



PLANNING & BUILDING COMMITTEE

Merrimack School District

<https://www.sau26.org/domain/23>

Minutes

November 13, 2024

Present: K. Bernier, G. Perry, S. Albuquerque, A. Santoriello, F. Rothhaus, T. Groff and School Board liaison L. Rothhaus

Also Present: Chief Educational Officer B. Olsen, and Assistant Superintendent for Business M. Shevenell

S. Albuquerque called the meeting to order at 7:06 PM.

Public Comment

S. Albuquerque stated that there were members of the public in attendance and asked if any of them had comments to share with the Committee. No one did, but S. Albuquerque said that he would offer other opportunities to make comments or ask questions as appropriate during the meeting.

Central Office proposal

M. Shevenell told the Committee he had gotten new price quotes from Eckman and Hutter for an 11,000 square foot building and gave an updated presentation, which included a detailed Central Office construction timeline.

- The timeline indicates that, if the project passes in April, prep work including surveys, final design and construction plans will be completed, site plans and permits will be obtained so the project could go out to bid next January with construction starting April 2026 April and lasting about a year.
- Additional costs include engineering, technology, electrical, legal, and other administrative issues which have resulted in a new average cost estimate of \$6.3 million.
- The District has now received the Fire Marshall's report detailing several life safety issues in the blue and green buildings which need to be corrected as soon as possible.

S. Albuquerque asked for comments from the public.

Brian Trant (S. Baboosic Lake Road) asked how the current buildings and this newly proposed building benefits the public, i.e. School District.

Members explained centrally locating the various administrators of the District in the same building allows for more efficient workflow and communication among administrative staff as

well as better communication with the public.

Shayne Lester (Button Drive) told the Committee he thought that meeting children's needs was more important than meeting staff needs. He said his children are suffering in schools without air conditioning.

Stephanie Lester (Button Drive) told the Committee that she felt that the elementary school classrooms are overcrowded.

B. Olson explained that elementary class sizes in the District are between 18 – 20 students. He said state regulations allow up to 30 students per class in grades 3 – 5 and also state that schools should strive for 25 or fewer students per educator. He also said the District uses a 7-year cohort to project future student population and, at this time, a slight population decrease is projected.

Additional Discussion included:

- The final Central Office proposal will be thoroughly reviewed to remove all unnecessary costs.
- A building of 8,000 square feet will not adequately house all the staff the Administration wants to house in the new office.
- All of the positions the District wants to locate in the new office space are currently employed by the District.
- This project has been on the Capital Improvement Plan (C.I.P.) for over 20 years.
- Air Conditioning is not standard in schools in New England, though many school districts (including Merrimack) are installing split air conditioning units in selected areas of their schools.
- Correcting the unsafe working conditions in the current office buildings is not optional.
- The term of the project bond is a School Board decision.
- Voters need a good explanation about how bond costs affect their taxes.
- Several members wanted more information about how office sizes are determined.
- While the project has been in the C.I.P. for a long time, it has only been on the ballot twice. (April 2013 and April 2024)
- A summary of the alternatives that the Committee has considered was reviewed:
 - Renovating the current office spaces
 - Renting space in town
 - Using other town buildings, for example: the police station
 - Administration needs for confidentiality, meeting space, security and storage space.
 - Adding office space at one or more of the schools

Recommendation for School Board

G. Perry made a MOTION to accept the plan for a new Central Office, provided d by Marinace Associates, with price quotes from Hutter and Eckman averaging \$6,235,000 and recommend the plan to the School Board. Second: F. Rothhaus

Discussion included:

- The School Board puts the project out to bid, not the Committee.

- Would it be possible to get a third cost estimate?
- The District will create the bid specification documents based on the final design and best value construction guidelines.
- At the current time there appear to be opportunities to get bids lower than the initial estimate.
- The Committee needs to attend an upcoming School Board meeting to report its recommendation about proposing a new Central Office.

MOTION PASSED - YES: 5 plus School Board liaison, NO: 1 (A. Santoriello).

Approval of Prior Minutes

G. Perry made a MOTION to approve the Minutes of October 9, 2024 as amended. Second: F. Rothhaus. A. Santoriello requested that the statement about the impact of a bond on the tax rate be removed. No one objected.

MOTION PASSED unanimously.

Member Comments

L. Rothhaus told the Committee that School Board Chair Lori Peters had learned at a School Board Association conference that no other School Board liaison on a local committee doesn't have a vote. Members were reminded that the Committee By-laws can be amended by a warrant article at the Annual School District Meeting to add a voting School Board liaison to the Committee.

A. Santaniello asked when the Committee would be working on the Capital Improvement Plan.

Next Meeting Dates

L. Rothhaus reported that she had received a text message from the School Board chair suggesting that S. Albuquerque could attend the December 2nd meeting to present the Committee recommendation on a new Central Office proposal. B. Olson said he would add the Committee to the December 2nd agenda.

S. Albuquerque told the Committee that the School Board has already posted meetings every Wednesday in December. By consensus, the Committee agreed to meet on Tuesday, December 17th, probably at the high school since both Town Hall meetings rooms are booked on that date.

Public Participation

There was none.

G. Perry made a MOTION to adjourn. Second: T. Groff.

S. Albuquerque declared the meeting adjourned at 8:33 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Pat Heinrich