



PLANNING & BUILDING COMMITTEE

Merrimack School District
<http://www.isone.com/~merrpbc>

Minutes
January 17, 2003

Present: K. Powell, T. Koenig, S. Heinrich, W. Morrison, C. Morrison
Guest: School Board member D. Powell

W. Morrison called the meeting to order at 7:15 PM. He announced that “Issues Concerning the New School Proposal” was the only agenda item. He said the committee had been invited to participate in a special School Board Work Session on January 20th. This work session would be informal and would allow time for public comment. He indicated the School Board intended to vote on the new school proposal at their regular meeting on January 21st.

Population Projections: W. Morrison explained to T. Koenig and K. Powell that the committee had been provided with a corrected population projection sheet. The projections indicate that there is a slight downward trend in population. However, he noted that the district has a history of cyclical trends with rises, followed by slight declines, and then increases. Committee members noted that these trends may be tied to the economy.

Kindergarten: The question was raised whether kindergarten is driving the need to pass a new school. D. Powell noted that this is the last year to receive kindergarten funding. However, he felt that a new school is needed regardless of the kindergarten issue.

Middle School Compliance Issues: D. Powell told the committee it was his opinion that passage of a new school in April would satisfy the deadline for compliance issues. However, he noted that Merrimack could be a test case on whether, and how much, funding is withheld for non-compliance if a new school is not passed.

Middle School Renovations: S. Heinrich stated that he thought that passage of funds for renovations at the current middle school could be put off until April 2004. He noted that none of the proposed renovations could be done until summer, 2004. He suggested renovations might be funded through a capital reserve fund, the interest on the new school bond or individual warrant articles - all of which would only require a majority vote. C. Morrison noted that Superintendent Chaifery has stated that if renovations don't pass, the building would be inconvenient and uncomfortable, but that appropriate education would still continue.

New School Options: W. Morrisons summarized the new school options being considered:

1. 1,000 student school for grade 7/8, cost \$18.7 million

2. 875 student school for grade 7/8, cost \$17.6 million
3. 850 student school for grade 5/6, cost \$15.5 million

The committee noted it had concluded in its original October 2000 report that the new school should be for grades 7/8, not grades 5/6. The committee had revisited this issue with the same conclusion in its December 2001 update. Specifically regarding the current proposal, committee members noted that an 850 student school was not large enough to accommodate the expected population, the school as shown was not designed for the upper elementary curriculum of three person teaching teams with one large instructional space as had been proposed by the administration, and that the building as designed looked like major renovations would be needed to convert the building to a 7/8 school at some future date.

The committee discussed the benefits of staying with the originally planned 1,000 student grade 7/8 school. These included credibility, smaller school nearly full at opening, and curriculum benefit of both grades having 4 five teacher clusters. The committee expressed concern that the voters will believe that the original proposal was not what was really needed and will also wait to see how small a school the School Board will settle for - as a result, nothing will pass for several years. The committee also noted that the projections indicate that there will be at least 800 students between the two grades. However, while this would appear to be growing room in an elementary school, it is not sufficient in a middle school configured with 5 person teaching cluster teams. In addition, the projected size of each grade is basically the same size. Building a school for 875 students means seven 5 person teaching clusters or one grade having 4 clusters and one grade having 3 clusters. Another possibility would be for each grade to have 2 clusters with 5 teachers and 2 clusters with 4 teachers. This is currently being done at the middle school in response to large class sizes but was done as a temporary solution to a space problem and is not considered an ideal configuration. The committee felt that the new school should not start out with a space problem (how to determine clusters) to solve at the outset. The committee also noted that the difference between the originally planned school and the downsized one is about \$1 million dollars or only \$50,000 per year for 20 years and that interest rates are low at present. The larger school would meet both short and long term needs as well.

S. Heinrich made a motion, seconded by C. Morrison, to recommend that the school district

1. Propose a 1,000 student grade 7/8 middle school and
2. Put off renovations for at least one year.

The motion passed 5-0.

On a motion from K. Powell, seconded by S. Heinrich, the committee voted unanimously to adjourn at 8:55 PM.

Respectfully submitted,