

**RYE SCHOOL DISTRICT
SCHOOL USE FEASIBILITY COMMITTEE
Thursday, November 9, 2017
8:00 a.m. – Rye Town Hall**

Members Present: Co-Chair Paula Tsetsilas, Co-Chair Peggy Balboni, Jeanne Moynahan, Salvatore Petralia, Paul Goldman, Doran Morford, Gregg Mikolaities, and Katherine Errecart.

Ex-Officio Members Present: James Katkin, Business Administrator SAU 50 and Michael Magnant, Town Administrator.

I. Call to Order

Co-Chair Tsetsilas called the meeting to order at 8:02 a.m.

Co-Chair Tsetsilas noted that this is the last meeting of the School Use Feasibility Committee. She thanked the members for their time and commitment. The feedback from the public meeting was very positive, in terms of the work being thorough, positive and engaging to the community.

Member Goldman stated that he has enjoyed being a part of the committee. Given the complexity and freedom of where all this could go, the committee did a good job of what and what not to pursue. He understands in retrospect how this got started with a warrant article. It was heavily engaged and somewhat conflicted between two kinds of goals. One is what is the right thing to do for the schools from the education and students' standpoint? At this same time, there is a conflict as to what to do with school building use. He continued this is something the School Board could do at any time. Taking all issues out of the picture like space use for the town and the fact that enrollment has declined, a quality approach should be taken for doing the right thing for the schools. All the factors and information that is relevant to that goal can then be brought in. There can be some independency of what the right thing to do is, regardless if the town needs space or not, and regardless of whether enrollment is declining. Someone pinning themselves to declining enrollment will forever be trapped by invalid or valid rationale for what to do because it is a moving variable.

II. Review and Approval of Minutes – October 12, 2017

Motion by Salvatore Petralia to approve the October 12, 2017 meeting minutes. Seconded by Paul Goldman. All in favor.

III. Review of feedback from the Public Meeting held on October 25th.

The committee reviewed the memo regarding feedback in regards to the public meeting, which was received at the meeting and by email.

Discussion on the comments from the public meeting:

Community Preschool:

- There is a lot of support for the preschool in the community. It was seen by some as an opportunity to tuition-in students to higher grades who attended the pre-school.
- There is a risk with the town tuitioning-in students and being responsible for children who may have special needs. There could be costs associated with that.
- There is an application process for the preschool through the SAU 50 District Office. The goal is to maintain typical versus non-typical ratios. At this time, the program is not a full day program but that might be an option in the future. The enrollment cap is per classroom is 10-11 students with 2 sessions.
- Recommendation for a town annual census, which would provide more accurate data on the number of families who have moved in to town and the number of children attending both public and private schools to be used for kindergarten enrollment projections. (*The committee agreed to include this recommendation in the final report.*)

Pre-K through 4th and 5th through 8th Option:

- The option was well received by the community.
- There are some concerns in the community in regards to the emotional readiness of the 5th graders being in the middle school environment. Careful consideration should be given by the administration and School Board on this issue.
- Principals considered this to be a favorable option. The elementary school principal has noted that the 5th graders are ready to move on.
- Superintendent Petralia feels this would be the most seamless option to implement. He also feels there would be some programming benefits to having the 5th graders at the middle school. The grade could be kept self-contained or follow the middle school model approach. This option is favorable for other entities in the town for space to be freed up at the elementary school, such as Rye Rec. This option would allow for Rye Rec to have its own designated space.
- Member Moynahan noted that the current principal of the middle school, Marie Soucy, previously worked at a middle school that was 5th through 8th grades. The school was run very successfully. The 5th graders were segregated and had their own space, which

worked well. Ms. Soucy's experience in this area will be helpful in making the decision on whether or not this is something the community should do.

- The 5th graders will already be at the middle school. This could affect parents' decisions to not send their children to private school and will help with retention.
- Information prepared by Marie Soucy will be submitted with the report in regards to how other schools in New Hampshire, who have a 5th through 8th grade model, run their programs. Ms. Soucy is also researching how middle schools with low enrollment handle their programming and will be submitting the information with the report.
- Member Morford noted this option is fully able to be accomplished with Rye's situation currently. It's a very feasible plan.

Collaboration with other towns:

- A lot of support, specifically with Greenland. There are many social pros to this scenario.
- A public question came up regarding collaboration with North Hampton.
 - Member Morford noted it would not be wise to collaborate with No. Hampton. There is a strong culture of the students moving on to private schools. This would emphasize the idea that middle school is an entrée to private school more than what it already is in Rye.
 - Co-Chair Tsetsilas feels this option has low feasibility. It is a different SAU. Exiting the current SAU would require approval of the district and the State Board of Education. There are a lot of complications from a feasibility standpoint.

K through 8th model:

- A question from the public – Has the committee thought about improved student services that this model could provide because there would be cost savings?
- The cons of this model should be carried through to other models.
- Member Moynahan noted that the elementary school has a fairly large parcel of land but most of it is wet and it cannot be built on.
- Member Morford noted that students by the time they get to 6th and 7th grade, in a K through 8th model, are feeling like they have gone to the same school forever and want something different. The exodus is as much student driven as it is parent driven. Programmatically it can get very complex in running everything in the same building.
- Member Mikolaities noted the land at the elementary school could be built on. It would have to be determined if it could be built cost effectively, however.
- Member Errecart pointed out that some of the research shows that there are not necessarily cost savings with merging the schools.
- Co-Chair Tsetsilas stated this option has many moving parts and variables. There are other ways to solve the problem that are more feasible which could be more short-term cost effective and still continue to offer excellence in education.

Marketing Rye:

- Question from public – Is the product marketable? Is it strong enough the way it exists now to be marketable?
- Who is responsible for a marketing campaign? Would it be the town or the schools?
- Member Goldman noted the quality of the schools are good and provide a good bedrock in which to build a marketing program.
- Co-Chair Balboni stated it would be easy to build a marketing piece. The School Board put together a brochure, which can be posted online on the town's and school's websites. The annual newsletter is also available to be used as a marketing piece. The marketing does not have to be difficult.
- Marketing can also build pride in the town. The schools' and staffs' accomplishments and awards could be more visual on the website.
- Are there ways to tap into certain groups of people who may enjoy living in town? The marketing needs an intentional approach.
- Possible recommendation for a line item in the budget to include some marketing ideas.
- Possible recommendation that the town should consider a marketing committee.
- Member Moynahan discussed the importance of reaching out to people and using network marketing to promote the schools and the town.
- Recommendation that the School Board keep looking at the reasons why the students are leaving. Why do residents feel the students will get a better education somewhere else?
- Outreach may be a better word for marketing and the messaging is important.
- Currently, the elementary schools conduct exit interviews for students who chose not to go on to Rye Middle School. That information is submitted to the School Board.

Retention from elementary school to the junior high:

- Possible recommendation to the School Board to consider using the methodology for student enrollment projections that appeared to have the most accurate results, which was the accumulative average of all the years of kindergarten enrollment.
(There was discussion on the methodology of using live births to project kindergarten enrollment.)
- Develop a written retention plan. Have objectives and goals around the retention plan. Develop tactics to carry out these goals.

Tuition-In Program:

- Overall support in town for this option.
- Preschool is an option for bringing students into the system.
- The option is feasible.
- Can it be offered at a rate that makes financial sense?
 - Member Morford noted that the town does not make money on empty seats. If students can be tuitioned-in at a reasonable rate so families can afford the program, the town will be ahead.

- Member Mikolaities noted that there are many other issues and options that the School Board need to address at this time. There would not be a chance that he would drive his child from Portsmouth to Rye and pay \$10,000. There may be one or two families that will actually do this and there are more things that the School Board needs to tackle.
- Mr. Katkin noted that it costs approximately \$21,000 per pupil cost. He is not sure how they can charge someone from Portsmouth \$10,000 and tell the people in Rye that they are going to make up the other \$11,000. In the past, when students were brought in to Greenland and New Castle, very few came when they saw the cost. They are already paying \$10,000 in taxes to Portsmouth and then have to pay \$21,000 to bring their child to Rye. There is a cost factor that comes in to play for a lot of people.
- The Committee agreed that they did not feel an overwhelming support for the option of tuitioning-in students. There are other areas to focus on and this is not a top priority.

Town Needs:

- There was a public comment that the town should consider working with N.H. Listens or establishing another committee to look at town needs across all departments.
(The committee agreed that this should be included in the final report but under “other comments/suggestions heard from the public”.)
- It was identified that there was a need for a municipal rec program. A question from the public was whether the Rye Rec could execute this program if the school created space.
 - Member Mikolaities noted that the perception in Rye is that rec can run any program that they want; however, rec does not control the space at the schools. Parents in town get frustrated but rec does not have free reigns on the space and this is a problem.
- Other public suggestions;
 - Use the underutilized space at the middle school for a charter school. Co-Chair Tsetsilas noted that this idea presents in-house competition to the current program with varying interests.
(The committee agreed to put this suggestion down as one that was mentioned by the public under “other comments”. The committee does not have the time and expertise to explore this option. This is something that should be addressed by the School Board.)
 - Is the enrollment going to go so low that all the students could be at the elementary school without a major expansion?
Member Errecart stated that the committee looked at where the schools are in terms of capacity if they take into account the fact that the School Board has taken a very intentional approach about smaller class sizes. The capacity that the schools are supposed to be able to serve is based on a State formula related to how many students can be in a class. Rye has taken an intentional approach to have smaller class sizes. Looking at this in terms of the State formula the schools would be at about 60% capacity at this time. However, using the Rye’s formula

for class sizes the schools are at about 75% capacity. It may look like there is more room than there actually is.

Member Morford stated that even if the students could all fit in the same building there would be a question as to whether the education program could be carried out and be innovated in a way that would provide the best education for the students.

Member Moynahan noted there has to be a certain number of square footage per child. When the elementary school was renovated 21 years ago, it was renovated for elementary school size children. The junior high is the same situation. The gymnasium at the elementary school is not a junior high size gymnasium. The elementary school could not be used for all students without a major renovation.

Mr. Katkin stated that it is required by the State to have 50 square feet per kindergarten student. It is 25 square feet for students 1 through 8. The problem is that the classrooms are 825 or 850 square feet. The amount of students per classroom is governed by what the State says per square footage they need to have. If a classroom had 1,000 square feet for a kindergarten class, the most students that could be in the class would be 20. This puts constraints on the town on how many students can be put in a building.

- With some careful planning the town can work with any kind of enrollment and it could be to the town's advantage in regards to programming.

IV. Final Report Review

The Committee reviewed an outline for the final report.

Highlights:

- Executive Summary
- Purpose of the Study
 - Article 3
 - Goals of the Committee
 - Methodology, process, timeline
 - Fundamental drivers
- Data collection
 - Enrollment
 - Secondary research – school consolidation
 - Findings from the schools visited
 - Town space advisory
- School use scenarios considered
 - Criteria
 - Charts
- Conclusions

- Preferred scenarios
 - Kindergarten projections
 - Annual town census
 - Public outreach
- Other considerations outside of the scope of the Committee’s work
- Appendices

The final report will be submitted to the Town and the School Board by December 1st. A presentation will be made to the Board of Selectmen by a representative from the Committee. Members of the School Board will be invited to attend the presentation at the Board of Selectmen’s meeting.

V. Public Comment

Peter Crawford, 171 Brackett Road, spoke in support of the town census. He also spoke on the square footage of the schools versus how many students can be housed in each building. He suggested that the final report give information on how the space in schools are used.

Co-Chair Balboni suggested adding under the data collection what the space requirements are and how it transfers to the schools (perceived capacity).

VI. Reflections of the Committee

Co-Chair Tsetsitlas stated that in terms of the process she thinks the committee followed it naturally. The process led them to two or three solid ideas that the committee would recommend. She feels they have been successful in that area and also in challenging themselves to be open minded with considering varying needs of the community in life stages. She is pleased how this has come together and the individual perspectives of each member.

Member Goldman stated he feels the committee has been successful because they have a lot more insight from when they started, which in of itself is a success. He personally feels it is a success because it is blatantly pointing them in a direction to go. In this case, they went through a process that was aimed at “the right thing to do”, irrespective of enrollment projections or town hall space needs. That is something that clearly came to light as the committee went through this process. Based on the work that was done, the next steps are laid out for the next committee or the School Board. He thinks that should be explicit.

Member Mikolaities commented that to be successful and get something done, the conclusions need to be broken down into things that can happen right away. Success is when progress is made. He would hate to see another report sit and collect dust for another five years.

Co-Chair Tsetsilas agreed. She commented that it could be broken down in to short-term and long-term. The committee does not necessarily have to decide the timeframe. That is something for the School Board to decide. She reiterated it could be broken down into smaller chunks so things can get done.

Member Errecart stated the committee has absolutely been successful. She thinks about the things they have accomplished. Establishing goals, establishing criteria, considering a universe of options and the initial assessment gave them the ability to recommend ruling out a couple of things. That feels exactly like what their mandate was and what was possible within the timeframe they were given. This was an initial assessment. A more robust assessment would be to include the budget implications, the operational implications and potentially secondary research about the academic pieces. She would want to be clear as to what was within bounds for this committee and what happens next.

VII. Next Steps

- Co-Chair Tsetsilas and Co-Chair Balboni will work on writing the report.
- Member Marc Sedam will contribute to writing the final report.
- The draft final report will go out by email to the committee members for final review by Monday, November 27th. The members will have four days to respond with final comments.
- The final report will be submitted to the School Board and the Selectmen on Friday, December 1st.
- A presentation will be given to the Board of Selectmen at a Selectmen's meeting soon following the submission of the final report. School Board Members will be invited to attend the presentation.

Adjournment

Motion by Jeanne Moynahan to adjourn at 10:04 a.m. Seconded by Doran Morford. All in favor.

***Final Meeting of the School Use Feasibility Committee concluded.**

Respectfully Submitted,
Dyana F. Ledger