

MINUTES
JOINT TOWN COUNCIL CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS COMMITTEE &
SCHOOL FACILITIES COMMITTEE MEETING
Meeting of Thursday, April 15, 2021 – 6:30 p.m.
Online Zoom Meeting

Present: Council Vice Chairperson - Suzie Phillips, Committee Chair; Councilors Ben Hartwell and Janet Kuech; School Committee Chairman Darryl Wright and School Committee members Stewart McCallister and Sarah Perkins.

Also Present: Town Manager, Ephrem Paraschak; School Superintendent, Heather Perry; School Facilities Director, Norm Justice; School Business Manager, Hollis Cobb; CHA Architecture Associate Vice President, Matthew Pitzer and Architectural Designer, Ashley Richards.

1. Consideration of the minutes of the November 20, 2020 meeting.

A motion was MADE by Councilor Kuech, SECONDED by Councilor Hartwell, and VOTED to accept the minutes of the November 20, 2020 Joint Town Council Capital Improvements Committee & School Facilities Committee Meeting. Unanimous vote.

2. Current Business

A. Update regarding Capital Projects from CHA Architecture regarding Town Facilities Study

CHA Associate Vice President Matthew Pitzer shared a presentation reflecting the status of the Town facilities study and reviewed a timeline of the study of 15 buildings and how it has progressed. He noted that all site visits were complete and that the capacity analyses were the next steps. Mr. Pitzer noted overall concerns for buildings, which included egress routes and ADA clearances, the amount of program space for school buildings (nursing suite, cafeteria, classrooms, offices, etc.), life cycle of windows and interior finishes, operable partitions, lighting energy usage, boiler, rooftop and air handling unit, and chiller replacement, fire protection and sprinkler systems.

With regard to athletic fields, Mr. Pitzer noted that site visits and assessments were in progress, field space is limited, fields suffer from over-use, tennis needs a fifth court and that there were no visitor bleachers and very limited storage for sports/maintenance equipment.

Architectural Designer Ashley Richards then reviewed overall concerns with various buildings including the Robie Gymnasium, the Police Station, the Central Fire Station, Public Works, the lower Public Works shop, the Little Falls Activity Center and Old Robie School. Mr. Pitzer then reviewed an assessment spreadsheet for the Gorham Middle School and the next steps for the study, which were to perform athletic field assessments, enrollment/capacity analyses, ranking of school and municipal needs, hold

follow up meeting with the joint committee members and staff present, and finish with programmatic diagramming at which CHA will present diagrams and a final report.

Council Vice Chairperson Phillips recommended that CHA hold two separate meetings – one with the School Committee (SC) and another meeting with the Town Council if CHA plans to dive deeper with the analyses so as to avoid having each committee review the same information twice.

SC Chairman Wright recommended a joint workshop if CHA wishes to provide an in-depth final report and analysis of Town and School buildings.

Councilor Hartwell asked if the Historical Society building and Gorham Lions Club building (formerly the Old Elmwood School), as well as athletic field at Old White Rock School could be included in the study.

Council Vice Chairperson Phillips asked if the Gorham Cooperative Preschool should also be included in the study since the Town owns it and currently leases it.

Town Manager Ephrem Paraschak said that the buildings and field that Councilors Hartwell and Phillips inquired about were not included in the study, but could be added. He said that the other buildings, not including the Gorham Cooperative Preschool, are in very poor condition and are not being used for programs for the Town per say, which is why there has not been a lot of emphasis on their use. They could be added, however, if the Town Council wanted.

Mr. Paraschak asked if the paving of the lower Public Works yard was brought forth by CHA or Town employees – he does not view it as a high priority. Mr. Pitzer said that it was very apparent to him when he arrived for the site walk that it was needed. He then asked Town staff about it and they agreed that it was needed.

Council Vice Chairperson Phillips asked Mr. Paraschak to proceed with adding the previously mentioned buildings and field to the study.

Councilor Hartwell asked if the Old White Rock athletic field was available as a lease to the Town, to which Mr. Paraschak said he was not 100 percent certain.

B. General discussion with School Facilities Committee regarding Town and School Facilities

Council Vice Chairperson Phillips said as a disclaimer that the Town Council has not discussed any facilities needs and she supports having a joint discussion in the future instead of having separate meetings.

Mr. Paraschak said that the greatest liability is Town roads and capital infrastructure related to roads; the Town could invest millions of dollars into roads and get them to a point where they could be maintained. He further said that if there were ever a road bond, it could be used for capital rebuilds. He received noticed and a warning from the state that the weight limit on a bridge on Wescott Road was being downgraded and the

bridge would need to be replaced in the future. These bridges run \$300,000 to \$400,000. Generally speaking, Mr. Paraschak said the Town is waiting for the final facilities study outlining items to replace. The Town always has capital needs for replacements such as fire engines that cost \$1.5 million dollars.

C. General discussion with School Department regarding November 2021 referendum

School Superintendent Heather Perry said that the School department has significant needs. The referendum that passed last year helped tremendously. Ms. Perry said that the School department ran into some problems with the heat pump bid process for the Middle School as the bids received were half a million dollars over budget. Staff have looked at the possibility of trying to phase in the project or divide it in different ways; however, there is not a way to do it and still be within budget that was appropriated through the referendum, so that project is on pause for another year with the intention to try to go out to bid again if things calm down in the market. She does not foresee the market improving as there are lot of federal funds flooding the market and causing increased costs.

Ms. Perry shared an Excel spreadsheet titled “Gorham Schools Facilities Capital Planning – Potential Bond Items.”

SC Chairperson Wright said that he met with Town staff to discuss bonding last fall. He noted that the SC would like to explore the opportunity to get some engineering done and other projects that could be done now with the most desirable interest rates to cost taxpayers the least amount of money. He anticipates the proposal being brought to the Town Council and wanted this group to know that was something the SC was looking at.

Council Vice Chairperson Phillips commented that the Town Council has not had any discussions about any referendums or road bonds. If she were to entertain a referendum, she would consider the mil rate and budget. She would want to avoid going out to market and bids coming back higher than budgeted on future referendums. She added that the document that Ms. Perry shared was very helpful.

SC member McCallister asked if the list that Ms. Perry shared referenced bonds with priorities higher than future budget cycles, or was it a matter of those bonds fitting better for that particular budget year to which Ms. Perry said that it was combination of both. She noted that if she were to have to narrow down the list, she would shift the Village Elementary site work earlier on in the conversation mostly because of how the pandemic has demonstrated how challenging it has been with the large amounts of traffic coming out of that building. Otherwise, the list was purposely slated to take care of some of the smaller needs while the facilities study was progressing. A lot of thought went into the timeline of the bond projects listed, but staff was also mindful of the priorities of the projects.

Councilor Kuech said that it seemed reasonable that the Town Council consider some of these bond referendum ideas at a future Town Council budget workshop in the coming weeks.

Council Vice Chairperson Phillips said that the Town Council could plan to hold a second School budget workshop, if needed, to separate discussions about the proposed budget versus proposed bond referendums, or try to review all items at an upcoming workshop.

Mr. Paraschak said that there is no doubt that the School department has needs as does the Town side. He is more concerned with how the Town goes about bonding and when that is done. Some of the Town's bond ratings this year mentioned the Town's debt load, which is not significant; however, bond analysts always talk about the High School debt that is forthcoming, the frequency of bonds and how often we go out to referendum. He does not recommend going about bonding without planning out what the debt ratio will be and what the Town can afford.

Councilor Hartwell noted that he had asked Mr. Paraschak questions about the Town's bond rating and debt level as a percentage of municipal tax revenue a couple of years ago – he had done some research on benchmarks and what level of debt-to-tax revenue was healthy. Although he can't remember the terminology at the moment on what the benchmarks were called and the recommended debt levels, that would be his starting point now when reviewing bond projects to get a better idea of the big picture of what should be prepared for and replaced. He added that everyone is aware that the market is a mess right now and he recommends waiting on what items can be delayed, so the market can correct itself and the Town can stretch dollars further.

Councilor Kuech said that the meeting she was referring to when she spoke earlier was the joint Town Council budget workshop when the Council would be reviewing the Capital Part II projects at which it would be a good time to mention that there is a possibility that these committees are talking about bonds. She did not want to tack the bond discussion onto the joint meeting.

Ms. Perry confirmed that the Town Council budget workshop to review the proposed School department budget is scheduled for May 11, 2021.

SC member McCallister said that he would prefer for the SC to verify and confirm the list of proposed bond projects before submitting and reviewing at an upcoming budget Town Council budget meeting.

3. Other Business

No other business was discussed.

4. Schedule next meeting and discuss agenda items for next meeting.

Council Vice Chairperson said that the next meeting will not be scheduled at this time, but if needed, the School Committee could meet with the Town Council to discuss current needs as a joint Facilities Committee, and Mr. Paraschak will meet with CHA as the facilities study progresses.

5. Adjourn.

There being no further business, a motion was MADE by Councilor Kuech, SECONDED by

Councilor Hartwell and unanimously VOTED to adjourn at 7:49 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Jessica Hughes, Executive Assistant