

MINUTES

JOINT TOWN COUNCIL CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS COMMITTEE & SCHOOL FACILITIES COMMITTEE MEETING

Meeting of Monday, November 29, 2021 – 6:30 p.m.

Conference Room A

Present: Councilor Suzie Phillips, Committee Chair; Council Chairman Lee Pratt (ad hoc); Councilor Vice Chairman Jim Hager, and Councilors Benjamin Hartwell and Janet Kuech; School Committee Chairman Darryl Wright, and School Committee members Stewart McCallister and Sarah Perkins.

Also Present: Town Manager, Ephrem Paraschak; Superintendent Heather Perry; Assistant Superintendent, Brian Porter; School Facilities Director, Norm Justice; School Business Manager, Hollis Cobb; CHA Director of Design, Alan Kuniholm, and CHA Architectural Designer, Ashley Richards.

1. Consideration of the minutes of the October 12, 2021 meeting.

Meeting minutes were not reviewed, and no actions were made.

2. Current Business

A. Final presentation from CHA Architecture regarding Town Facilities Study

CHA Director of Design, Alan Kuniholm, said that the focus of this meeting will be on the school facilities as Architect/senior Vice President, Brian Curley, was unable to attend.

Mr. Kuniholm said that the study is really a long-term master plan looking at what's in the future. He said that the study charge was an inventory of all municipal and school buildings, and the final plan will include all building plans and their existing conditions. During the building surveys, he noted that CHA engineers went through and captured costs for essential repairs that would include upgrades needed and repairs for things that are failing. Also included in the report will be a capacity analysis for schools that allowed CHA to project out student populations based on enrollment projections. Another component for CHA staff was to provide recommendations for school expansions, noted Mr. Kuniholm. Finally, CHA took all facilities needs and repairs and put the data into a facilities cost index that reflects the cost of repairs and/or needs for all facilities together. Mr. Kuniholm then referred to the Study Index slide included in the presentation.

Mr. Kuniholm shared a sample of the data collected for all buildings that reflects what is failing and where the items were in their lifespan, which was bundled into the projected cost. He noted that CHA calls those items "essential repairs." CHA also noted the high points of what they were hearing from staff, so those items were listed on the index.

Mr. Kuniholm noted that floor plans for all buildings were included in the report.

Councilor Hager commented that the slide reflecting essential repairs was not included in the packet that was distributed to the Council and staff to which Mr. Kuniholm said they would make sure it was included in the final report.

Mr. Kuniholm then said referred to the presentation, which included plans for the high school, the classrooms, the specials, circulation, the square-footage, when it was built; the same data was collected for all municipal buildings and all school buildings. He noted that the report also includes an overview of issues, which for example with the high school, included photos of the issues with the window package, exterior door package, the finishes, floor and ceiling tiles, tennis courts. Included in the report, Mr. Kuniholm said that the list of essential needs repairs for all schools included in the report reflects project costs per square foot rounded up to the nearest thousand. He pointed out that the high school has the most systems on the verge of needing to be replaced, including the mechanical system, the roof, exterior windows, and doors. He said that there is about one million dollars in site work improvements needed in the short term with regard to paving and drainage due to water not draining from the site fast enough since it is too flat.

School Committee member Darryl Wright asked what the definition of short and long term was in terms of the essential needs repairs data to which Mr. Kuniholm said short term was one to five years, and long term was six to 20 years.

Mr. Kuniholm said that the report does not reflect an apples-to-apples comparison since not all buildings contain the same systems so there is an inequity in the educational environment in terms of what one student might get and another student might get. He noted that none of the facilities analysis includes the consideration of adding more insulation other than replacing the window package.

Mr. Kuniholm then referred to a capacity analysis for all schools, which reflects a gross-to-net comparison between all schools, enrollment projections through 2035 based on NSDC [National School Development Council] standards, average class size, average cost per class. He noted that the data reflects that the high school is 100 students over capacity, which is shown as a negative number. He said that the middle school has the capability for additional capacity, as does Great Falls Elementary; however, Narragansett Elementary is way over capacity. Lastly, he said that the Village Elementary is just about spot on with capacity. He noted that the Schools are paying for additional utilities with the inefficiency with weather stripping and cracks in the floors. He noted if the buildings were on an National Park Service (NPS) land in the last column, which would be a consideration if the Schools were to be expanded as the NPS-dedicated land may have to be replaced somewhere else.

Mr. Kuniholm then reviewed existing site plans. With regard to the high school, he said there is a full gamut in terms of what could be done, including replacing the high school on site, to doing full renovations, to switching it up with the middle school. He said that the high school site plan is configured like a pie shape, which makes it difficult for planning.

With regard to the middle school, Mr. Kuniholm noted that it sits on 58 acres of which there is a large portion of wetlands in the lower right corner. He said that it is .6 miles from the high school so it is within walking distance.

With regard to Great Falls Elementary, Mr. Kuniholm said that the bus versus parent drop-off routes provide better student safety, and there is unlimited expansion potential.

Mr. Kuniholm then reviewed the site plan for Narragansett Elementary followed by Village Elementary. He noted that the site works well with two connections into the site. He said the bus and parent drop-off is more congested than they like to see. He said that a nice feature is the single point of entry to the building from a security standpoint inside the school.

Mr. Kuniholm then reviewed what he called the “decision matrix” or Master Planning Option Flowchart, which reflected that the high school is in the worst shape of all buildings. The flowchart reflected options, including building a new high school on another site, or on the middle school site, and turning the old high school into an athletic and recreation complex for both the middle and high school. The flowchart also listed an option of building a new high school on the Chick property. Another option is to demolish the old high school once rebuilt elsewhere and build a combined elementary school.

School Committee (SC) members Sarah Perkins asked if the numbers reflected included what we need to do to which Mr. Kuniholm said – no.

Mr. Kuniholm said that the flowchart reflected a host of opportunities and suggestions for the high school. He said a large consideration will be being able to build a school and not affect students.

Mr. Kuniholm referred to the existing high school building plan to review whether a building could fit on the Chick property. He noted that there are 950 students and there are 250 square feet per student. He then referred to a slide with a potential site plan for the high school to be potentially located on the Chick property for an estimated cost of \$77 million.

Mr. Kuniholm then reviewed a slide that reflected how the former high school could be converted into a combined athletic and recreation complex for an estimated cost of \$3.2 million, followed by a slide reflecting a potential combined elementary on the middle school site that could be done for an estimated cost of \$34.6 million.

Mr. Kuniholm reviewed a slide reflecting a new potential community recreation facility that could be done on the former Village Elementary site for an estimated cost of \$1.45 million, followed by a new potential high school on the middle school site that could be done for an estimated cost of \$65.6 million, as well as a new combined elementary on the Chick property for an estimated cost of \$37.2 million.

A slide reflecting projected costs was then reviewed that reflected some potential adjustments including a temporary expansion of classroom space at the middle school, moving facilities at the middle school, high school, and municipal center to the new high school, and moving adult education to the municipal center.

SC member Ms. Perkins asked what the difference in price would be between moving the high school to the middle school site versus the Chick property to which Mr. Kuniholm said that the cost of \$77 million to move to the Chick property included the site development of the athletic fields. He pointed out that there are some nuances with the costs reflected such as value for the existing site work. He noted that there will be more definitions in the larger reports that all groups will be able to understand.

Councilor Hager asked to clarify if the cost of \$77 million to locate the high school on the Chick property was for the building (brick and mortar) itself, not land, to which Mr. Kuniholm said – yes, the cost does not include land acquisition.

Councilor Hager said that the Council review the National Park Service (NPS) land easements a few years ago and he recalled that NPS land was only around the tennis court area at the high school to which Town Manager Ephrem Paraschak said that a there is an individual at the state that is now leading at the national level that interpreted a sketch from the 1970's that the entire parking lot around the high school was the value that the Town hasn't transferred. He added that the Town is not in compliance and will not be until that is resolved; the NPS easement is there and we have to acknowledge it, and will not likely change in the next couple of years.

SC member Stewart McCallister said that the numbers provided for new schools seem very low compared to the last process of trying for a high school remodel, which was close to \$100 million to which Mr. Kuniholm said that there have been a number of studies and you need to have someone that says you're doing core facilities for 1,150 and classrooms for 950 – you have inflated the number above what the department of education (DOE) standard is, which is why the other studies are more expensive. He noted that CHA benchmarks with the DOE, and that the recommend a square foot of 200 as opposed to 180 per student.

A brief discussion ensued in which Councilor Hager commented on the current inflation rate versus when the last high school study was provided.

Councilor Hager commented that CHA previously provided a comprehensive study in the early 2000's and the Council reviewed it again in 2005-2006 with a referendum vote to move the competition athletic fields to the Chick property.

SC member Darryl Wright commented regarding Mr. McCallister's point in that the estimate with no land cost for the high school renovation in 2017 was going to be almost the same as the estimated cost within this study – he feels that the estimated cost of \$77 million is too low for the new high school on the Chick property.

Mr. Paraschak asked if it is possible to add dates to the timeframes on the report, and he noted a consideration should be what the immediate impact to the taxpayers could be.

Councilor Phillips said that a goal of the joint committees should be ensuring there is a community buy-in, and understand what they want.

A discussion ensued in which the groups discussed how to interpret the report and make the best decision with regard to the high school.

Ms. Perkins said that the construction of a new high school on the Chick property would mean that another elementary school would need to be built somewhere else since Narragansett Elementary would be displaced. She said alternatively that if we were to build a high school on the middle school property, it wouldn't force us to do anything other than have students access the athletic fields a half mile down the road.

Superintendent Heather Perry said that the Town Council and School Committee could piggy back the review of the final study after the review of a bond item at a joint workshop on January 11, 2022, but the joint committees will have needed to review the municipal study results prior to then.

Mr. Paraschak asked if CHA has or will touch on the Town's total acreage available to help inform what the Town should be looking at with regard to land acquisition right now.

Ms. Perkins asked how often the joint committees should be meeting after the joint presentation to which Council Phillips said that the immediate, short term, and long term essential needs will guide how the committees start out with things. Councilor Phillips said that capital money will need to be set aside for immediate needs on both sides. A consideration noted by Councilor Phillips was looking at any items that can be done together or combined.

Mr. Wright said that he would anticipate the School Committee presenting something in the next summer to be bonded in November. He recommends trying to address immediate needs and put them in the proposed operating budgets for next fiscal year.

Councilor Hager said that when the 1999 study was done, the Council did almost every single project - he is hoping that these committees would have something like that. He is hoping that the study will serve as a historical document, just as the 1999 study, that will similarly list 12 recommended projects.

Councilor Phillips said that she agreed with a list of recommended priorities, which will help the Town and School. She feels it is the joint committees' jobs to prioritize what should be done.

Ms. Perkins said that she wants to get a sense of our how frequently the joint committees should meet.

Mr. Paraschak said that the high school is the elephant in the room that should be addressed first. He added that he believed that the Council formally accepted the direction of the study at their meeting last month.

Council Chairman Pratt said the next meeting should be to review the municipal side of the study with CHA Architect/Senior Vice President, then have a final meeting with the Town Council and School Committee.

3. Other Business

No other business was discussed.

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

The committees discussed scheduling another joint committee meeting to review the municipal side of the study. Staff will coordinate the next meeting date and time in December.

5. Adjourn.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 7:56 p.m. No votes were taken.

Respectfully submitted,
Jessica Hughes, Executive Assistant