli report. Mr. Baldwin wants that level of granularity. Mr. Wyszynski responded that the charge on existing conditions was not to duplicate that effort. They did walk through and validate, and for the most part,]they are in agreement with Silver Petrucelli. Mr. Bertasi said that the FOC committee had agreed and explicitly kept a duplication of the Silver Petrucelli report out of the scope. We do not want to recreate that work, and we will update cost numbers as we finalize plans. Mr. Baldwin hopes that unidentified gaps or mistakes would be corrected, as he does not want to take the Silver Petrucelli report as verbatim. Mr. Bertasi stated that we will dig in as we look at options, and we will cost budget for those items. Mr. Baldwin said he wants to see a spreadsheet with that level of granularity.

Utilization and Capacity Analysis: Mr. Wyszynski said that we need to understand how the buildings are being utilized in order to determine if we can improve the overall plan efficiency. One of our assumptions will be to utilize the medium enrollment projections which will be updated once the BoE gets updated projections. The State requires future enrollment based on the highest student enrollment in an 8 year window in order to seek reimbursement. Will have another conversation after we get updated numbers.

The existing area is the building gross square feet area. The maximum allowable area (Square feet) by the State for reimbursement is based on grade level and highest enrollment over the 8 year period. It is a set formula. When looking at the delta between our building’s square feet and the maximum allowable area, it is important to identify the causes of the variance and the options that may result from it. Usable area is the assignable space. Our buildings have a higher than typical ratio of gross area to usable area because of the inefficiency of the layouts.

Ms. Harvey asked when the State standards were updated? In a post-COVID environment, how does that factor in the analysis? Mr. Hopkins said that the standards and resulting guideline were updated in 2016, and he does not see any impending changes to that standard. Prior to formalizing any options, we will check and see if the State is planning an update to these standards.

Mr. Bertasi emphasized that the delta is an aggregation of data points. The individual data points are what matter. We will unpick the details behind the numbers.

Mr. Baldwin wanted to know how our utilization compares to that of other DRG A schools. He heard Weston schools have a higher ratio than surrounding communities, and would like to get an answer to that. Mr. Ezzes asked if the square foot per student includes common space. If we back that out and talk about classroom space do the numbers change dramatically? Mr. Bertasi replied that the inefficiency of the circulation is the single biggest contributor to the delta, but not 100%. The maximum allowable area by the State doesn’t mean you can add more space, it just means it may not be reimbursable.

Hurlbutt Elementary School

Summary Comments:

-The useable area ratio is less than typical.

-The majority of classrooms are “right” sized.

-The core spaces are larger than typical and there is some duplication of spaces (cafeterias)

-The evolution of specialized education has led to reuse and adaptation of existing classrooms because they were available rooms, not because they were the perfect size.

Details:

While the majority of the grade classrooms are within or below the State standard for area, 6 are above the State standard. An additional issue is the layout of the building. For example, 2 of the Grade 1 classes are 700 ft away from the rest of Grade 1 which creates operational challenges, and the Grade 2 classrooms are far from the cafeteria. The Media Center is above the square foot State standard by approximately 150%. There are duplicate cafeterias and kitchen space, which contribute to a less than typical usable area ratio. About ½ of the specialized education classrooms are above the standard. This is because those are the spaces that were available. It wouldn’t be designed that way now, but schools are using what rooms were available to deliver these services.

Useable area analysis- The expected gross to net usable area averages between 25-30%. Hurbutt is currently at 40.4%. Given the layout and the causes for the more than typical ratio, it is not easy to take that square footage and create classrooms with that space. Most of this inefficiency is the result of the building being being added to and modified over time.

Mr. Ezzes stated that it is simple to take the square feet and divide it by the number of students but more difficult to understand what accounts for the excess space. Mr. Baldwin asked what goes into non- usable space. He is trying to understand if it is excess space or if it is truly non-usable. Mr. Bertasi responded that that SPED rooms are considered usable. Hallways, teacher prep, storage (each not currently assigned as education space), bathrooms, and boiler rooms are part of the non-usable space.

Ms. Wolak confirmed that space encroachment is happening. There is available space so the staff is using it. The storage room is labeled “storage” because it has physical problems and we cannot put children in that classroom. Unfortunately, choices had to be made based on the condition of the building. Some SPED classrooms need to be large because of OT/PT equipment. Other SPED classrooms, such as ELL are there because there is space. Mr. Bertasi said we need to consider the cost to achieve efficiency to make the space usage more economical so that we balance the efficiency and quality of space with the spending required to achieve it.

Weston Intermediate School

Summary Comments:

-The usable area ratio is less than typical

-The majority of the classrooms are slightly larger (5%) than average.

-Core spaces are slightly larger than typical.

-Dedicated educational space for “specials” and adapted typical classroom for SPED.

Details:

The media center is 198% larger than the standard usable area but we need to keep in mind that the space is used in a variety of different ways. The cafeteria is 49% larger than state standard. The issue with the specialized education classrooms is similar to the issues already discussed for Hurlbutt.

There may be some opportunity to optimize classrooms that are currently dedicated for Specials (Art, Music, Spanish, Science and Health) as you don’t always need a dedicated room.

Usable area analysis - The gross to net usable area is 42.3%. There are 3 classrooms that may be repurposed, but the layout and design contribute to the increase in percent of usable area.

Ms. Weinstein asked for clarification regarding the ability to recapture space other than the 3 identified classrooms. Mr. Wyszynski said that we are not likely going to be able to slice space out of the hallways and awkward spaces to create classrooms.

Mr. Baldwin asked about a scenario where we move students from Hurlbutt into WIS. He would like to reconcile some of our earlier work with the information learned from Tecton. Ms. Weinstein replied that the assumption was an average of 7 classrooms per grade plus an additional classroom or 2 as flex space to account for growth. We planned on recapturing some space such as classrooms currently being used for Spanish and professional development and breaking up large classrooms into smaller ones for specialized education. There are 35 similar classroom spaces. The number of classes we felt we could add came to 28, and therefore assumed we could include 4 grades. We did not share this information with Tecton, as we wanted their information to be unbiased.

Weston Middle School

Summary comments:

-The usable area ratio is less than typical

-The core spaces are larger that typically found and there are some duplicative areas.

-There is uneven distribution of classrooms and size due to building additions and adaptive reuse of space.

-Multiple single loaded circulation paths due to original building/additions relationship

-Limited grade level neighborhood

Detail:

As a result of several additions over time, there are some weird hallways and single loaded corridors. Due to the way the school was added to over time, some classrooms are above the standard and some classrooms are smaller than average. Ms. Weinstein asked at what point does the number of periods of day come into play? Mr. Wyszynski responded that it is not included in this plan, but it will be taken into consideration when they get to the analysis of opportunities.

Ms. Wolak said that when you have a team, you want to keep the team pure. There are 2 periods a day that the classrooms are available but you don’t want to mix grades.

The media center is 194% larger than typical and the cafeteria is 30% larger than typical. There is leftover space on the sides of the cafeteria that isn’t often used. Another issue is the 2 gymnasiums which, taken together, are above standard by 47%, but each of which is below the necessary standard by itself. With regard to the SPED classrooms, the comments are similar to the analysis to HES and the Middle School.

Usable area analysis - The pool and locker rooms were not included as they are shared community space. The gross to net usable area is 40%.

Final comments:

We need to understand how the buildings are utilized to made decisions on the options. It is important to understand our baseline utilization, which is what was presented today.

Mr. Baldwin asked about the scheduled time frame and where in that schedule are we reviewing and discussing options? Are we going to pull together estimated costs? Will it happen in December? Our brainstorming session to discuss community input from our first communication conversation will happen after that meeting in November, and that will be an important meeting to give some direction and guidance. From that point forward when options are presented there will be order of magnitude costs. Mr. Baldwin asked if we are going to consolidate incremental capital costs compared to a baseline and cost avoidance from consolidation. He’d like to know the change in operating costs from a facility maintenance and operating cost perspective. What are the work streams that are going to get at these two items?

Mr. Ezzes commented that, if we were to consolidate, whatever buildings are no longer used for education are not going away and there will be a cost associated with the alternative use. Mr. Bertasi said that in order to get to a decision we need to understand the status quo vs. what we are proposing across all buildings, not just the schools.

Mr. Baldwin asked what is the work-steam to get into the operating expenses and who is going to do the analysis? Ms. Weinstein stated that we need to allow the BOE some time to review these options. We might not have the costs together in January because we need to allow the BOE to have those conversations first. Mr. Baldwin does not want to discuss scenarios without having a sense of school operating assumptions.

Ms. Harvey would like to know what discussions have taken place at BOE to date? How are they planning on moving this process along? Ms. Wolak said that they are not far along, as they are waiting to hear the utilization analysis. The focus was to make sure that Tecton had all informational do this work. She can’t comment further without speaking to Tony Pesco, BOE Chair. She also doesn’t know how this meshes with Town space and can’t prematurely make any decision without understanding the overall scope and plan.

Mr. Bertasi summarized where we are to date:

* We started the process and slowed down due to COVID to understand its impact on the Town and schools.
* We are going to have to update the analysis based on new enrollment data.
* Our process assumes no change to policy on class sizes or educational programming.
* We are largely on track for the schedule.
* Tonight provided a good baseline understanding which compared the total area of our school buildings to State standards which allowed us to understand the variances.
* There is excess circulation space due to design and additions.
* The poor ratio of usable space is largely due to circulation, oversized and sometimes duplicative core spaces, which result in inefficiencies.
* Existing space is used because it is there.
* Some systems will require end of life replacement.
* Program requirements (SPED etc.) will still exist, but there may be a way to optimize how we deliver those service.
* The analysis is not yet complete, it is still a work in progress.

A motion to adjourn was made at 9:18 by Ms. Weinstein and seconded by Ms. Harvey.

Follow Up:

1. Work stream to establish baseline operating costs to compare to operating costs of options.
2. Finalize communications mailer to be sent townwide.