

East Lyme Public Schools
Facilities Vision Task Force
Findings Report to EL Board of Education
4/23/13

Background: In 2010 the East Lyme Board of Education commissioned a feasibility study by Kaestle Boos Associates, Inc. to assess the physical condition of the East Lyme Public School buildings and properties. Following a rigorous process, Kaestle Boos Associates, Inc. submitted a Feasibility Study report to the Board of Education in 2011 that identified and prioritized the deficiencies and long-term health of these structures. Findings determined that the structures in greatest need of renovation and upgrade were the three elementary schools.

Following discussion of this report, the East Lyme Board of Education voted to create a Facilities Vision Task Force with the following charge:

The ELPS Facilities Vision Committee is charged with developing and presenting to the Board of Education a vision and a plan to address the identified facilities needs of the District. The plan should include the following: long term goal for capital projects over the next five (5) years; timeline for completing identified projects to address needs; estimated costs of the selected direction and plan; clearly articulated rationale for the identified solution, including educational benefits, impact on annual general fund budget, maintenance benefits, and impact on students and families. While the vision should consider other District needs, the focus of the committee should be on the needs of the elementary schools.

The committee was comprised of 33 members that included teachers, administrators, parents, community members-at-large, and representatives from the Board of Education. The Task Force completed its work on April 9, 2013. The report and recommendations of the committee are included herein.

Committee Membership:

See attached list

Committee Process:

The Task Force met 11 times over an eighteen (18) month period, beginning on October 2011 through April 2013. The Superintendent of Schools, Dr. James Lombardo, facilitated the process. The architectural firm of Kaestle Boos Associates, Inc. provided ongoing assistance to the Task Force, and Mr. Ken Biega of O&G Industries, Inc. provided construction estimates for the various options considered. Both consulting firms provided their services without cost to the district.

Throughout the planning period, the Task Force undertook the following activities:

1. Heard a detailed summary of the ELPS Facilities Feasibility Study from Kaestle Boos Associates, Inc. (Appendix A)
2. Reviewed the adopted East Lyme Public Schools Mission, Core Beliefs and Long Range Plan (Appendix B)
3. Identified the preferred design elements to include in any renovation or construction project (Appendix C)
4. Reviewed design features of several 21st century schools
5. Considered six (6) possible design solutions to address the facilities deficiencies of the three elementary schools. Following several discussions, the Task Force reduced this initial list to three (3) solutions that were considered most viable, based on cost, effect on the general fund, educational benefit, community use, and future potential.
6. Identified the pros and cons of each of the three options, based on discussions with parents, teachers, students, and community members-at-large, and memorialized these factors into a detailed spreadsheet of data (Appendix D)
7. Conducted a parent/community forum to share the three options and to secure community feedback regarding the options (Appendix E)
8. Created and administered a survey instrument to generate student ideas for addressing school facility needs (Appendix F)
9. Conducted a focused forum of all elementary school teachers in order to elicit their ideas regarding the three options under consideration (Appendix G)
10. Met with the Town 20-20 planning committee to share information regarding our respective discussions
11. Met with the Town 20-20 Committee architects, Natalie and Peter Miniutti, to determine the feasibility of locating a single school complex on an existing town property
12. Developed a recommended list of “directions” for Board of Education consideration

Committee Conclusions and Recommendations:

After thoughtful deliberation, the Task Force recommends that the Board of Education consider, in order of preference, the following options for further study and consideration:

Option #1: Discontinue the use of Niantic Center School for elementary school purposes and renovate as new both Flanders and Haynes elementary schools.

This option received the strongest show of support from the committee, with 21 of 22 members ranking it either first (13) or second (8). While individuals may have focused on different reasons for their vote, the positive features of this choice include the following:

- A renovated Haynes and Flanders can accommodate foreseeable future population needs of East Lyme Public Schools.

- This option allows for continuation of all current East Lyme educational programs, as well as full-day kindergarten and pre-school.
- The net cost to taxpayers is the least of the three options at an estimated **\$34 million**, after state reimbursement of 42.5%.
- The general fund savings of this option is estimated at \$550,000 per year due to some reduction in maintenance costs and staffing needs, as well as reduced utility and heating costs. The 20-year savings of approximately \$11 million will offset nearly one-third of the cost of the bond.
- A two-school option allows for better balanced class sizes and more equitable distribution of resources. Currently, Niantic Center School has 20% of the district elementary students, but utilizes 30% of the available resources. The cost per pupil at NCS is \$10,000, compared to \$7500 in Flanders and Haynes.
- As with the other options, a “renovated as new” school structure allows for better and more effective utilization of space for teaching, learning and recreation.
- Under this option, *most* of the design priorities recommended by the Task Force will be realized.

The disadvantages of this option over the others are as follows:

- This option eliminates one usable gym for community recreation if decisions about the future of the Niantic Center School property do not include using the third gym for community recreation.
- This option creates a larger elementary school on the Haynes site, eliminating the “small school feel” of Niantic Center and the intrinsic benefits of that smallness.
- The choice may mean a longer bus ride for some elementary students.
- Design options are limited to the existing schools’ footprints.

Considerations with the option:

The school district and town will have to consider several factors with this option:

The Future Use of Niantic Center School:

Short term, the East Lyme Public Schools could make good use of the NCS space. The two-year old Coastal Connections program, for example, could move into and grow at this site. Moving would save the district nearly \$20,000 per year in rental costs. The program supports 24 students at present, but could easily expand to accommodate 50 – 75 students on the second floor of NCS. We already know that the program has garnered interest in the area, and now supports two tuition paying students. There is much potential for offsetting revenues in this program.

The LEARN program, currently housed in 11 classrooms at LB Haynes Elementary School, would need relocation under this option; these LEARN classes could easily occupy the first floor at NCS, thereby, continuing the lease arrangement with the Town of East Lyme that brings in about \$60,000 per year.

The Town of East Lyme could use NCS as a future town office space or police station. Of course, these uses would require some renovation and upgrading. What is not included in the estimates is the cost of

demolition of the NCS building should the Town opt to keep the property, but demolish the actual building. That cost is estimated at \$1.0 million.

Finally, the Town could choose to sell or lease the property for commercial or business use, thereby generating revenue for the Town.

Town Recreation and Other Use:

At present, the Town Recreation program utilizes all three elementary school gyms for community basketball and other activities. The Town would either need to keep the third gym for future recreation use or choose to readjust its program to two gyms. Of course, a third gym could be built adjacent to Flanders or Haynes.

Option #2: Discontinue the use of all three elementary schools, and build a new “elementary school complex” on either the Haynes or Flanders site.

This option was ranked first (6) or second (10) by 16 of the 22 Task Force members. The Town of East Lyme has already explored the viability of this option and has expressed strong support for the Haynes site for future school use. It is important to note that the Task Force is not recommending a 900-student school building, but instead is recommending an elementary complex on a single site. As an example, the complex could include a primary grades K-2 “wing” or “pod” connected to an upper elementary (grades 3-4) “pod” by common services, such as cafeteria space, libraries, gymnasium, and administrative services.

In selecting this option, members identified various advantages to this “direction”:

- As new construction, the structure could be designed to meet *all* of the preferred design features identified by the Task Force and would not be restricted by the existing footprint of Flanders and Haynes in Option #1. Building features could be designed to create the most effective use of natural light, classroom groupings, efficient use of common spaces (cafeteria, multi-purpose room, library, etc.)
- While the net cost to the taxpayers is slightly higher than option #1 at \$36 million, the greater savings in general fund expenses each year (\$1.3 million) nearly covers the extra cost in one fiscal year. In fact, the general fund savings over the 20 year life of the bond will cover more than 60% of the cost.
- If selected, the Haynes property is centrally located, and allows for multi-generational support, given the proximity of the Senior Center and Middle School.
- This option allows for the most efficient use of staff and the most equitable use of district resources.
- This option allows for balancing all classes and eliminates the current variance in class sizes among schools.
- This option accommodates all current and future educational programs, including full-day kindergarten and future pre-school programs.

The disadvantages of this option include the following:

- State reimbursement is at a lower level (32.5%), compared to the reimbursement for option #1 at 42.5%.
- Unless additional gym space is included in this new construction, the Town may lose some recreational space choices.
- Limited research on school size suggests some educational advantage for smaller schools. Therefore, selecting this option will require establishing smaller “schools within a school” to maximize educational programming effectiveness. As a result, the Task Force recommends this as a multi-unit “complex” and not a single unit building.

Considerations with the option:

The school district and town will have to consider several factors with this option:

The Future Use of the Three Elementary School Buildings:

Short term, the East Lyme Public Schools could make good use of the NCS space. The two-year old Coastal Connections program, for example, could move into and grow at this site. Moving would save the district nearly \$20,000 per year in rental costs. The program supports 24 students at present, but could easily expand to accommodate 50 – 75 students on the second floor of NCS. We already know that the program has garnered interest in the area, and now supports two tuition paying students. There is much potential for offsetting revenues in this program.

The LEARN program, currently housed in 11 classrooms at LB Haynes Elementary School, would need relocation under this option; these LEARN classes could easily occupy the first floor at NCS, thereby, continuing the lease arrangement with the Town of East Lyme that brings in about \$60,000 per year.

The Town of East Lyme could use NCS as a future town office space or police station. Depending on the site of the new school, the Town could also choose to maintain either Flanders or Haynes for some other office, recreational, or storage use. Of course, these uses would require some renovation and upgrading. What is not included in the estimates is the cost of demolition of these buildings should the Town opt to keep the property, but demolish the actual building. That cost is estimated at \$1.28 million for Niantic Center, 1.62 million for Flanders, and 1.56 million for Haynes.

Finally, the Town could choose to sell or lease any of the properties for commercial or business use, thereby generating revenue for the Town.

Town Recreation and Other Use:

At present, the Town Recreation program utilizes all three elementary school gyms for community basketball and other activities. The Town would either need to keep some of the existing gym space for future recreation use or choose to readjust its program to the new school gymnasium site.

A third option? The remaining option that the Task Force considered was renovating all three current facilities as new. While 15 of the 22 Task Force members ranked this option third, the Task Force felt that the Board and community should be aware that we carefully considered this option in our deliberations.

Several advantages were cited in researching this choice:

- The option preserves the “neighborhood school” feel of smaller school populations.
- This choice maintains separate school cultures, a variance that some members also cited as a disadvantage.
- Limited educational research on elementary school size suggests some advantage for smaller schools.
- This option maintains the intimate school setting and in-town advantage now enjoyed by Niantic Center School.
- This three school option retains multiple gymnasiums and space for community use.
- This option provides flexibility in terms of ensuring adequate classrooms in the event that the district grows in student population.

Significant disadvantages were cited in a review of this option:

- Renovating all three schools was the most expensive choice at a net cost to taxpayers of \$49.3 million. While the renovation would result in some general fund savings each year (\$100,000), the 20-year savings will only cover 4% of the bond costs.
- Much of the increased cost of this choice is due to the fact that the state of CT will only reimburse the square footage that our 8-year population projections justify; therefore, a significant portion of the renovation cost will not generate state reimbursement.
- This option maintains the inequitable allocation of resources among schools.
- This choice maintains inequitable class sizes among schools.
- This option retains inefficient use of staff since three schools require many full-time staff members that could be reduced in a one or two school option (i.e.; nursing, librarians, custodial services, office staff, etc.)
- This option limits sharing opportunities among staff.
- This choice eliminates availability of buildings like NCS for Town use or sale and generation of property taxes.

Recommendations to the Board of Education for Next Steps:

1. Make a choice in a timely fashion. Certainly the Board of Education needs to process the Task Force’s recommendations with the public, but the Board must recognize that the longer we discuss the options, the greater the likelihood of costly repairs that will garner no state

reimbursement. The Board should consider discussions at BOE meetings and in one or two public forums to garner public opinions about the first and second options. This input can set the stage for the BOE to make a timely decision regarding the direction to pursue.

2. Budget funds to secure necessary architectural services to develop educational specifications and design the actual schematics to fulfill all the specifications. We estimate a cost of \$25,000 to fulfill this step.
3. Take the necessary steps to secure a positive referendum vote on the project.

ELPS Facilities Vision Task Force
Committee Membership

Teachers

Gil Gallant	ELTA President/Elementary Teacher
Stephanie Paulsen	HA Library Media Specialist
Lori Skelton	HA Preschool Teacher
Diane Swan	NC Teacher and Parent

Administrators

Linda Anania	FL Principal
Dr. Karen Costello	Administrator for Program Improvement
Melissa DeLoreto	NCS Principal
Dr. James Lombardo	Superintendent
Robyn McKenney	District Technology Director
Don Meltabarger	Finance and Facilities Director
Dr. David Miko	HA Principal
Brian Reas	Assistant Superintendent for Special Services and Pupil Personnel

Board of Education Members

Jaime Barr Shelburn	and Parent
Beth Groeber	Former BOE Member
Al Littlefield	and Parent

Parents

Alicia Brothers	Creative Playschool President
Kevin Brouillard	MS
Tina Carrico	
Michelle Dean	FL and MS
Maureen Higgins	NC PTA President
Sonja Mazzulli	HA PTA President
Melpomeni Mustakis	MS PTA President
Genevieve Pasutto	FL PTA President
Dinis Pimentel	and Salem BOE Member
Tania Ranelli	HA

Community Members

Joe Mingo	
Natalie Miniutti	and UCONN Adj. Prof. Architecture
Peter Miniutti	and UCONN Adj. Prof.
Robert Pierce	and Former BOE Member
John Rhodes	and Old Lyme Director of Facilities
Madeline Schad	and UCONN Graduate Student
Gene Schultz	and Retired ELPS Teacher
Bob Sullivan	
Margaret Tobin	

Others

Ken Biega	O&G Industries
Ben Monroe	KBA Architect
Brian Solywoda	KBA Architect