

School Facilities Review Committee Minutes
February 6, 2017, 5:30 PM
City Hall, Room 335

Mayor Deb Hinchey called the meeting to order at 5:30 PM.

Committee Members Present: Board of Education Member and Committee Chair Dennis Slopak, Mayor Deberey Hinchey, Business Administrator Athena Nagel, Alderwoman Joanne Philbrick, City Manager John Salomone, Facilities Supervisor Dolores Thayer, Comptroller Joshua Pothier, Board of Education Member Aaron Daniels, Teacher Susan Blinderman, Teacher Lisa Cormier and Teacher Julie Tamborra

Committee Members Excused: Superintendent Abby Dolliver

Others Present: Alderwoman Stacy Gould

Determination of Quorum: It was determined a quorum was present.

Prior Meeting Minutes: On a motion by Mayor Hinchey, seconded by Josh Pothier, the minutes of December 5, 2016 were unanimously approved with two grammatical corrections.

Citizen Comment:

Susan Goldman, 35 Sherwood Lane, spoke of her disappointment with the Board of Education (BOE) vote against the recommendations of the School Facilities Review Committee. She spoke to a lack of clarity in representation of the School Facilities Review Committee recommendation by Chair Dennis Slopak during his presentation to the BOE.

Christie Gilluly, 39 East Town Street, retired NPS employee, spoke to wanting more people involved in the school facility decision. She said it is extremely important to continue the process.

Sheila Hayes, 288 Central Ave, Unit 1, spoke about the NEXTT project which identified issues with school buildings years ago. She suggested asking the BOE for reconsideration to let the School Facilities Review Committee recommendation go in front of the City Council.

Heather Romanski, 297 Scotland Rd, spoke to reassessing a collective vision for reorganization.

New Business:

Joanne Philbrick asked Chair Dennis Slopak to consider stepping down. She noted her concern regarding the focus, direction, and representation of the committee's recommendation.

Mayor Hinchey reported she consulted with legal counsel regarding the issues at hand. A vote was taken by this committee to accept the report that JCJ developed. She anticipated that vote would be taken to BOE. Since the vote by the BOE was a 4-4 tie, the recommendation will not go to the City Council. Therefore, the work of this body is essentially done. This committee was asked and tasked to gather and review recommendations to be taken to the BOE, and if ratified by the BOE, take the recommendation to the City Council and then it would go to referendum. She noted it was clear to her that this committee voted to accept the recommendation of JCJ which was to renovate-as-new four schools.

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Mayor Hinchey continued, reporting that, as a courtesy to Dennis, she did not put a resolution to cancel this committee on tonight's city council agenda. She did cancel the information session that was originally scheduled to occur today.

She reported she spoke with Aaron Daniels and they agreed she will go before BOE to explain the purpose of this committee when it was formed two years ago. She has asked Athena Nagel for some more figures as to renovating the schools and the costs of doing nothing. She will consult with Mr. Daniels prior to the BOE meeting.

She would not support removal of Dennis as Chair of this committee because there is no longer a need for this committee. If the BOE decides through a vote to reconsider the recommendations of this committee, then another committee would be formed to communicate the information and promote the recommendation for referendum. She feels it is the right of the taxpayers and voters of this city to decide if a change is to be made.

She reported that one question that came up at the BOE was whether the city was behind it. Many members of the city have spent a great amount of time and effort as the recommendations were developed. These are the things she will explain to the BOE. She will not review the other options discussed in the development of the final recommendations. This committee has voted on a recommendation.

Lisa Cormier asked that if the BOE reconsiders and a new committee is formed that teachers are included. Having teachers on the committee from the beginning will represent students, families and teachers of the city.

Athena clarified a new committee would be a state compliant, city committee, not a BOE committee.

Chair Slopak responded. He said he still supports his idea for a single campus. He believes that is the best way to go. He feels it saves the most money, offers the most opportunities, and allow the BOE and Norwich Public Schools (NPS) to import people in to pay tuition and make money. He voted for the magnet schools because they would be inter-district, but that has never happened because NPS does not have enough space for extra students. NPS sends out 100 children per day for special education. Education is a business; it happens to be a big business with big unions and big dollars being spent. The transition program is generating revenue that is split with the city. He said he wants to do more of this. He wants to bring back a majority of special education students that are now going out and have NPS be a source for other towns, to make money in that manner.

Chair Slopak continued by saying that the SFRC consultants were not charged with enough. They should have been tasked with suggesting best uses for the other properties. He voted against accepting their recommendation for that reason. Then he was told the vote inferred the recommendation that was in report and accepting the report was accepting the recommendation. He presented the case to the BOE even against his own view.

He said the BOE will reconsider and will advance a recommendation to the city council and hopes the council lets the public have their vote. He said he has been accused of politicking and conniving but that has not happened. The BOE will be putting forward a recommendation at next meeting. There will be more community

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meetings. He said the BOE will put forth a recommendation and it will be in the council's hands and if council chooses, it will be in the people's hands.

Chair Slopak said that the BOE does not have to vote for a particular recommendation from the report.

Mayor Hinchey pointed out that the consultant and this committee said the same thing; they made the same recommendation for a 4 school, renovate-as-new project.

Alderwoman Philbrick noted that a dissenting voter has to bring it forward for reconsideration to BOE.

Chair Slopak said he will be that dissenting voter and will bring it forward for reconsideration at the BOE.

Mayor Hinchey repeated that she will present to the BOE on the reason this committee was formed and why the renovate-as-new 4 schools proposal was recommended. She encouraged Chair Slopak to take his idea of having the BOE vote on a different recommendation to corporate counsel for review. She also urged Mr. Daniels and Chair Slopak to consult with corporate counsel to clarify so that any vote that is taken by the BOE will follow proper protocol for submission to the state.

Chair Slopak noted that the BOE will welcome Mayor Hinchey.

Old Business:

Review, consider and possibly take action on JCJ Option A

Agenda item was not discussed.

Adjournment: On a motion by Mayor Deb Hinchey, seconded by Aaron Daniels, the meeting adjourned at 6:08 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Melinda Wilson
Recording Secretary