

DRAFT Town Hall Minutes
Fairfield BoE; April 30, 2019

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

Chairman Christine Vitale called the Regular meeting to order at 7:30PM. Present were members Trisha Pytko, Jennifer Leeper, Phillip Dwyer, Jessica Gerber, Christine Vitale, Nick Aysseh, Jennifer Jacobsen, Jennifer Maxon-Kennelly, and Jeff Peterson. Others present were BoS member Ed Bateson and approximately 50 members of the public.

Mrs. Vitale welcomed Mr. Bateson and the members of the public.

Mr. Bateson encouraged people to come forward and speak.

Jerriann Mitchell, ECC

Asked the BoE to consider the option of keeping the ECC in one place moving forward and repurposing an elementary school for the ECC. Asked about plan to accommodate growth moving forward. Mentioned concerns about ECC sites in elementary schools regarding safety, distances between classrooms etc. Westport is a great model. Goal is to maximize student learning, asks to be included in the decision-making process. Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly specified that "short-term" for the ECC to her means 1-2 years, not 5-10. She welcomes the ECC staff's continued advocacy. Mr. Dwyer said that regarding the practical issues mentioned – it takes quite a long time to see a building project to fruition. If we are trying to find a single facility for the ECC that will not happen in the short-term. The two-facility option is where the Board is for now. Closing a school to repurpose it for an ECC would potentially pit one group of parents against another. Mrs. Vitale said there are no plans for a committee moving forward. The Board wants to look at the facilities before they decide anything. Not sure if ECC will stay at Warde. Mrs. Jacobsen asked if there was a preference between two sites in elementary schools versus one site at ECC/Warde and one at an elementary school. Ms. Mitchell said that the ECC-Warde site is ideal because it is self-contained. A separate site in a wing of an elementary school would be good. Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly said that the Board has gotten input from staff.

Frank Sahagian, 20 Chelsea Street

Commented on guiding principles for redistricting, said a lot needs to be done before Milone & MacBroom is consulted. Said that Board members appeared to support comprehensive redistricting. Asked about parameters regarding the feeder plan. Is the Board prepared to redraw elementary boundaries. What about guidelines used for the feeder plans. Spoke to perception of high schools being different, said it's divisive. Mr. Peterson said that he hopes for public input, and plans to have all discussion in public. He has been most vocal about wanting a comprehensive redistricting, went through it himself growing up in Fairfield. He thinks that due to demographics this is something we cannot sidestep. Will recall his personal experiences when redistricting takes place. Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly said that the guiding principles have not been changed, only discussions about changing have happened. Ms. Pytko asked the people to weigh in. The Board will vote on the guiding principles before they are given to the consultants. Mrs. Vitale said that the guiding principles came out of prior discussions about elementary school redistricting. Mr. Aysseh said that the Board had

discussed concerns about “handcuffing” the consultants when they are formulating redistricting plans. They want the consultants to have leeway to come up with multiple scenarios. Board has to do their due diligence. Mrs. Jacobsen said that the Board adopted the goal to address multiple facilities issues. Redistricting is one of them. The principles will be voted on in public. Mr. Sahagian asked about the Board timeline. Mrs. Vitale said the Board goal is to have guidance provided for Milone & MacBroom by June, although the Board may decide they are not ready at that time. More public feedback is needed, more Board discussion is needed. Mr. Dwyer said that the Board has not voted on anything yet. For him, providing for 90% occupancy in elementary school is important. His belief is that “everything is on the table” in terms of redistricting. Hopes that the Board looks at the feeder plan for MS and HS.

Gina Hallock, 6 Sommerville Street, works at ECC

Thanked the Board. Understands the ECC situation is untenable. ECC families need the utmost care. Knows the Board will do the right thing.

Larry Kaley, 1162 Jennings Road

Wanted to address the solar carports. CT air pollution is the worst in the eastern US. Fairfield County has problems with ozone. This is a guiding principle to him. Spoke to concerns regarding climate change. The carports will help address these concerns, they will make a positive difference and save money. Wants to reduce the carbon footprint and make a difference.

Matt Ogurick, South Benson Road

Re: the redistricting guiding principles. For his family, walking to school is important. His family moved to Sherman to be able to walk to school. Walkers should remain walkers – that should be prioritized. All principles should be prioritized, especially regarding walking to school. There is anxiety in his neighborhood. All walking neighborhoods should remain so. Referenced “Walking Wednesdays” at Sherman School. Mrs. Vitale said that walking being removed from the discussion came out of concerns that walkers were driving and not walking. But she thinks that, for elementary school, walkers should remain walkers. Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly said that at Sherman there were concerns about cars coming to school every day, which drove the discussion about not considering walkers. She also was considering walkers in MS and/or HS who could walk to not one but two schools. Doesn’t think busing walkers is written in stone. The “draft” of the planning principles changes has not been voted on by the Board. There is more nuance to the discussion than perhaps people understand.

Rabab Hussain Syed Judd Street

Appealed to keeping the ECC in one location. It was an invaluable program for her family. She also supported the solar projects being presented to the Board. There is an opportunity to educate students and provide savings. Mr. Peterson said that he is a fan of solar power but he is concerned about the proposed projects at Burr and Stratfield. He is open to hearing options and finds the savings compelling. Regarding the ECC – it is a treasure, and the staff feedback has been remarkable. The one challenge he has found is educating the public as to what the ECC is. Encouraged people to speak up.

Jim Curley, 185 Springer Road

Spoke to minimizing impact of redistricting. Will the Board examine the social and academic performance impact of redistricting. Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly said that no one is looking at redistricting as being "convenient." The only discussion the Board has had regarding consultants is related to developing plans. Ms. Pytko said that she had not wanted to talk about redistricting but she has seen so many facilities issues and inequity between schools that she feels the Board must look into redistricting. She is concerned about equity in services and facilities. Impact on academic performance should be primary concerns. Mrs. Jacobsen spoke to the previously developed planning principles and their impact on social and emotional concerns. The district does have many experts who can help with this discussion.

Heather Dubrosky, Holland Hill

Holland Hill parent, went to Oldfield School and was redistricted to Sherman. The Fairfield she grew up in is not the Fairfield she lives in now, there have been many changes. Fairfield continues to develop and change. Look at projections of future developments and 8-30g. Holland Hill is an early start school, which impacts working parents. The new addition is wonderful but she believes that HH has only gained two classrooms. Concerned about addition of ECC to HH. Mrs. Jacobsen mentioned her concerns about planning and zoning in town. Fairfield has pulled more construction permits in the past year than it has since the early 90s. Ms. Dubrosky said that no one could have anticipated the subdivision on High Street taking place. Ms. Pytko said that Milone & MacBroom needs to consider 8-30g housing development in any redistricting plan.

Shaun McCormick, 193 South Benson Road

Chose his home because of neighborhood feel and desire to walk to school. Hopes the Board keeps residents' concerns in mind

Theresa Miguel-Stearns 79 Oyster Road

Safety concerns are a reason why some people don't walk to school when they can. She walks to the train station and has had near misses. Biking should be a priority but there are no bike lanes in the beach area. Infrastructure should be improved. Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly recommended contacting RTM members regarding infrastructure. Ms. Miguel-Stearns said that there could be other reasons why parents don't walk to school; the Board should look into this. Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly said it is not up to her to dictate what parents do, but her comments about busing walkers happened within the context of the Sherman building project. Ms. Miguel-Stearns recommended doing a survey. Mrs. Vitale said that there have been discussions coming out of this. Mr. Dwyer said that there has also been a district-wide trend of parents driving students who should be taking a bus.

Jackie Bardenwenger, 35 South Benson Commons

Concerned about redistricting planning principles. Her family wants to remain walkers. Spoke to the importance of neighborhood schools. To move families from a community they chose to live in isn't right. The sense of community is important in Fairfield. Walking to school with her kindergartener is a special time.

Megan Dockam 633 Riverside Drive

Understands the difficulty of the Board's job. Moved to the beach to be walkers to Sherman, doesn't want her children to be on a bus for 30 minutes instead of walking for 10 minutes. Neighborhoods should be kept intact, feeder plans should be as well.

Melanie Ross, 796 Riverside Drive

Sherman parent. Moved from NYC, were walkers there and wanted to be walkers here. Walking to school is a tremendous benefit to her family. There is great infrastructure for walking to school; many families in her neighborhood walk. The community is special. People do look at the value being walkers to middle school and high school as well. Don't put walkers on a bus.

Tina Brown, 340 Merwins Lane

Math teacher at FLHS. Concerns about freshman math class and the fact that only Algebra 1 is offered. She has brought this up before. Students are having problems and something needs to be done. There is a disservice being done to these students. Board needs to go to the administration and ask for change. Mrs. Vitale said she will take this message to the superintendent

Wendy Lien, 429 Riverside Drive

Bought her house because of walkability and community. Has a 5th grader and sophomore, not sure about status of grandfathering. Concerned about social and emotional impact of redistricting. Walkers should be walkers but it's more than that – communities need to stay together. Students walk from HS and MS as well – these were considerations when she bought her house. Mrs. Gerber said that re: grandfathering – the Board can't commit until after there are plans before them. MS grandfathering in 2011 cost the district over \$1 million. Board will need to weigh the impact of not grandfathering with the impact of grandfathering and the associated costs that come with it. Mr. Dwyer said that redistricting won't take place in the immediate future. The size of Mill Hill's expansion will play a role in any redistricting plan. Nothing will happen right away.

Mrs. Vitale said that she believed the Board has heard the concerns of the Sherman community walkers who want to stay there and/or want to remain walkers. In the essence of time she said that the Board understands parents' concerns.

Suzanne Miska, 123 Ryegate Road

In June the Board usually votes on the Superintendent's contract; this past year it did not. She attended the search firm's focus group meeting and was surprised to hear that the Board wasn't asked about Superintendent criteria as a group. Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly said that the agenda doesn't cover personnel issues, Mr. Bateson agreed. Mrs. Vitale said that when the superintendent leadership profile is presented to the BoE on May 7 there will be public comment.

Scott Weisberg 260 Springer Road

New to Fairfield, has redistricting questions, chose neighborhood very carefully. Went

through redistricting. Has question regarding 2016 Milone & MacBroom documents – is this leading the discussion now? Mrs. Vitale said the Board is looking at ECC, WFC and facilities utilization, asking for public input. The plans from earlier on are not the plans the Board will be reviewing, although some may be similar. Sherman is crowded, so you could look to Mill Hill to redistrict, and then Dwight would be impacted and then Burr. Mr. Weisberg asked about the impetus for redistricting. Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly said that regarding racial imbalance – the Board has been grappling with this issue for years but they haven't redistricted. There are other issues regarding space utilization which are driving this discussion. Mr. Aysseh said that his concerns are related to facility utilization. Explained that Holland Hill and Mill Hill projects weren't driven by Milone & MacBroom; they were already part of the district's long-range facilities plan. We need to look at how we are using the space we have added throughout the district. Mr. Weisberg said he thinks it will be hard to solve the racial imbalance issue in Fairfield. Asked about adding portable space. Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly referenced the prior Board's goal to get rid of all portable school spaces. Mrs. Gerber said that portables created a problem for core facilities in schools. Ms. Pytko said there will be different variables factoring into future redistricting plans. Board is looking to make decisions that will last a long time. Mr. Dwyer said that the Board's facilities plans tie into the long-range plans of the town. Mr. Weisberg mentioned the possibility of fundraising to help with facilities issues.

Reini Knorr, 83 Alberta Street

Parent of four current or past HS students. Thanked the Board for their hard work. Pointed out that everyone present is trying to do the best for the students of Fairfield. People should try to avoid different groups pitted against one another. Cohesiveness in a community is important. Thanked Board for support of Fairfield Cares, and spoke to the work of Fairfield Cares. Also supports solar projects.

Will Reagan 132 Charles Street

Asked about transparency of redistricting process, wanted to see a review of redistricting plans. Mrs. Gerber said that there aren't any plans to post yet but past plans and other info on the topic are available on the FPS website. Mr. Reagan said that he hoped for more transparency in understanding the process. Mrs. Gerber said that following Board meetings and minutes and FairTV was helpful. Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly said that as things come up they will be added to the website. Each PTA has a BoE rep who they can and should use for updates. Mr. Aysseh recommended looking at the minutes and recordings to get up to speed. Mr. Dwyer said that the FPS website is a wealth of information. Looking at the BoE Friday packet that is posted every week might be helpful. A summary document wouldn't be brief.

Peggy Macaluso, 322 Riverside Drive

Spoke to her family's experience with Fairfield school facilities and Easton school facilities. Urged the Board to make a concrete decision. In Easton they chose to make an elementary school larger to avoid redistricting. People don't like being redistricted. Programming at schools could change if students are moved around. Cutting classrooms from a project can negatively impact the whole district. Primary goal should be classroom space. Mr. Peterson said that he appreciated the Easton perspective. Concerned about equity between schools. He has heard for years that Fairfield should have stayed with one high school but he

feels that our town's lack of space makes that impossible. Fairfield is deeply developed. Available space is a constraint. Ms. Leeper said that the reason that the Board has advocated for a 504 at Mill Hill is to give the whole district space that will be helpful in the long run.

Marney White, 29 Shoreham Village Drive

Referenced an email she sent to the Board earlier. Advocated the need for an educational consultant to work on any future redistricting plans. Asked about research regarding educational and psychosocial outcomes of redistricting; everything she has found points to negative effects. As an educator and clinical psychologist this concerns her. Mrs. Vitale said there has not been Board discussion about hiring someone from the outside to focus on those issues because the district has many professionals who can be consulted. Before during and after the last redistricting parents and PTAs worked very hard to help with the transition. All schools in Fairfield are wonderful. Ms. White referenced epidemic of mental health problems for students. Mrs. Vitale said that efforts will be made for students to have support. Ms. Pytko spoke to staff helping students transitioning from ES to MS and MS to HS – similar efforts would happen in any redistricting transitions. Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly said that the PTAs can play a vital role in any redistricting for both students and parents. Mrs. Jacobsen said that the Board still hasn't decided on scope and depth of redistricting, and that these topics would be part of the discussions. Trying to think holistically about all levels impacted.

Mary Hogue 165 Stonewall Lane

Thrilled about interest in walking and biking. Advocated for solar projects. Encouraged the public to get involved – the strategic planning committee and PTAs. Students are so well-served in this school district.

Gray Peckham 36 Shoreham Terrace

Three children in the system in all three levels. Concerned about educational impact of redistricting, especially for special needs students. As a Sherman busing family he wants to advocate that they too are part of the Sherman community.

Bonnie Rotelli, 1280 Merritt Street

Made a final plea that ECC needs to be in one location. It's probably inevitable that a comprehensive redistricting will take place. ECC is so important to so many children and families. Repurposing an elementary school will upset some families, but considering this for the ECC is important because they are the most vulnerable population. Delays in fixing the ECC situation have created this situation. Fears the ECC will be dismantled. Please reconsider finding one dedicated space. ECC staff has been so successful. As a Stratfield family, many people are walkers, and many people are bused across town to Tomlinson. Mr. Peterson believes the ECC is a deeply felt issue. Regarding repurposing an elementary school – his concern is that removing an elementary school amount of seats will come back to haunt us later as our population increases down the road. Ms. Pytko says that her daughter attended the ECC and she owes the staff there everything; she has seen firsthand what they are capable of doing there. Fears that splitting the program will result in equity. Also worried that kids will be pitted against one another. Is well aware of the issues before the Board.

Bob Smoler, President FEA

Regarding managing change. Asked the Board to consider evaluating the impact of change on existing programs. There needs to be a holistic mechanism to evaluate change. Need help with operational change management. Come up with principles regarding holistic management of change – a person, a committee. Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly said she is very interested in pursuing with the interim superintendent some time to reflect on all of the changes. We don't have a COO but we do have many experts in the district who can help examine the changes that have taken place and the impact of those changes. Mr. Smoler referenced implanting initiatives with fidelity.

Lindsay Swan Youngs, 348 Veres Street

Sherman parent. Zoned for busing but always walks or drives. Her third child will go to Sherman with an IEP and she is concerned about the negative impact that redistricting would bring.

Ryan Young, 329 Shoreham Village Drive

Spoke to data, operational efficiency and subject matter experts. Worked in educational technology. Concerned about data not being properly reported and correlated. Operational efficiencies – school registration process can be streamlined. Subject matter experts could be valuable in the redistricting process.

Gina Dignan, 58 Clinton Street

Works and lives in Fairfield. New employee to FPS. Referenced the draft of the revisions of the draft principles. There is a need to explain "why" – what is the goal, where is the timeline. Need to improve transparency. Having an educational consultant to help with redistricting would help, as teachers – elementary teachers in particular – are stretched thin.

Mark Joyella, 64 Shoreham Village Drive

Two children, one at Sherman and one soon to attend. Worried about redistricting. Questioned removing the guiding principle about considering boundaries, not crossing main roads. Understand what the criteria means to kids. Mrs. Gerber said that students today already do cross main roads every day because there is only one school south of Post Road, so the beach neighborhood feeds into three elementary schools already. Mr. Aysseh said that his family crosses Post Road and 95 every day going to elementary school and his son has had a wonderful experience in his school. For this guiding principle he felt that it was necessary to address the fact that we can't avoid crossing main roads. Takes public comment very seriously, and he feels very strongly about working for the needs of all students in the district. Mr. Peterson said that the district can't look at reopening Oldfield as an elementary school for a number of reasons. Ms. Leeper said that she too will have to cross Post Road with her children to go to elementary school. Mindful of not setting rules that don't apply to all students.

Andrew Martschenko, 817 Riverside Drive

Sherman School has a huge number of walkers. That's why his family moved there. Spoke to disruption -- did basic math of walking to school versus taking the bus. Walking each way is

nine minutes; busing each way is 30 minutes. All this additional time will have a negative impact and create disruption. There are degrees of disruption. Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly said that she appreciated the absolute civility of the conversation that has taken place throughout this meeting. Mrs. Vitale said that as the adults in the room we can help minimize stress and anxiety with any change that may take place. Nobody wants to disrupt the lives of kids. Please stay engaged.

Mr. Bateson thanked the public for their participation.

Mrs. Vitale thanked Mr. Bateson for moderating.

Adjournment

Mr. Aysseh moved/Mr. Peterson seconded to adjourn the meeting. Motion passed 9-0.
Meeting adjourned at 10:42PM.