

East Lyme Board of Education
East Lyme Elementary Schools Design Steering Committee Meeting
December 14, 2015
4:00 p.m.

MINUTES

Members Present: Dr. Tim Hagen, Mr. Jeffrey Newton, Linda Anania, John Arnold, Eric Bauman, Melissa DeLoreto, Gil Gallant, Linda Johansen, Dr. David Miko, Ray O'Connor, John Rhodes, Dr. John Whritner, Al Jacunski from Jacunski Humes Architects, LLC

Members Absent: Candice Carlson, Marc Salerno, Maria Whalen

Guests Presents: First Selectman Mark Nickerson, Ken Biega (O & G Construction), William Derry (BOE Member), Barbara Senges (BOE Member), and Dr. James Lombardo

The meeting began at 4:00 p.m.

Discussion of Projected Tax and Mil Rate Increases

Mr. Jeffrey Newton distributed the following materials from the Town Finance Department for the Elementary Design Steering Committee to review before being presented to the Board of Education at their 6:00 p.m. meeting:

- Town of East Lyme Analysis of Mil Rate Impact Report
- Existing and Proposed Debt Service Report 2015-2016 the Town of East Lyme
- Existing and Proposed Debt Service Report for the School Facilities Project
- Existing and Proposed Debt Service Report for 2015-2016 CIP and School Facilities Project

The projected 2.46 mil rate increase is based on the school facilities project only and does not include the Town's yearly mil increase. Discussion followed:

- First Selectman Mark Nickerson stated that the Town needs to make an investment in our elementary schools, and that even though there will be an additional financial impact to repurpose Lillie B. Haynes School, that discussion should not drive the discussion and decision regarding the elementary school facilities project.
- Tim Hagen proposed that a meeting with the Board of Finance be held to outline the rationale of the Board of Education's adopted school facility proposal along the history of the past Vision Committee and the current Elementary Design Steering Committee leading up to the current proposal.
- Barbara Senges asked how the upcoming property assessment will impact the projected mil rate increase. Mark Nickerson responded that the upcoming property assessment is a statistical assessment only that is completed every five years and will have a minimal impact. After any assessment, the Town makes adjustments so property taxes remain approximately the same.
- Bill Derry questioned why the November community forum was held before the Design Committee received the tax and mil rate information. Tim Hagen responded that the November community forum was designed to give the public general information only and that the second forum will focus on the financial information.
- Eric Bauman suggested that before the next community forum, discussions between the Board of Education, Board of Selectman and Board of Finance take place and that the community be informed of the Town's CIP for the next six years. Mark Nickerson responded that we cannot promise the community now how Lillie B. Haynes will be repurposed in five years. The community will vote at a referendum when the time comes to make that decision.
- Jill Carini asked if the Town has formulated any plans for how they may possibly use the Lillie B. Haynes building. Mark Nickerson responded that the BOF has not yet approved the expenditure

to hire an architect firm, but the building could be used for Town Hall office space, Park & Recreation, Youth Services, Creative Playschool, Senior Center, and LEARN. The building is large and a portion of the building would be demolished. The Existing and Proposed Debt Service Report does include other town capital expenses including \$7 million for a new police station, \$4 million for the Niantic Fire Station, \$6 million for the public library extension and \$5 million for new athletic fields for a total of \$22 million. If the Town's debt ratio doubles, our bond rating will be affected.

- John Arnold distributed a report indicating that if Niantic Center School and Flanders School are not completed simultaneously, it will cost the Town an additional \$9 million due to decreased State reimbursement and escalating constructions costs.
- Tim Hagen and Jeff Newton will share with the Design Committee a draft letter to the BOS and BOF outlining the rationale of moving forward with the BOE's adopted proposal.
- Barbara Senges commented that community members who are already vested in the school project expect a tax increase and asked how much larger the projected mil rate increase is than what was expected. Dr. Whritner replied that a 1 to 1.5 mil rate increase was expected.
- Linda Johansen commented that the taxpayers do not understand the costs associated with the school project and does not have the passion needed for a referendum vote. John Rhodes replied that it is normal for taxpayers to become engaged only when actual costs and mil rate increases are discussed. Eric Bauman suggested that we highlight what expenses the Town will still need to incur if we do not proceed with the school project and what our plans are for the current three elementary schools if the project is stalled. Mark Nickerson estimated that currently 75% of the taxpayers do not see a reason to be vested in the school project and that this is the population we need to reach.
- Mark Nickerson suggested that the Design Committee meet with the BOF before meeting with the BOS due to the limited amount of time remaining before the March referendum.
- Al Jacunski suggested contacting our State Representative to request a Space Standards Waiver in order to receive more reimbursement from the State.
- Barbara Senges commented that the BOF should be informed that as a result of the numerous community forums held last year, parents and educators overwhelming rejected a one school option. Al Jacunski stated there is only a \$5 million difference between one school (\$61 million) and two schools (\$66 million).

Public Comment

- Dr. Lombardo commented that even though the Existing and Proposed Debt Service graphs look very dramatic, the impact is actually less because the general fund will realize \$1 million in savings per year over 20 years, and that failure to proceed with the proposed school project will result in huge costs to the Town to maintain old buildings.

Next Steps

- Meetings in January with the Board of Finance and Board of Selectman

Respectfully Submitted,

Dr. Timothy Hagen
Timothy Hagen, Ph.D.
Steering Committee Chair

Mr. Jeffrey Newton
Mr. Jeffrey R. Newton
Superintendent of Schools