

"East Lyme Public Schools will inspire, engage and educate each student to become a contributing citizen and a responsible, independent, and critical thinker."

**EAST LYME BOARD OF EDUCATION
East Lyme, Connecticut**

**Wednesday, November 18, 2015
East Lyme Middle School Cafeteria**

**ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS FACILITIES COMMUNITY FORUM
SPECIAL MEETING NOTES (No Quorum)**

Board Members Present: Tim Hagen (Chair), Al Littlefield (Secretary), Jill Carini, Barbara Senges, Jaime Barr Shelburn

Board Members Absent: Joseph Arcarese, Candice Carlson, Rob Kupis, Marlene Nickerson, Pamela Rowe

Administrators Present: Jeffrey Newton (Superintendent), Donna Gittleman (Interim Assistant Superintendent for Special Education and Pupil Personnel), Maria Whalen (Director of Business and Facilities), Linda Anania (Flanders Principal), Melissa DeLoreto (Niantic Center Principal), Dr. David Miko (Lillie B. Haynes Principal), Pat Lannon (Technology Director)

Architect Present: Al Jacunski, Jacunski and Humes, LLC

- I. **Opening** – The community forum began at 6:00 p.m.
- II. **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE** – Led by Chair Tim Hagen
- III. **INTRODUCTION AND PRESENTATION**

BOE Chair Dr. Tim Hagen thanked everyone for attending the Elementary Schools Facilities Community Forum. Dr. Hagen thanked the 2012 Vision Task Force Committee and the Elementary Schools Facilities Design Committee for all their hard work and dedication. Dr. Hagen thanked middle school student, Jack Derry, for taping the community forum and high school students Maura Donnelly, Emily Scott and Jasmine Perez for providing child care services during the community forum.

Superintendent of Schools Jeffrey Newton thanked the community for attending the first in series of community forms regarding the elementary schools project. Mr. Newton gave a presentation on the Board of Education's adopted recommendation to build a new Flanders School and to renovate as new Niantic Center School. The presentation highlighted the following:

- The rationale for the elementary school building projects, the BOE adopted proposal, the logistics and timing of the projects, and the projected estimated costs
- The East Lyme Public Schools Mission Statement, excellence of education, DRG ranking, and test scores
- Information on the previous high school and middle school building projects and their costs
- An estimated \$22 million needed to repair and maintain our aging elementary school buildings
- Declining K-4 enrollment
- The factors and attributes for the two school BOE adopted recommendation
- Rational and building specifics for renovating Niantic Center School as new
- Rational and building specifics for a building a new Flanders School
- Definitions of the State of Connecticut's reimbursement rates

- Budget cost estimates for Niantic Center and Flanders Schools
- Operating cost savings and potential expenses
- Logistics, timing and next steps of building projects

IV. **PUBLIC COMMENT AND QUESTIONS**

1. Lisa Picarazzi, 14 Oak Hill Drive, Niantic, (EL Board of Finance Member) questioned the State of Connecticut's reimbursement percentage of 43.21% on the total estimated cost. Ms. Picarazzi (1) asked for the expense to date for the study and plans from the architect, (2) what the cost of a one school project would be, (3) and how many parking spaces will be available at Niantic Center and Flanders School. Ms. Picarazzi expressed concern about a two school project with declining enrollment. **Response:** Al Jacunski clarified that the state reimbursement is based on the eligible space standards of 120 sq. ft. per student which calculates to 43.21% of the eligible square footage allowance; that the expense to complete the feasible study and site plans is \$52,000.00; there will be 80% more parking places than what the schools currently have available; and that the NESDEC projected enrollment report indicates that there will be a 50 student decline through 2018 and then the decline in enrollment levels out.
2. Wayne Fraser, 22 Gurley Rd., East Lyme, (former East Lyme First Selectman) commented that during the middle school construction project, they made sure the new debt fit into the Towns debt and that the middle school project passed by only 16 votes. Mr. Fraser reminded the Board that the recommendation of the Vision Task Force Committee was to maintain a two campus setting at the ELHS/FL location and the ELMS/LBH location. He supports an elementary school facilities project, but not one using the Niantic Center School instead of Lillie B. Haynes School. Even though the town cannot afford a tax increase, he realizes the need for new elementary schools.
3. Dan Glynn, 103 Flanders Rd., Niantic, thanked the efforts of the Board of Education and Design Committee. Mr. Glynn distributed a handout indicating why he feels the BOE adopted recommendation is misguided and too expensive for the town. He questioned why additional square footage is being recommended when the enrollment is declining and why we are considering such an extensive project when the 2011 architectural report indicated that the schools needed minimal repairs and that the buildings were sound. Mr. Glynn stated that the Vision Task Force recommended closing Niantic Center School and renovating as new Flanders and Lillie B. Haynes School. He expressed concern that it is less expensive to remodel than build new projects and that the tax payer ultimately pays for subsidies used for state reimbursement. **Response:** Dr. Tim Hagen clarified that the Vision Task Force Committee did a great job in completing their task which was to generate thoughts and possible designs, a professional architectural firm was then hired to guide the Board of Education with options and the Elementary Facilities Design Committee was chartered to review all options and give their recommendations to the Board of Education.
4. Kyle Douton, 5 Rockwell St., Niantic, noted that taxes are important to the community as well as our children and teachers. He expressed concern that (1) the two campus plan was consistently moving forward as the best option for East Lyme until there was a recent change; (2) the town will still have the cost of any upgrades associated with Lillie B. Haynes building if it is returned to them; (3) is concerned with parking at the Niantic Center School location during large school events; (4) and is concerned with the traffic on East Pattagansett Rd. and West Main St. **Response:** Dr. Tim Hagen informed the public that First Selectman Mark Nickerson and the Town offices will address their proposed future uses of the Lillie B. Haynes building and that the elementary schools project is working in conjunction with the Town's future needs.
5. Community Resident: Questioned if geothermal heating is being considered and if it is included in the cost estimates. He expressed concern that not enough emphasis is placed on reutilizing what we currently have and that people will not be able to afford to live in East Lyme due to higher taxes. **Response:** Mr. Al Jacunski confirmed that geothermal heating and cooling is currently included in the projected cost estimates.

6. Joel Farrior, 33 Corey Lane, Niantic, questioned the number of elementary students. Mr. Farrior expressed concern about traffic issues and the safety of students at Niantic Center School since it is a distance away from the other schools. Mr. Farrior commented that there will be a logistical problem for parents when they need to pick up a student at NCS and ELMS or ELHS at the same time. Mr. Farrior feels that renovating all three elementary schools should still be considered. **Response:** Mr. Jacunski reported that there are 856 students including pre-kindergarten. Mr. Newton noted that we only received nine students from the new Gateway Commons which has 300 units.
7. Maia Vargas, 18 Pontiac Dr., Niantic, commented that the projected enrollment numbers increase and decrease in a 15 year cycle and that she is in favor of keeping three elementary schools.
8. Dr. John Whritner, 4 Blueberry Lane, East Lyme, (former East Lyme Superintendent of Schools and current Elementary Schools Design Committee Member) commented that when he first became a member of the Elementary Design Committee, he was in favor of the two school option including Flanders and Lillie B. Haynes, but after working with the committee and the architect, he fully supports the two school option of Flanders and Niantic Center School. As a Superintendent of Schools for East Lyme, as well as in Michigan and Greenwich, CT, he knows that East Lyme students are receiving a comparable education as in other wealthy communities. Dr. Whritner acknowledged that there are numerous opinions and ideas, but the Board of Education has always valued community input which has helped them make thoughtful decisions.
9. Carol Glynn, 103 Flanders Rd., Niantic, likes the aspect of the two school campus approach because Lillie B. Haynes students are able to access the public library and can interact with the middle school.
10. Greg Lutzen, 19 White Birch Circle, Niantic, (former LBH Head Custodian) prefers the two school campus option also. Mr. Lutzen stated that as Head Custodian for Lillie B. Haynes Schools he was not consulted on the issues of the building. Mr. Lutzen is concerned that a March referendum will be inconvenient for taxpayers who do not live in town for the winter months.
11. Dawn Rhodes, 26 North Rd., Niantic, commented that as a military family, they decided to stay in East Lyme because of the schools. She is in favor of renovating as new Niantic Center School because the location has a lot to offer students.
12. Alicia Brothers, 149 Roxbury Rd., Niantic, reported that as a former member of the Vision Task Force Committee and former President of Creative Playschool, she is in favor of keeping all three schools. The students need to be considered first with a focus on the whole child. As a parent, she has never felt that the students were unsafe at Niantic Center School. What are the plans for Creative Playschool?
13. Bill Derry, 212 Pennsylvania Ave, Niantic, commented that he originally supported keeping all three elementary schools, but after coming to the community forums and seeing other school districts consolidating their elementary schools, he realizes that East Lyme cannot support three elementary schools. Our current elementary schools are an embarrassment to our community. He feels that there are benefits of the two school campus option keeping Lillie B. Haynes instead of Niantic School, but that he endorses the Board of Education's adopted recommendation of a new Flanders School and a renovate as new Niantic Center School. Mr. Derry thanked the Design Committee for their hard work and informed those present that he has heard many different vision plans and ideas by attending meetings.

14. Suzanne Smith, 35 Seacrest Ave., Niantic, asked if the Board of Education has considered including preschool classes. **Response:** Mr. Newton stated that this option was discussed by the Elementary Schools Design Committee, but was not included in the current project because the State of Connecticut has not mandated preschool at this time. If the State of Connecticut mandates preschool in the future, the current building designs have room to add additional classrooms.
15. Karen Delesdernier, 254 Giants Neck Rd., Niantic, asked that the committee consider the tax burden on families. Due to the property reassessment, she was forced to relocate. Ms. Delesdernier commented that the Niantic Center School location is a prime building lot and should be sold and that the traffic at Niantic Center School is a concern.
16. Community Resident: As a new resident to East Lyme he would like information on the design process. **Response:** Dr. Hagen directed him to the East Lyme Public Schools website for detailed information.
17. Andy Jolly-Ballantine, 8 Greycliff Dr., Niantic, feels that community space surrounding the elementary schools are an important aspect and should be considered in the decision making process. Both Flanders and Lillie B. Haynes Schools have outdoor resources that are beneficial. LEARN and Creative Playschool are both great educational opportunities for students at Lillie B. Haynes. Parking will continue to be an issue at Niantic Center School when there are entire school events.
18. Liz Dumond, 10 Acorn Dr., Niantic stated that as an educator in Montville, she has gone through a school construction project and knows how disruptive it can be. Ms. Dumond agrees with the two school option, but disagrees with Niantic Center School being recommended instead of Lillie B. Haynes. She feels that the impact of moving the Niantic Center students to Lillie B. Haynes during construction is more than a “minimal” impact. **Response:** Mr. Newton stated that the plan to renovate Niantic Center instead of Lillie B. Haynes is the least disruptive for students. If Lillie B. Haynes is returned to the town, some of the possible usages for the building could include: parks & recreation, senior center, police station, and Town Hall offices. There may be room for another field if a portion of the building is demolished.
19. Community Resident, Monastery Rd., East Lyme, questioned how many people would be impacted by the loss of Creative Playschool and does not understand why the number of preschool classes are being reduced from five to three classrooms according to the building plans. **Response:** Mr. Newton reported that the preschool classes will be housed at Flanders School and that additional information on our preschool program will be discussed during the December Community Forum.
20. Suzanne White, 20 Nathan Hale Dr., East Lyme, asked if Lillie B. Haynes currently has a bond and, if so, when will it be paid? Ms. White would like clarification on why a portion of Lillie B. Haynes would be demolished if that site was chosen. **Response:** Dr. Hagen reported that there is a small bond outstanding on Lillie B. Haynes and the exact amount will be provided at the December community forum.
21. Lawry O’Connell, 81 E. Pattagansett Rd., Niantic, expressed concern that the decision to renovate Niantic Center School instead of Lillie B. Haynes changed suddenly and would like clarification as to why this change occurred. One of the selling points for adopting the new middle school in the late 90’s was maintaining two campuses when the need to renovate the elementary schools occurred in the future. The intersection at Niantic Center School is a concern and further traffic research is needed. Ms. O’Connell feels that the community needs to know the Town’s plans for the Lillie B. Haynes building before the elementary school project can go to a referendum.

22. Kathryn Parulis, 22 Billow Rd., Niantic, asked if renovating three elementary schools was off the table for discussion and would redistricting the elementary schools help. **Response:** Dr. Hagen reported that the three school option and the one school option were both considered multiple times but found not to be the best educational option for our students or the best long-term solution for our aging buildings. First Selectman Mark Nickerson will be invited to attend the December Form to respond to questions regarding the usage of the Lillie B. Haynes Building.
23. Carol Glynn, 103 Flanders Rd., Niantic stated that if enrollment is declining, and taxes are too high, community members will relocate out of East Lyme.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

The community forum adjourned at 8:15 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Albert Littlefield
Secretary
East Lyme Board of Education