

Milford Board of Education

Board meeting held at City Hall
Meeting Minutes
March 24, 2014

Board members present:

Tracy Casey
Michael DeGrego
John DeRosa
Suzanne DiBiase
Laura Fucci
Susan Glennon, Chair
Anthony Piselli
Christopher Saley
Earl Whiskeyman

Administration present:

Dr. Elizabeth Feser
Michael Cummings
James Richetelli
Susan Kelleher

Board members absent:

Dr. Heidi Gold-Dworkin

I. CALL TO ORDER

Ms. Glennon called the Committee of the Whole meeting to order at 7:03 p.m. with the reciting of the Pledge of Allegiance. She then announced that Dr. Heidi Gold-Dworkin was ill and would not be in attendance.

II. RECOMMENDATION BY THE LONG RANGE PLANNING COMMITTEE

Ms. Glennon began the meeting by providing a brief history relating to the formation and charge of the Long Range Planning Committee. Ms. Glennon turned the meeting over to Mrs. Alberta Jagoe, Long Range Planning Committee Chairwoman.

Mrs. Jagoe explained the course that was taken to ensure a recommendation that would best fit Milford. The process included planning criteria, ideas, analysis and recommendations, both short term and long term. She noted the Committee included members from the Board of Education, Board of Aldermen, Central Office administration, principals, parents, teachers and the consultant team. She then indicated 4 committee members would make the presentation and called up Mr. Michael McCabe, who provided an overview of the work that was accomplished by the Committee during the past 11 months: data collection, facilities analysis, enrollment (historical to projected), staff interviews and demographic data. The Committee carefully developed criteria, and then spent five months analyzing the data and compared it to state, regional and national trends. The Committee sought input from the community by holding a public forum as well as conducting a survey. Mr. McCabe turned the meeting over to Mrs. Jennifer O'Connell.

Mrs. O'Connell navigated through the development of the alternatives. Factors that were key to the process were: the charge of the committee, input received from teacher/administrator focus groups, building conditions, criteria, enrollment projections and education programs. Mrs. O'Connell then reviewed the many alternatives that were examined. She then turned the meeting over to Mr. Al Corsi.

Approved

Mr. Corsi explained how the Committee reviewed the input received from the community – both from the public forum and the online survey. It was evident that fewer transitions were viewed as the priority. Eighty one percent of the survey respondents prefer the K-5 structure for the elementary schools. He further said the community was split about school consolidation. The long term plan would include a themed school within a school at the high schools. A themed school could also be offered at Harborside. However a cost analysis would need to be done. He then turned the meeting over to Mrs. Erica Wikstrom.

Mrs. Wikstrom explained many options were taken into consideration prior to the Committee's ultimate recommendation, which would include a short term alternative that will lead into a long term alternative. The recommended short term plan would be a PK-5 elementary structure that would be implemented no sooner than the 2015-16 year with six or-seven elementary schools, redistricted to provide school and class size balance. Additional programs could be added. Pre-K would be decentralized into two or three elementary schools. The long term plan could also include a K-8 theme school which is suggested to be housed at Harborside. She further explained if the Board of Education chose this option the school would need to be retrofitted to meet the needs of the younger students. She then reported the Committee looked at the option of building a new high school. However, the consensus was to maintain the two existing facilities and implement a "school within a school" concept that would allow for a program, i.e. STEM to be run inside of a high school and students from either school could attend. A lottery would occur if the interest exceeded the enrollment capacity.

Mrs. Jagoe offered closing remarks. She then thanked the members of the Committee and Milone and MacBroom.

Ms. Glennon moved to Board Questions.

III. BOARD QUESTIONS

Mrs. Casey asked if the Committee looked at the trends across the state. Mrs. Wikstrom confirmed that they had. Mrs. Casey asked how they narrowed it down to two options. Mrs. Wikstrom explained the group conducted a SWOT (Strength, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats) analysis. That analysis will be provided to the Board.

Mrs. Casey asked how the numbers were reached for children being redistricted. Mr. Zuba, consultant from Milone and MacBroom explained they used the 2013-14 current enrollment and worked with the projected numbers going through 2018-19. Mrs. Casey wanted confirmation that no teachers would have to use carts. Classroom parity and natural boundaries were used as the primary factors.

Mrs. Casey then confirmed the survey was sent to the community and 55% of the respondents were parents of current students.

Mrs. Casey asked that the footnoted data related to the Milford 8th graders outperforming most 8th graders in K-8 schools be provided to the Board.

Mrs. Casey also asked for the data that represents the enrollment numbers based on having six K-5 schools opposed to seven.

Approved

Mr. DeRosa asked when, in the process, was the education configuration or needs used as part of the discussion. Mr. Zuba explained the education configuration trends were reviewed across the region. Following that process, the Committee analyzed the comments made at the Public Forum. The Committee felt strongly about the K-5 configuration. They wanted to cement the K-5 piece first, and then look at further programming options.

Mr. DeRosa asked that the Board be provided with alternatives being proposed in other districts. Mr. Zuba explained that information is in the February presentation.

Mr. DeRosa then requested the Existing Conditions PowerPoint that was presented to the Board at the October 15, 2013 meeting.

Mr. DeRosa asked for the number of survey respondents preferred the K-8 option.

Mr. DeRosa then asked why the Committee recommends to wait to do the reconfiguration for one year. Mr. Zuba stated the delay would give the district the opportunity the amount of time to close a school, if needed, and redistrict students accordingly. It would also give the Board adequate time to explore the K-8 themed school option.

Mr. DeRosa thanked the Committee for their recommendations. He stated that he wants it done right for the community.

Mrs. Fucci asked the Committee to elaborate on the work of the focus groups. Mr. Zuba told her the work was captured in notes and it would be provided to the Board.

Mrs. Fucci asked why West Shore would have the most amount of students if it is indeed the smallest middle school. Mr. Zuba explained the feeder schools were impacting the enrollment base.

Mr. Saley questioned the need for more programs since the district has lost approximately 840 students. Mr. Zuba explained the Board would have the potential to add new programs to retain students. Redistricting alone is not the only solution. There will be a shift of students if a K-8 themed school is offered.

Mrs. Fucci asked if students with severe disabilities were taken into account. Mr. Zuba confirmed that all factors were reviewed, including students with disabilities. She also asked if there was sufficient space for school psychologists, social workers, speech & language, occupational and physical therapists. He confirmed there is sufficient space.

Mrs. Fucci stressed that music begun in the elementary schools is very important to building the music programs in the middle and high schools. How will the K-5 configuration work? Mr. Cummings responded that the discussion has begun with music teachers.

Mrs. Casey requested copies of slides 20-22 without the overlay.

Mrs. Casey then asked if the Committee felt that an in-depth analysis was done before presenting the recommendation of having two high schools opposed to building one new high school. Mr. Zuba confirmed that the due diligence was done.

Approved

Ms. Glennon explained the Board will receive more information over the next few weeks. Long Range Planning will be placed on the Board business agenda as an unfinished item. Additional meetings may be scheduled if needed. She stated the Board will arrange for additional opportunities for the public to comment on the plan.

Mrs. Glennon asked for a recess at 8:56 p.m.

The meeting was called back to order at 9:03 p.m.

III. PUBLIC COMMENT

Tom Jagodzinski – 27 Berkley Terrace – Mr. Jagodzinski disagrees with the concept of a themed school as solving Milford's problems. He feels the district is spending too much money in the wrong areas. The test results show the proof.

Jennifer Federico – 14 Breakneck Lane – Mrs. Federico asked that the Board take their time and do it right. She cautioned the Board not to let politics take over. She then added she personally like the idea of K-5, with parity and equality being the priority.

Staci Godek – 154 Mary Ellen Drive – She warned the Board about supporting its children with special needs. Live Oaks has the accommodations for children with special needs. She hopes the Board considers the space and needs when deciding which school is to be closed.

Tony Blasi – 25 Warfield Street – Mr. Blasi agreed with fewer transitions are better for children. However, he does not understand the thought of closing a school.

Ed Vanchot – 858 New Haven Avenue – Mr. Vanchot is concerned about the impact on the kids. He questioned the addition of a specialty school. Does the Board realize the costs involve? There is no timeline. Despite the Committee voting to keep the existing high schools, the Chair suggests the possibility of building a new high school. This does not make sense.

Jeff Kupson – 140 Platt Lane – Mr. Kupson strongly supports returning to the K-5 configuration for the 2014-15 school year. He asked the Board to look at the costs of keeping the school system in the current configuration for the 2014-15 school year. To maintain all eight elementary schools will cost the taxpayers more. He also noted the PTA's have been negatively affected by the current transition.

Kathy Ellison – 55 Cardinal Drive – Ms. Ellison supports K-5. However, she urged the Board to seek program changes with the work of administration. The programming needs need to change. She encouraged administration to look at what other districts are offering.

Deb McKenna - 94 Seaside Avenue – Ms. McKenna echoed Mrs. Federico's comments Based on the presentation, the Committee did a great job. He urged the Board to take the time needed to implement the plan.

Approved

Unknown Name – 139 Clark Hill Road – She has been a long standing public educator for 18 years. She told the Board to improve the curriculum. The money should be put into programs. She urged the Board to impress the parents and they will stay.

Lucilla Massey – 57 Morris Lane – Mrs. Massey thanked the Long Range Planning Committee. Her family was affected by the recent school configuration changes. Her hope is that everyone works together to determine which school will close.

Pat Pacelli - 7 Beth Ann Circle – She urged the Board to take the time needed and evaluate all the special needs of the kids.

Tim Chaucer – 5 Norwood Avenue – Mr. Chaucer believes the suggestions put forth make sense. However, \$240M for a new high school would be disastrous. The rivalry between Law and Foran far out weight one high school concept.

III. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. DeRosa made a motion to adjourn. Mrs. Fucci seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 9:35 p.m.

Mrs. Pam Griffin
Recording Secretary

Ms. Laura Fucci
Corresponding Secretary