

**Special Meeting Minutes
Fairfield BoE, October 20, 2015**

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

Chairman Philip Dwyer called the Special meeting to order at 7:35PM. Present were members Eileen Liu-McCormack, Marc Patten, Donna Karnal, Jessica Gerber, Philip Dwyer, John Convertito, Paul Fattibene, Jennifer Maxon-Kennelly and John Llewellyn. Others present were Superintendent Dr. David Title and approximately 75 members of the public.

Business Items

Redistricting Committee Report

Mr. Dwyer reviewed the purpose of the Special Meeting - to discuss the Redistricting Committee Report and then hear and dialogue with the public. He asked those with public comment to maintain the 3 minute rule.

Mr. Convertito said the first priority of the committee was to create guidelines, as this was a step that was recommended by the consultant. The guidelines are prioritized, and were finalized at the previous meeting that was held at Sherman. He read through each of the 8 guidelines and took questions from the Board.

Mr. Patten noted a typo for guideline #1; the word “boundaries” should be added to “natural and man-made.”

Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly questioned what the guidelines had been edited from, whether they were in priority order, and if any of the guidelines were controversial. Mr. Convertito said the committee had edited the guidelines from the previous meeting. They were in priority order, and most of the discussion was on headroom capacity. Some members felt that headroom should be determined by the consultant and others felt it was a programming issue.

Mr. Llewellyn asked what changed on this list versus the one from several years ago. Mr. Convertito referenced the 2013-2024 facilities plan, and said page 1-3 was the take-off point.

Mr. Dwyer added that the original facilities plan was adopted in 2010.

Mr. Llewellyn wanted to know what changed and whether Principle #1 was currently being violated. Mr. Convertito said the committee drafted its own list of guidelines, but did reference the facilities plan. The consultant would determine if #1 was being violated, but is currently addressing only the racial imbalance. The committee might piggyback on that as it relates to redistricting. Mr. Llewellyn asked if the consultant had been engaged to only work only on racial imbalance and asked if the consultants would be considering capacity.

Dr. Title said the consultant is performing preliminary work as described in the previously provided proposal; Phase 1 will focus on the racial imbalance, but that may affect capacity at multiple schools. This will take several months and will include updated projections on a per-school basis. The consultants are working on proposals for the Board’s review and approval, prior to the April CSDE meeting. Capacity will be considered as it relates to racial imbalance.

Mrs. Liu-McCormack asked what the state would do if racial imbalance cannot be solved, and what is the recourse if we don’t solve it? Dr. Title said the problem can be solved either voluntarily or involuntarily. One of the voluntary solutions is to make the school enticing in some way, both Greenwich and West Harford created new buildings and/or renovated schools for this purpose. There has been some success with the Pre-K program but it hasn’t helped enough. He said he wasn’t sure of the consequences for non-compliance, but he would not recommend being out of compliance with a state statute.

Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly said previous Board members have suggested exactly that. She clarified that the guiding principles are for 2 different points of focus and separate issues: racial imbalance and redistricting. Mr. Convertito said that was

correct, the guidelines are for redistricting, whether it is done for racial imbalance or capacity. If the Board decides to redistrict, the same consultant should be used so as to not replicate expenses; the data would already have been gathered. Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly asked about the headroom capacity and whether it was just for the elementary level. Mr. Convertito confirmed that it was and said the consensus was that it would be in the Board's purview to decide the headroom capacity. The consultant mentioned that the typical guidelines are at 85-90%.

Mr. Llewellyn asked for more information on the middle-school redistricting that was done a few years ago as it related to fill issues at Woods; he wondered whether that should be added to the guidelines in order to not forego reimbursement due to vacancies. Dr. Title said the reimbursement for FWMS was for a different purpose. Mr. Llewellyn asked if there is a risk of not receiving reimbursement for Riverfield. Dr. Title said no, the new projections will have no impact. State reimbursement happens on a rolling basis; expenses are incurred and then filed; the Board must also vote on whether to accept the project as complete, after which the state audits the project.

Mr. Dwyer asked if the guidelines will only be used for the consultant, and wanted to confirm that they will not replace those in the Long Range Facilities Plan. Mr. Convertito said these guidelines don't supplant the facilities plan guidelines. These guidelines should be strictly used for the moving of students from one school to another.

Mrs. Gerber said redistricting is a sensitive topic and asked whether there was any truth to following rumors: (1) that Riverfield will be used for a Therapeutic Day Program, and (2) regionalization; allowing students from other towns to attend our schools that have excess capacity. Dr. Title said no to both. The therapeutic day program would need its own facility; it has been discussed a couple of years ago as a possible way to address some of the high costs of outplacement, and that action on that idea has been shelved. Regionalization has never been discussed and is not in the cards. The legislature is, however, pushing to regionalize services to be more efficient and save money.

Mr. Patten confirmed that the consultants are fully aware of the redistricting committee's charge and will take that into consideration when reviewing racial imbalance. With regard to Mr. Llewellyn's question on planning principles, the redistricting committee reviewed several planning principles including Mr. Kery's guiding principles from a long-range planning subcommittee; close to 16-20 various guidelines were reviewed.

Mr. Llewellyn asked if there was a charge to change the feeder pattern. Mr. Convertito said no.

Mr. Fattibene asked if there was a requirement to report unoccupied seats to the state. Dr. Title said no. There is a facility survey that is done. Mr. Cullen agreed, there is no statutory requirement to report unused capacity.

Mr. Dwyer said this is a first read, and these principles will return to the November or December meeting.

Mrs. Liu-McCormack clarified that the consultants were retained to study racial imbalance; if they were to do a full redistricting study, they would have to be further retained. She also mentioned that some were confused over the voter redistricting and clarified that the voter redistricting is completely different than the school redistricting. Dr. Title agreed; the voting redistricting is completely separate from this issue.

Mr. Dwyer said the meeting would continue as a town-hall meeting, with public comment and Board interaction. He would moderate, rather than reply, and would hold his comments to the end of the meeting. He also reminded speakers to mind the three minute time limit.

Mrs. Gerber asked speakers to also write their name on a sign-in sheet, as provided at the table.

Matt Hutzelmann, Pansy Road: asked if Redistricting Committee could be dissolved. Doesn't understand why redistricting discussion is taking place, no one wants it. Holland Hill needs space. His children are walkers to OHS, he wants it to stay that way. Mr. Dwyer explained that this is a Special Meeting, so an agenda item cannot be added to tonight's meeting. Mr. Fattibene had a point of order – asked if this meeting is setting a precedent to start having a

dialogue with members of the public. Mr. Dwyer stated that this special meeting is similar to two previous meetings that had a “town hall” style. Mr. Dwyer asked Mr. Fattibene asked if he wanted to overturn the ruling of the Chair. Mr. Fattibene asked if this is setting a precedent. Mr. Dwyer said they should move on and listen to the public. Mr. Patten said that the committee had already had questions about dissolving the committee. The committee needs to give the consultants looking into racial imbalance some criteria for their work. Mr. Fattibene said that no one likes redistricting, but the elementary school population has declined. We need town funding to renovate Holland Hill, but there is no guarantee that we will get funding. We need to have a plan. At some point the town may say they don’t want to pay anymore. Renovating every school to a 504 capacity may get us to a place where we won’t get funding. Mrs. Gerber said that Holland Hill needs renovation and expansion. Going from a 462 to 504 plan doesn’t cost so much that we shouldn’t do it. Other town officials support a 504 for Holland Hill.

Greg Jackson 61 Longview Avenue. Concerned about conversations centering around race. We are looking at a socioeconomic disparity. Need to look at what the maps tell us. The northwest and southwest corridors of town will be less impacted by redistricting. Need to reverse disparity amongst our schools. We need to look at equity in the services being provided to all of our town’s students. All schools should be equitable. Mr. Patten said that if we had \$100 million available he would put AC in all schools and build every school to 504, but the reality is, we have a waterfall chart and a plan that we need to stick to. Holland Hill and Mill Hill are next on the list, we know we have to do them. Mr. Jackson said that children today shouldn’t pay for mistakes of the past. He realizes there aren’t unlimited funds. Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly said we need to look at deficiencies in our system. Neighborhood schools are important. Holland Hill has many walkers, that needs to be factored into decisions. Mrs. Liu-McCormack said that everyone on the Board is in agreement that Holland Hill and Mill Hill need renovations. Racial imbalance is beyond the Board, it is related to state statute, we need to look at this issue. A real solution is ideal. There are people being bused to schools far away, it is hard to please everyone. Mrs. Gerber clarified that most elementary schools do not have students being bused all over the place; that middle school and high school bus rides are longer because of here schools are located.

Ann Harvey, 363 Hemlock Road. Wants to thank the Board for wasting time on redistricting as it has awakened parents. Believes subcommittee was formed by Board members to do their due diligence. She does not believe this is about racial imbalance. Other town bodies want the renovations and expansions to move forward. She thanked board members’ for their lack of civility and questioned Mr. Fattibene’s hidden agenda. Mr. Fattibene said he has always been an advocate for public comment. He does not have a hidden agenda. Is concerned we will run out of money before we have the chance to get all of our schools where they need to be. He is worried about budgets being cut. Ms. Karnal said there is an issue about racial imbalance so we should look at redistricting as well. She voted for Holland Hill to go first even though she is a Mill Hill parent. Every school needs something done to it. Need to figure out where to get money. Mrs. Gerber clarified that we have a long range plan and a waterfall plan. Understands concerns about costs but we do have a plan. Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly said that Holland Hill was always supposed to be first, ahead of Mill Hill. In concerned that racial imbalance issue is being conflated with redistricting committee’s work. They are two separate things. The operating budget and the budget for school projects are two separate things. Other town bodies are on board with moving Holland Hill forward. There’s nothing capricious about this. Mrs. Gerber reminded everyone of the committee’s purpose, which has no mention of racial imbalance. Mr. Llewellyn read letter from the state from May regarding racial imbalance, and discussed how after that letter was received there were discussions in June regarding redistricting. Six or seven Board members mentioned redistricting. This is our fiduciary responsibility. Mr. Dwyer set up the committee. You can’t strip out racial imbalance. Mr. Fattibene said that there is a waterfall chart but we don’t have the money until it is approved. Mr. Convertito said that the placeholders were for 462 and 441. Redistricting will not

solve the problem of space issues. Every school we have renovated has come up to a 90% or higher capacity. This is a waste of time.

Tina Brown, 35 Quaker Lane. Understands frustration. Members of the public are misinformed. Board members have all said they are concerned about Holland Hill. Mrs. Liu-McCormack wanted to express appreciation that members of the public recognize that Board members spend a large amount of time on their work.

Susie Byrnes, Fairfield. Relieved that redistricting came up as a topic. In 2004 there was a redistricting done and it isn't a viable plan. Redistricting took place again in 2010 and with pre-K. There are lots of options that should be looked into for redistricting. Many children are bused all over town. It's false that no one wants redistricting. Talk to all the parents, this meeting wasn't publicized well. Mrs. Gerber said the 2010 redistricting was for all MS students because space was added. Understands that the long bus rides are difficult. Mr. Convertito said he has limited scope for his committee's charge. If we want to do a full district-wide redistricting then there has to be a different charge. Mr. Fattibene stated that there is more criteria for walkers as to whether or not there are sidewalks. Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly said that fiduciary responsibility, and filling seats was the criteria for forming the committee. There is a difference between neighborhood elementary schools and middle schools. Buildings aren't where they would be most convenient. Sense of community in elementary schools is vital. Mrs. Byrnes said that her neighborhood doesn't have a neighborhood school because it was taken away. Not everybody has a neighborhood school, from her perspective. It doesn't seem right. There is pre-K at Dwight and Burr, they should be looked at. Need to look at everything. Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly said that the ad hoc committee is looking at things only for space capacity issues. Whole Board or perhaps another subcommittee may need to look at racial imbalance, but not this ad hoc redistricting committee. Mrs. Liu-McCormack said it's appreciated that someone is saying that they want redistricting. Different people are experiencing different things. It's presumptuous to only take one perspective. Someone will be affected for each redistricting. All the information should be considered. Maybe a new commission statement needs to be written.

Trudi Durrell, Woodcrest Road, Fairfield. Redistricting did not first come up in May or June. At February 24 meeting the topic was mentioned several times. Redistricting as an idea happened in February and afterwards, not just after racial imbalance letter in May. Is concerned about constantly talking about redistricting and pairing the issue with Holland Hill and Mill Hill. Both schools require a core facilities upgrade whether you redistrict or not. Mrs. Liu-McCormack has been incredibly impressed by the Holland Hill community, it was quite a showing of solidarity. It has been recognized and heard. She thinks the Board gets it, the core upgrades needs to happen. Mr. Patten has followed school projects and the waterfall chart for many years. Holland Hill is a priority for him. Mr. Llewellyn believes the core facility upgrades at Holland Hill need to occur. Minutes from 2010 show that someone mentioned the importance of balancing K-12. Need to be responsible to taxpayers. Need to look at different possibilities before we spend \$25 million. Maybe we should get portables for Holland Hill now. Mr. Convertito wants to get ed specs going for Holland Hill, doesn't want to lose a year for Holland Hill. Portables do not help. Even if we eliminated pre-K at Burr and Dwight we would not have the seats. Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly said that redistricting first came up during discussions about Holland Hill and Mill Hill. Everyone agrees about core upgrades, but question remains about expansion. The Board hasn't voted on the planning principles yet, so they could change. Some areas of town do not have neighborhood schools, which she understands, but she supports the idea. Discussion that has taken place at this table is whether or not we expand Holland Hill and Mill Hill, or instead move students from those schools. She wants to make sure the public understands. Mr. Llewellyn says there is excess space at some schools that we need to look at. Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly says question is regarding expansion versus redistricting. Mrs. Durrell wanted to point out that projections used for Holland Hill are old, and that their school has

bucked all enrollment projections. Also need to consider that Holland Hill is an early start school, which redistricting could impact. Mrs. Gerber said that the Holland Hill enrollment projections put them at 85-90% capacity that consultants discussed.

Pamela Iacono, Phyfe Road. Has been involved as a member of the public and on the BoE in making sure that there aren't short term fixes that end up being more costly. Is frustrated that we are still having these questions and problems about space. You need 504 at Holland Hill, that's what other town leaders have said. Read a letter from Majority leader and Deputy Majority leader on the RTM regarding advocating for 504 schools. Mr. Fattibene said that he was an advocate for proper school space. He remembers some elected officials cutting the BoE budget. He said that 40 members of the RTM need to sign off on projects, not just 2. Wanting it is not getting it done. Concerned about budget cuts. Mrs. Iacono stated that it is very different looking at operating budget and capital requests. RTM only needs a majority of only 21 to approve a project.

Adam Kane, 1084 Unquowa Road Is an educator at a magnet school in NY state, has been there 18 years, and redistricting has never been brought up in his district. Having a magnet school helps with racial imbalance. Important to have flexibility for space, which his district utilized when there was an emergency. Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly said that the notion of flexibility is an integral part of guiding principles, which is why she supports them. We need headroom. Need to think long-term and avoid costing ourselves more money by not understanding our history. Mr. Kane Is concerned about timing of vote on planning principles versus when the BoE election takes place. Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly stated again that there are two separate issues – racial imbalance, and then also possible redistricting plan that comes out of the ad hoc committee. They should not be forced together. The public should speak out if they disagree with the guiding principles. Mr. Convertito said that the Board has to pass the guiding principles for both themselves and also for the racial imbalance consultants. We need to talk about flexibility and contingency. Mrs. Gerber mentioned the past situation at OHS with PCBs and the possibility of having to temporarily remove the students from the school, and said it illustrated how little space we have. Mr. Fattibene said that racial imbalance and potential redistricting are intertwined. There are different phases in the consultants' plan. Charge of the committee doesn't specifically mention racial imbalance but needs to be factored in to the decision making process. Mrs. Liu-McCormack said that she agreed with Mr. Fattibene and said that the criteria the committee is discussing is applicable for both the redistricting question and racial imbalance. Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly said that the ad hoc redistricting committee is not considering racial imbalance in its work.

Julie Gottlieb, Applegate Road, RTM deputy minority leader. Has seen Stratfield go through the space issues that Holland Hill and Mill Hill now experience. The issue of school space has been around for years, and we are now hearing the same things again. The RTM has supported capital projects over the years, they have been approved. There has been support for Holland Hill and Mill Hill at the capital planning workshop, we have missed an opportunity. Mr. Patten said Holland Hill and redistricting are not related. Mr. Fattibene agreed that the town has been supportive of education, but not every project has been supported – Oldfield for example. In the past the "pod" structure has been approved instead of brick & mortar. Getting the funding is not a guarantee. Mrs. Gottlieb thanked Mr. Convertito for his service.

Tim Kery, 7 Green Acre Lane. Spoke to the history of facilities issues in Fairfield. Concerned about Board members stating things clearly and accurately. Happy to hear that Holland Hill is a priority for the Board, asks that they support it as a 504 school. Think of long-term perspective for school projects – 20-30 years of ebbs and flows. Redistricting happens when schools open and close. Consider planning principles, which help you avoid problems of the past. Mrs.

Liu-McCormack thanked Mr. Kery for historical perspective. Mr. Fattibene said he appreciated Mr. Kery's work and advocacy. Mr. Patten thanked Mr. Kery for his work.

Gary Corrigan, Fairfield. Asked about rumors saying that Dwight would be shut down. Mrs. Liu-McCormack said she had never heard of that. Mr. Patten said he didn't see it was in the realm of possibility, had never come up as a point of discussion. Mrs. Gerber didn't see how it could happen. Addressed issue of "empty seats", but said that looking at the number of sections was more important. A 504 school doesn't mean that there are just 504 seats waiting to be filled. Mr. Fattibene said he'd never heard that Dwight would be closed. Thought that lines could be tweaked to balance things out more. Five schools have been renovated, and many have capacity, so perhaps some tweaking can be done to balance things out. Never considered closing a school, he advocates for neighborhood schools. Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly had heard that Dwight could be affected by racial imbalance, but not that it would be closed. If headroom number is not considered to be 90% then perhaps it is premature for anyone to assure the public that a school will not be closed. Mr. Corrigan said it's one thing to redistrict but another to actually close a school. Mr. Convertito said that the committee did not discuss closing a school. Closing Dwight would mean busing children large distances. Core facilities at Dwight need to be upgraded.

Sarah Weiland Hill Farm Road. Heard rumor that Dwight is going to be closed to be an ECC and offices. Believes that even those who don't walk to school still want to stay there. Addressed confusion as to what the situation in regarding redistricting, racial imbalance and Holland Hill. Doesn't understand why the Board is continuing to look at redistricting. Mr. Convertito said that his understanding is the consultant for racial imbalance will be looking at redistricting as a possible way to address racial imbalance. The ad hoc committee is in place because some Board members did not want Holland Hill and Mill Hill to be approved as 504 school projects. He made a concession to approve and be on the ad hoc committee to look at the feasibility of redistricting. Mrs. Weiland says she understands looking at redistricting in regards to racial imbalance, but doesn't understand the point of redistricting committee. Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly said that the conversation on facilities started last September. All Board members agree that Holland Hill and Mill Hill need core upgrades, the difference of opinion lies in the amount, if any, of expansion of those schools. Mr. Dwyer did not advocate for redistricting, but because enough Board members kept bringing up redistricting as an option instead of adding space, he, as Chair, formed the ad hoc committee. Mrs. Weiland said that the goal should be long-term planning. Ms. Karnal said we don't have the money to do all of the projects, that's the issue. Mr. Patten said he agreed to be part of the ad hoc committee to make sure things were done appropriately, he is not in favor of redistricting. There were discussions about scaling back the Holland Hill and Mill Hill building projects, and to see if those numbers work, the Board had to look at redistricting. Racial imbalance is a separate situation. Mrs. Liu-McCormack wanted to clarify that at first the committee was going to hire a consultant, but then it turned out that the Superintendent could only be the one to hire a consultant, and said that the commission statement changed somewhat. Mr. Fattibene said in terms of why redistricting now – no redistricting is smooth, he hates redistricting. Need to look at headroom, flex space. Enrollment has dropped, if you wait too long after enrollment drops you have budgetary issues and funding issues where you may need to close a school. Not addressing issues now postpones possibly difficult decisions. Mrs. Weiland said doing one large construction project makes more sense than doing smaller ones. Mr. Llewellyn said that he's hearing that some Board members are saying this was all done to get the waterfall approved. We have slightly declining enrollment, we have closed schools in the past. Maybe 504 is too big. Need to do our fiduciary duty. The public has been whipped up when they didn't need to be. If we build everything out and then need to close that's a problem. Need to work with facts. Mrs. Gerber said it's important to look at the long range facilities plan – only Holland Hill and Mill Hill are slated to

become 504 schools. Mr. Llewellyn said that the verbalization has been for all 504 schools. Mr. Convertito said all 504 was not verbalized at the Board table; members of other town bodies have said that.

Lisa Havey, 216 Longview Avenue. Talked to points of neighborhood schools and Holland Hill being a Title One school. Please disband redistricting committee. Title One funds go to schools; if you redistrict students out of Holland Hill you could conceivably have students no longer receive breakfast under federal funding, and they may not have other programs at a new school. Try to keep neighborhood schools. It's not the Board's job to figure out the best possible solution to deliver the programs to students. Other Boards decide about how to fund. Mrs. Gerber agrees about importance of neighborhood schools. We don't have space in enough of our schools, it's a slippery slope, especially with feeder plans. Mrs. Havey thanked Mr. Convertito for taking on the committee, and thanks to Mr. Fattibene for his service.

Mr. Dwyer said he thought that as Board chair it was his responsibility to form the ad hoc committee because many Board members brought it up. He himself is not in favor of pocket redistricting. Building capacity is important to him. Each future Board needs to make their own decisions, they are not bound by what previous Boards did. A majority of the other town Boards need to be convinced that proper facility expansions are necessary.

Mr. Llewellyn thanked Mr. Fattibene for his years of experience. He has insights in the history of the district. He will be truly missed and has been an invaluable asset to the Board and the community.

Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly thanked Mr. Convertito. He has given his time and effort in myriad ways as an advocate for children, schools and our district. His experience as a PTA member and with different facilities committees has helped the district.

Mr. Dwyer said that he and Mr. Fattibene have had many good conversations, and he will miss him.

Mr. Fattibene said that he had always wanted to be on the BoE. He and his children both went through FPS – the system was good and is good. He has tried to be realistic and practical. We have been lucky that the town has for the most part been supportive of education. He will continue to support education.

Mr. Convertito thanked Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly for her words. He had thought his children would go to private school, but he and his wife chose to have their children attend public schools. He has made it his mission to get rid of every portable building in our schools, they are close to that goal. Thanked Jeff Steele, Pam Iacono, Kevin Kiley, Jim Walsh. Got advice from Jim Lee and Tom Flynn regarding what is important in a BoE member.

Mr. Convertito moved/Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly seconded to adjourn the meeting. Motion passed 9-0. Meeting adjourned at 11:0PM.