

**Special Meeting Minutes, "Town Hall"  
Fairfield BoE; December 13, 2018**

**Call to order of the Special Meeting of the Board of Education and Roll Call**

Chairman Christine Vitale called the Special meeting to order at 7:31PM. Present were members Jennifer Leeper, Trish Pytko (arrived 7:57PM), Philip Dwyer, Jessica Gerber, Christine Vitale, Nick Aysseh (arrived 7:45PM), Jennifer Jacobsen, Jennifer Maxon-Kennelly and Jeff Peterson. Others present were RTM moderator Phil Pires and approximately 20 members of the public.

Mrs. Vitale thanked the public for attending and gave a brief synopsis of what topics the town hall meetings would cover. She welcomed RTM moderator Phil Pires, who would act as moderator of the meeting, allowing Mrs. Vitale to participate more freely.

Mr. Pires welcomes members of the public to come speak at the microphone

Kevin Buckley, 273 Alden Street. Had questions about the inequity of athletic facilities at FLHS vs Warde. Scoreboards at Warde are nicer, field is newer, weight room is smaller and sparser at Ludlowe. Asked how funds are distributed. Some sports staff feel that facilities are inferior. Mrs. Gerber said that the Ludlowe turf field is fairly new. A football coach who is also an RTM member has reached out to the BoE with his concerns about Ludlowe facilities. The FPS head of operations has a long list of facilities projects each year and they all can't be done. As a Ludlowe parent, she doesn't think there is as much of an inequity as some may think. Dr. Jones and Tom Cullen are aware of the concerns. In the 19-20 nonrecurring capital projects there is a project proposed for the Ludlowe tennis courts. Mr. Dwyer said that the town and school district have long range facilities plans posted online that detail the improvements that need to be done at all sites.

Kristin Morrison 230 Barberry Road, Southport. Also has concerns about athletic facility equity. Asked about the scoreboard situation at Ludlowe – it doesn't always work well and isn't used for JV and freshman events. Mrs. Gerber asked if the athletic director had been asked about this and when she was told that the athletic director said that it was a BoE decision she clarified that perhaps he meant that central office makes decisions regarding the scoreboard. She suggested asking again.

Ms. Morrison asked how is Kiwanis Field, which is used by the Ludlowe baseball team, maintained? Mrs. Gerber said that that field is managed by the town. Mrs. Vitale suggested talking to the athletic director and headmaster.

Melissa Travis 270 Warde Terrace. Asked about heat in school due to lack of AC in warm weather months. PT/OT rooms in particular need to be considered. Ms. Leeper said that Dr. Jones and Tom Cullen are working on a proposal to figure out the costs of installing AC in all schools that don't have it. That is a long-term plan, so there will also be ideas proposed for having to deal with short term concerns. Mr. Peterson said that other town bodies have raised this issue; it's on a lot of people's minds. Mrs. Vitale said that Jennings is up for renovation in the future and that there will be AC installed then, if not before. Usually AC is installed during renovation projects. Ms. Travis also requested that the Board considers

having the ECC in one building.

**Amity Almond**, 544 Silver Spring Road. Agreed that AC in schools is a problem. Dwight hasn't been renovated and is in rough shape. Split system ACs can cause their own issues. Understands the huge expense but asked that something be done at Dwight to make the air cleaner, or can the timeline be moved up. Mrs. Gerber said that unfortunately projects can't be moved up because there are so many projects and some have run over or taken longer, causing others to be delayed. Building projects take a tremendous amount of time and work and the district has limited funds. Mrs. Vitale said that AC requires electrical upgrades as well, which can lead to a bigger and more complicated project. Air quality in our schools has become a more challenging issue. **Ms. Almond** asked at what point does the district decide that it's a waste of money to continue to invest in schools that are falling apart. Mrs. Vitale encouraged parents to get involved and share with other town bodies. Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly said that once the AC proposal comes out it will require parent support. It will be an ambitious proposal different from past facilities proposals. Mr. Dwyer said that the capital improvements over 10 years totals \$100 million. BoE tries to space projects out per the town's guidance. Mrs. Gerber gave information regarding where the facilities plans are listed online.

**Joy Ross** 682 Beach Road. Prioritization for budgeting. What is criteria for prioritization? Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly detailed the timeline for the budget process, **Ms. Ross** voiced concerns about facilities and the ECC. Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly said that the ECC is being addressed for short term, with the intention of looking at long term plans. Ms. Pytko referenced the district improvement plan. **Ms. Ross** said that the plan need to be constantly updated and reassessed. Ed tech needs to be updated. Mrs. Vitale said that the website is in the process of being updated. The superintendent does update and review the district improvement plan. **Ms. Ross** asked about FEMA – why wasn't Sherman School not knocked down after Super Storm Sandy? Why didn't the district push for a new school building? Mr. Dwyer said that to conform to all FEMA guidelines would be prohibitively expensive. **Ms. Ross** confirmed that it is a financial decision driven by the town that they would not reconstruct Sherman School. She is angry that the town didn't take advantage of government funds after Sandy. Flooding happens in the beach area quite frequently. She suggests that the entire cost of renovating Sherman completely be looked at. Is concerned about kids living through construction. Mrs. Gerber mentioned that after Sandy in 2012 there was no damage to Sherman School. If the BoE and district had asked the town bodies for funding to tear down and rebuild the school they would not have gotten the funding. Mrs. Vitale said that Sherman wasn't damaged in 2012 and that if there was talk about tearing it down she wasn't sure if people would want to rebuild in a flood plain. Mrs. Jacobsen said that she was at Sherman after Sandy and it was a devastating experience for families there and that they were glad to have the school as a community center. Re budget situation – it is hard to determine revenue form the state because we do our budget before we know what the state budget is. The BoE is looking for less traditional forms of revenue to help supplement. As much as people like to come to BoE with concerns they also need to go to the other town bodies. **Ms. Ross** asked how to get other parents involved. Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly said that the Board is constantly looking for parent input and support. Parents need to remain vigilant and engaged but that is hard to do. Please don't wait for someone else to do the advocacy. Mrs. Gerber said that BoE Town Halls are one way to get the public involved. FairTV is helpful

in keeping people informed. Mr. Peterson said that PTAs are a good way to get people involved, but we also need to remember that there are lots of people in town without children in schools.

**Anne Christine Cochran** 11 Pilgrim Lane. Asked about long-term solution for ECC. Mrs. Vitale said that in terms of a long-term goal, the BoE needs to have some discussions about all of the district's facilities. There isn't one location right now that can house the entire ECC program. She sees the ECC playing a role in the discussions about all district facilities. She understands parent frustration. Mr. Aysseh said he looks forward to moving this conversation in the right direction. Hopes to continue the ECC the way it's been, but there are many facilities discussions for the entire district that the Board will be having. Wants to see the most rational and efficient to move this forward. The Board is committed to working on this issue. Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly said that there isn't a facility right now that would work for a short-term solution. The Board needs to discuss long-term plans. Mrs. Vitale said that one criteria for an ECC location is AC, so that limits the search somewhat. We need some answers on some key issues. Doesn't want the Board to come up with a long-term plan that ends up not being long-term. Has confidence in ECC staff. Mr. Dwyer said that the ECC enrollment has doubled – the Board needs to recognize that this increase could continue. “Long-term” isn't just five years. This won't be an easy decision for the Board. There are many projects in line for approval.

**Jerriann Mitchell**. Physical Therapist at ECC. Read a prepared statement regarding the ECC. Asked if there was any flexibility regarding the plan brought forward by Dr. Jones. Voiced concerns regarding many issues that will come up with the ECC location at Stratfield. She is concerned that lots of spaces could be problematic at Stratfield. Worried about equity between sites. Concerned about continuum of services. Wants there to be two equal sites. Understands the focus on next year but is hard to get behind it not knowing what lies ahead. Wants all concerns to be addressed in conversations taking place about long-term plans. Ms. Leeper said that she shares her concerns. The Board is thinking deeply and critically about this. **Ms. Mitchell** is concerned about losing BoE member support if new members come on board. Ms. Pytko said that Board members will be visiting Stratfield site. Mrs. Vitale has visited the Stratfield site already and will go again. Agrees that there are space concerns and she plans to hold Dr. Jones to making adjustments. She had a child at the ECC and understands the need to create a nurturing environment. Will make sure that programs will be separate but equal. Board members will continue to advocate. Mr. Aysseh agrees with Mrs. Vitale. Board is supportive of ECC. Said that he thinks that more people should be educated about what the ECC really is and does for students. Welcomed community involvement. Coming up with a long-term plan in time for the beginning of the 19-20 school year would require a redistricting. This is a multifaceted situation. The Board will continue to advocate for the children and make the best of what we have in the short run. Spoke to the cohesiveness of the ECC community. As this program continues to grow as it has grown already, is a one-site system still going to be the best model and retain the same sense of community, or do we need to look at two equally strong sites? **Ms. Mitchell** said that other districts with more than one ECC site don't have the same flexibility. Even a larger site is better. Mrs. Jacobsen said that she has some follow up questions for Dr. Jones. The full Board wants to hear all of the input from stakeholders. Going forward the Board needs to make

some tough decisions. Ms. Pytko asked for clarification on staff numbers for ECC and said we will need to hire significant staff. Ms. Leeper said that past discussions have focused on facilities but the Board needs to discuss the programmatic piece more. Ms. Mitchell said she appreciates being heard. Mrs. Vitale said that the Board needs to trust staff recommendations.

Joy Ross said that for ECC you need to discuss long term management process for all students. The model of the ECC is not just facilities; it is a program that follows all students through the age of 18. She worries about major issues when 200 SPED students reach high school. Future programming needs to be discussed and factored into the budget.

Frank Sahagian 20 Chelsea Street, Thanked the Board for the opportunity to speak. Thanks Mr. Dwyer for his service. As a taxpayer he spoke to Board goals discussion. Doesn't want Milone & MacBroom to be paid for work without a specific charge. Need to come up with a comprehensive redistricting plan. Mrs. Vitale said there will be a Board meeting where they can discuss ideas in public. Mr. Aysseh said that the Board should have at least one if not more meetings to be able to come up with a charge for Milone & MacBroom. Mr. Sahagian said that the last redistricting was too complicated with too many constraints. Need to discuss whether or not where you go to MS and HS is determined by where you go to ES A 7<sup>th</sup> grade geography class could redraw lines better. Re: racial imbalance – why can't the town hire a lawyer to address this. It should be figured into the redistricting plan. Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly said that we have been discussing this issue for many year and we are not moving quickly. We have avoided pocket redistricting to address racial imbalance. Racial imbalance is in no way the driving force for redistricting. It might be part of the conversation but it is not the focus. Ms. Pytko said that the Board has worked hard to meet the needs of the district. Mr. Aysseh said that re: hiring a lawyer – not sure if that's a wise thing to do, but if the state tries to mandate something that the Board thinks is wrong they may need to revisit. The state isn't coming after us right now. Fairfield doesn't have a problem, it's just that an out of date statute is trying to say we do. Mr. Sahagian asked about the enrollment numbers used for budgeting. Mr. Dwyer said that past practice is that Milone & MacBroom does a one year projection to help plan the budget. Mr. Sahagian thanked the Board for publishing all the enrollment numbers. Younger grades are lower than projected. There is a declining ES enrollment. Mrs. Jacobsen said that overall Milone & MacBroom was off by only about 18 students. Mr. Sahagian said that we have two elementary schools below 300 students. We have a lot of schools for the size of our district. We have comparatively small schools. It costs more to run more schools. Mr. Aysseh said that community schools have been important. Should we make our schools bigger? Mr. Sahagian said that might not be the case, he's just making an observation. More physical buildings cost more. Mr. Dwyer said that Mr. Sahagian has mentioned that we could have fewer elementary schools. Mr. Sahagian said it depends on enrollment. When will we reach the trough? Mr. Dwyer said that enrollment is a series of troughs and peaks. Do we want to close schools only to have to reopen them? The Board does not want to reopen the question of closing a school. Mr. Sahagian said that as a teacher he wanted to comment on the alumni survey. More attention needs to be spent on classroom instruction. He took a survey in his school amongst his fellow teachers regarding experiences with students. Students' academic performance has not improved and many have declined. There has been an increase in struggling learners. It's too much about the

grade a student gets. Work ethic of students had worsened. Curriculum is not always age appropriate. More students with IEPs and 504s. Re: SPED audit –we get consultants who just compare us to other districts. No concrete information to help. The stakeholders don't have information that will help make progress. Audit was basically a data dump. Trying to define SPED jobs is very difficult. We will lose SPED educators and the audit will not help us. Student study skills and spelling are not where they should be. Ms. Pytko has been teaching for many years and the job has definitely changed. She has worked in three districts. There are demands on all teachers. Teachers need to change for student needs. Mrs. Vitale hopes that the Board will get more follow up on SPED audit – she does not think this topic is done. Hesitant to say that now that we have the data we are done.

Katie Flynn . 204 Grandview Road. Thank you for listening to the ECC concerns. Has some concerns of her own regarding the program. Wanted to understand the ultimate goal. Also has a transportation concern – at NSS there are drivers who make the area dangerous for walkers. What is the townwide policy to make walkers safe? Mr. Dwyer mentioned the Transportation Safety Advisory Committee and said that policies should be reviewed before advocating before the Committee. Roads belong to the town, lines are determined by them. Mrs. Gerber said that crossing guards are under the police department umbrella. It is also helpful to talk to RTM members to get everyone on the same page. Mr. Dwyer also mentioned the school security officers – could be helpful to talk to them. Mr. Aysseh said that he is on the Transportation Advisory Board. The police department has a traffic department that handles these types of issues. RTM could also be helpful. Ms. Flynn said that 25 families in the neighborhood are trying to advocate for a Stop sign. Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly confirmed that the issue was more about safe walking than adding students to buses. Ms. Flynn said she was asking about equity between schools regarding safe walking.

Robert Horne Stroll Rock Common. Asked about redistricting – what is the goal? Mrs. Vitale said that there isn't a known plan as of now. Board needs to start discussing how to move forward and find mechanisms to engage the public. Nothing is happening immediately. Mr. Horne asked what does redistricting look like. Mrs. Gerber said that Fairfield talks about redistricting but in recent years there have only been two major redistrictings driven by schools reopening or major space added at a school. She provided some background and context. Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly said that decisions will be made by the Board to move this topic forward. There are compelling educational issues that may warrant redistricting. Mrs. Vitale confirmed that this topic will appear on many agendas and will also be the focus of special meetings. Mr. Dwyer said that the demographer has to give the Board advice but it is hard for the Board to give them criteria to provide that advice without knowing the size of future projects like Mill Hill. It is a complicated situation.

Mrs. Vitale thanked the public for attending and thanked Mr. Pires for moderating.

## Adjournment

*Approved 1/24/2019*

Mr. Dwyer moved/Mrs. Gerber seconded the recommended motion "that this Special Meeting of the Board of Education adjourn." Motion passed 9-0. Meeting adjourned at 9:50PM