

Central Berkshire Regional School District  
School Building Project Committee Meeting  
Thursday, October 12, 2016

A regular meeting of the Central Berkshire Regional School District School Building Needs Committee, held at Wahconah Regional High School in Dalton, MA, on Wednesday October 12, 2016, was called to order by Co-Chair Armacost at 6:38 p.m.

ROLL CALL

Present: Shawn Armacost (Co-Chair), Tom Callahan (Co-Chair) Robert Archambault (Student Rep), John Bartels, Gary Campbell Jr., Mike Case, Mike Daniels, Liz Daniels, Jason Dion, Anna Duquette (Student Rep), Todd Emerson, Andrew Garcia, Mike Hagmaier, John McComish, Roberta McCulloch Dews, Jan Paxton, Aaron Robb, Chuck Sturtevant, Shawn Therrien, Laurie Casna, Melissa Falkowski

Absent: Wayne Cronnell, Amy Grallert, Kerry Mason, Bill Mullholland and Melinda Walton

Also Present: Superintendent Laurie Casna, Assistant Superintendent Melissa Falkowski, Recording Secretary

Co-Chair Armacost opened the meeting

1. Response from Audience

No audience present for response

2. Validation of Agenda

Co-Chair Armacost took roll.

Co-Chair Shawn Armacost thanked everyone for coming and stated that everyone has had several days to think about last session. Jan Paxton suggested adding an agenda item about the different possibilities of looking at our population decline and how we should relate that to the new school. She suggested the Berkshire Educational Task Force coming to talk to us. Co-Chair Armacost states he is a member of the Task Force and he can provide that data. He will gather that information and have it available for next meeting.

Co-Chair Tom Callahan said the NESDEC report is available and that would have similar information. The district commissioned that report in regards to the closing of Berkshire Trail School. Tom has used that report and found it helpful. Superintendent Casna explained you can access a link to the report from the CBRSD website.

Mike Case asked if, for this committee they all have to do a conflict of interest. Shawn Armacost will check on that.

Co-Chair Armacost validated the agenda as required by the open meeting law.

3. Approval of minutes from September 29, 2016 meeting

Co-Chair Shawn Armacost suggested the committee members look at CBRSD website to review September 29, 2016 meeting minutes and the committee will approve them at the next meeting. Committee member Roberta McCulloch Dews stated she was at last meeting and was omitted from the attendance. Co-Chair Armacost stated that Committee Member Bill Mulholland may not be at every meeting, but has decided to officially stay on the committee.

4. Questions/Discussions on Kick-Off Meeting Topics

- a. MSBA Process
- b. SOI, Building Walkthrough
- c. Open Meeting Law
- d. Meeting Conduct Strategy

Superintendent Casna told committee members that Attorney Russ Dupere will attend the November meeting for questions. She also explained the Central Berkshire website has a frequently asked questions section, which she will update frequently and the committee can refer people to that page.

In response to a question, Co-Chair Armacost stated that there are 2 methods of voting currently done by towns. All towns need to be affirmative for the project to go through. There is nothing stated in regional agreement to preclude the committee from using any other method. Attorney Dupere recommends doing a popular vote. Towns would vote on the project and it would be popular vote across the 7 towns. Committee member Jan Paxton asked for clarification if that would mean each town is a majority vote individually; it was clarified by Co-Chair Armacost that the result would be popular vote of all 7 towns together.

The vote will not be ready to be held during the upcoming presidential election but we will likely take place in an off voting season so the committee would be responsible for costs to the towns for holding a vote. Towns would have to have ballot counters and poll workers. Committee member Mike Case asked if voting can be done with the town elections in the spring. The committee has until June 1 to present to MSBA. Peru does not hold their town meeting within that time frame. A threshold for the latest voting date would need to be set if the committee agrees to use that method. Committee member John Bartels mentions that Dalton would rather have it as a ballot vote not as a vote at a town meeting.

Mike Case asked if it is possible to have an election in one spot for all towns voting, for example at Wahconah High School. Co-Chair Armacost will research the answer to that. Committee Member Chuck Sturtevant stated one central voting location might hurt the project because of backlash from the hill towns for having to travel to the central vote location in Dalton. Co-Chair Armacost agreed that is a valid point. HS Principal Aaron Robb liked the idea of having an election for the school building in each of the 7 towns.

The committee discussed inviting all town select boards and finance members to brief them on budget and school building project. Co-Chair Armacost will talk to towns this November when the seven town advisory group meets.

The meeting was turned over to Superintendent Casna. The superintendent showed on the projector screen how to access the links for meeting minutes and frequently asked questions from the CBRSD website. The advocacy document is on the website for everyone to review.

Superintendent Casna explained the committee's role will be educating the public by providing information in order to get better voter turn-out. The committee discussed which groups they need to reach out to and identifying what the concerns and questions will be from the voters.

HS Principal Aaron Robb told the committee that he is asked at several different school events about the new Wahconah, some people are for it and some are against it.

Superintendent Casna asked if there is a big enough group of people with no connection to the school district and also if there is a separate group that is no longer directly involved but would still support. Jan Paxton asked about options of re-designing the new Nessacus instead of building a new structure. She also feels retirees do want to make the investment but there are two sides. If education declines so does the community.

John Bartels stated as a town official he has to reassure people tax increase is needed because the project is necessary.

Superintendent Casna stated something has to make sense to you to want to vote for this based on your priorities. John Bartels commented when the committee did the building walk through that the school looks great from the outside but inside it looks horrible. He thinks no doubt in his mind something has to be done. Co-Chair Callahan stated we are a victim of our own maintenance. People believe that the school was so well built and taken care of and the community is proud of what this school looks like. Our district has gone the longest without renovation. We need to change the image to state that good maintenance isn't enough anymore. He doesn't think people are ready to equate poor teaching with the maintenance this building has.

Committee Member Gary Campbell Jr. stated it is important to touch on pre-seniors and people who still have an attachment to the school based on family benefits. It was asked, how to inform adults on the edge of not being able to benefit because their kids are done at high school. It was also stated that we have a great reputation and a great school choice population. The projected population for 9-12 grade was 484 and Wahconah currently has 550.

Assistant Superintendent Melissa Falkowski commented that employees will be approached. Someone may have a question so employees should be educated about the project so if they are approached they are well informed because they will be seen as a representative to the district. She would like to know how many people are in the groups they are targeting, so the committee can understand the numbers. Committee Member Bartels said NESDEC report would have the numbers. Co-Chair Armacost is not sure NESDEC has the numbers broken down the way the committee discussed needing to see them.

HS Principal Robb stated he has thought about Wahconah being Dalton centric just based on geography. Growing up in Cummington he never felt a connection to Wahconah until he got there. As we move out beyond Dalton and Hinsdale we need to be mindful of the possibility of a lesser connection to Wahconah. Committee Member Chuck Sturtevant commented that he does not think that is such a big issue for the towns because of the centralized middle school.

John Bartels recalled Aaron Robb's comment during the tour that this building was not made for 21<sup>st</sup> century learning and stated that was a very good point.

Committee member Shawn Therrien asked if we could do a virtual tour to show voters the inside tour. Superintendent Casna stated she would check with counsel on that.

Superintendent Casna and HS Principal Robb, presented a PowerPoint to the group titled *Educating the Public on the Vote for the Feasibility Study*. The PowerPoint can be found on the District website, on the MSBA Minutes page.

Aaron Robb asked if either of the student representatives have anything to add. Student Representative Bob Archambault, a school choice student, commented he chose Wahconah over the district he lives in based on education. Student Representative Anna Duquette says her family also questions why we can't just renovate the school that is here and she believes it's important to help people understand the building problems.

5. Working Session; gathering and processing information, community communications and involvement

The committee breaks into 5 groups:

- Town Officials
- Alumni
- People not connected directly to the school
- Parents of school age children
- Retirees

After about 30 minutes of group discussions the committee got back together

HS Principal Robb asked for the big ideas of the groups

The following reports were given:

Retirees

Co-Chair Callahan spoke for this group and asked to change the name to retirees and soon to be retirees

The points this group discussed were:

1. They need to identify the group getting data that states age and occupation
2. Avoid any annoying techniques when they inquire to get this information
3. This group has to be able to diverge when they get closer to the target groups and tailor to foster the interests they have in this project
4. Place bulletins in the right places

5. Word of mouth is effective if you can get people in to listen and read
6. A building tour for this age group will be helpful
7. Tom Callahan mentions he has seen the effectiveness of the council on aging in town on this age group
8. Organize and get moving soon
9. Talk to constituents at transfer stations (the town dump)

#### Town Officials:

Committee Member John Bartels spoke for this group

The points this group discussed were:

1. The 7 town advisory meeting needs to get many select board members and finance committee members to attend a meeting and to tour Wahconah.
2. Berkshire County Selectman League dinner is on the 20<sup>th</sup> and selectman from all towns in Berkshire county will attend. Mike case will target the 7 towns in the district that show up.
3. Have a direct link to the MSBA building project on each towns website- instead of having to go through the CBRSD website
4. It would be helpful if representatives could attend all town meetings to give direct info when necessary
5. It is extremely necessary to determine what the fiscal responsibility will be in each town and look at what other things are going on in the individual towns that will affect the tax rate each year.
6. Chuck Sturtevant added that we must inform town officials that there really is two votes on this, looking to move ahead with feasibility study vote and then the approval vote.

#### Alumni:

Liz Daniels spoke for this group

1. It will be best to utilize technology with this demographic 18-30 year olds
2. Facebook and other social media is a good tool to get info out to people quickly, it will be an effective way to advertise meetings and tours.
3. Identifying members of class government- reunion committees that can possibly get the word out
4. Become a face to people and less of a committee- share memories of building problems that you remember

Liz asked how can we get info about who is in charge of all of the reunions. Aaron stated he does not know if there is an official way to find that out, however recently he has been contacted by some alumni looking to plan reunions. Tom Callahan stated he had a book in his closet from 2002 that had a high percentage of alumni emails in it. Aaron Robb will look for that book.

#### People not directly tied to the school:

Superintendent Laurie Casna and HS Principal Aaron Robb spoke for this group

1. Inform this group on the impact of property value a new school will have
2. Getting more accurate info to these people, they might not realize that we have maintained enrollment and Central Berkshire is actually the second largest school district in the area.
3. Make it be known that MSBA is not a choice you have to be accepted and turning it down does not mean you can be accepted again.
4. Let people know that there are concerns if this project is voted down costs would still arise and repairs would need to be made. If the project is voted down, we wouldn't have the MSBA to help financially with repairs and issues that arise.
5. Inform voters about school choice
6. Share info with real estate agents, have them inform buyers and sellers in the area
7. Find where the town people meet to talk, get their opinions

#### Parents of school ages children:

A representative for this group spoke about the following points

1. Inform people how safe the building is outside and inside
2. It would be helpful for students to show the problems of the inside of the school by using phone videos
3. Doing a virtual school tour
4. Knowledge that the world has changed and schools have 21<sup>st</sup> century needs
5. Declining enrollment is not as bad as projected

6. Determine what the identity of the high school will be
7. Talk to PTO groups
8. Talk at the town dump
9. Determine what the financial impact will be and for how long
10. Online networks are important for this age group also

Superintendent Casna concluded and stated that at the next meeting the group will:

- Divide for 80-90% of the time in working sessions to make an action plan
- Spend a little time on how to get a uniform message out- what is our press briefing what is our bulletin
- She will have the answer to the question if the committee is allowed to survey the community

The Superintendent notified the group that she officially got the word today that this group has been approved as the MSBA Building Committee. An official broadcast that the committee is official should be sent out and get community feedback.

It was also discussed that an exposure point might be election day, and is it possible to post notices to inform citizens that this is coming up for vote. Committee Member Bartels stated it is allowed to have an informational table set up in the CRA lobby and each town hall. The committee should develop a handout and should start working on that now.

The Superintendent mentioned the options of the feasibility study, going forward are to renovate or to replace. Feasibility studies cost \$500,000 to 2 million. MSBA will fund 56% of that and they will do the same for the building project. Assistant Superintendent Melissa Falkowski confirmed that historically, the percentage amount has only fluctuated within a percentage or two.

The next meetings will be held on Wednesday October 26 and on Wednesday November 9 at 6:30 pm.

Thursday November 17 is the 7 Town Advisory meeting at Wahconah at 7 pm.

6. Adjourn

*Adjournment 8:34 PM*