

EASTON BOARD OF EDUCATION
Long Range Planning Committee
Special Meeting
September 19, 2016

Minutes

Attendance: Committee Members - Dr. Tom McMorran, Gabriel Rossi, Regina Bobroske, Randy Hicks, Andy Kachele, Claire Wilkes, Ed Nagy, Jenny Chieda, Pat Keane, John Mutuski
Others: Sue Kaplan, Anne Manusky and Susan Winter

- I. Call to Order** - Randy Hicks called the meeting to order at 7:04 pm.
- II. Approval of April 14, 2016 Special Meeting Minutes.** Rossi, Bobroske.
Approved.
- III. Public Comment:** None

Committee Member Comment - Andy Kachele said that for 2 of 3 phases of this committee there has been no product - no set of questions and answers. It is reaching the point where it's a problem from the public's perspective. The Board of Finance is asking about it. People are starting to say that this group is providing cover for doing nothing. He has a hard time seeing how some items on tonight's agenda are relevant. At some break point you have to do something. It could be there is not enough change happening now to warrant that, but we owe it to the public to put criteria together for how and when those decisions are made.

Randy Hicks said that the committee has had a lot to look at. He has just taken over the committee chair position and will be getting up to speed quickly. What he takes away is that what we are doing can't be done quickly.

Regina Bobroske said the committee needs to define key break points. A lot of work framing break points and criteria was done in an earlier phase of the committee and is available of the ER9 website.

Gabriel Rossi said that one of the outcomes of Phase 1 was identifying the need for a capacity study. We also need to look at plausible use case scenarios, as well as different scenarios with student distribution. He said the earlier we get our head around this the more flexibility we will have. Rather than being reactive, let's be proactive.

Regina added that these actions must be overlaid with what is best for the kids. The stagnation of the committee that occurred was not intentional, but due to changing personnel of the Board and committee. This work needs to be picked back up. Communication with key stakeholders is extremely important. We need to look short, mid and long term, and decide what needs to happen when.

Pat Keane asked what is the why- is a cost savings? He said it is important to bound your question and get input from educators. He mentioned his experience with the Base Realignment Closure Program. Potential is there for cost savings, but they just don't happen. There are costs to shut down.

Regina said that it's important to not put too fine a point on the financial aspect. We have a fiduciary responsibility but it's also in our stated mandate to maintain or improve educational quality. There need to be measurable things, but we have to be careful attaching a number to it. The challenge of this issue is the level of complexity.

IV. Discussion and Possible Action:

Dr. McMorran mentioned an enrollment decline in the 90's, and that there was no immediate discussion about how soon to close the middle school. There is a consensus about the need for High School and Elementary School. However, when presented with declining enrollment, what about the middle school? He said there are two questions to ask - what is pedagogically sound for the kids and what is fiscally responsible? A Junior High is not a viable option. There is a value in having a healthy community of middle schoolers. How far forward can we look - would we rue not having a middle school? He did a presentation on this issue to the Tri-Board which is on the ER9 website.

Dr. McMorran presented a document - the Adjusted Equalized Net Grand List per Capita (AENGLC), which compares Easton and Redding to other Connecticut towns, and indicates a town's ability to support municipal work. We are comparably near the top, but not at the top. We are most often presented as part of DRG A, but we should look at some distinct demographic features of our towns. The towns we hold ourselves in competition with (those in DRG A, specifically) are far wealthier and have more resources. The short version is that Easton is a unique scenario and it is not easy to make broad comparisons to other towns.

Dr. McMorran said that you want to maintain excellence and whatever changes you make need to have reversibility should enrollment bounce back. He stressed that he is making no recommendations, just providing information. He will tell us about things that are possible, but things he doesn't necessarily feel good about. He suggested that the enrollment projections don't go far enough and that is something for the committee to consider.

Next Steps:

Randy said the committee needs to identify 2-3 projects to begin work on. Numbers around capacity need to be done, viewing enrollment against capacity.

An inventory of the two schools (current room use and set up) is needed. Andy Kachele said that there is a document on the State Education Website that could be helpful. Gabriel Rossi offered to take on this task. He will get construction data from Ed Nagy. Jenny Chieda said she envisions a map of what reconfigured schools would look like. Dr. McMorran also said that there is a poster size layout of both schools.

Dr. McMorran suggested that the committee invite Steve Rowland to come and speak about his findings regarding estimating the cost of moving HKMS kids to Staples. Randy said he would look into having him come for the next meeting.

Regina noted that opening dialogue with the public is important. Committee needs to make known where all the Phase I work is available.

Dr. McMorran suggested that there are other agencies to help with looking into enrollment. Cooperative Education Services (CES) can give an idea of what it would cost to get a consultant.

Regina said that this would be critical information, as Dr. McMorran can't keep crunching numbers for the committee. We have to consider an outside consultant.

Randy said that in terms of looking at moving Central Office to another location, asking the public for money to reconfigure space in another building is a hard sell, because those costs would be hard to recoup. Every option we talk about requires careful financial evaluation.

John Mutuski said the committee should look at what would it be if no action was taken. There are so many variable, so many what ifs.

Randy said we could look at what will happen given what we know has happened historically over the past few years, and where the town might predictably be headed in terms of budget. Whatever is decided there is a cost associated.

A committee member asked how the consideration of putting a bus depot in Easton might factor into this work being done. Randy said he will be the interface between the bus depot and the Long Range Planning Committee.

V. Public Comment - None.

VI. Board Member Comment – None.

VII. Adjournment

Motion: Move that the Easton Long Range Planning Committee adjourn the meeting. Rossi, Wilkes. Approved. Unanimous
The meeting was adjourned at 9:35 pm.

Submitted by,
Claire Wilkes, Committee Member