



PLANNING & BUILDING COMMITTEE

Merrimack School District

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

Minutes

August 7, 2024

Present: S. Albuquerque, F. Rothhaus, A. Santoriello, K. Bernier and School Board Liaison L.

Rothhaus

Excused: G. Perry

Absent: T. Groff

Also Present: Chief Educational Officer B. Olsen, Business Administrator M. Shevenell,

S. Albuquerque called the meeting to order at 7 PM and asked members to introduce themselves.

S. Albuquerque explained that last year the Committee had focused its efforts on plans for a new Central Office building proposal, which was on the ballot and failed. He said the Committee will be focused on revising the proposal to address issues and questions that were raised at the Deliberative Session in hopes of providing all the information that the voters need to approve the Central Office proposal on the ballot next spring.

S. Albuquerque told the Committee this meeting would be the first of two Q & A sessions. He said B. Olsen and M. Shevenell were present to discuss answers to the questions the Committee had sent them and that the architect would be present at next Q & A session to discuss construction costs and building design.

Fire Marshall's Report

S. Albuquerque said the School District has received the Fire Marshall's Report and asked M. Shevenell to share the report with the Committee.

M. Shevenell told the Committee the District has received the report about the Fire/Life Safety Inspection that was done on November 7, 2023. The report dated June 17, 2024 details 8 code discrepancies which the District needs to correct by July 17, 2024. Alternatively, the District needs to submit a written plan of action which details the time frames and scope of the work to correct each item. The issues that need to be corrected are

1. Change of use (occupancy) permit filed
2. Automatic sprinkler systems installed in both buildings
3. Legal means of outside egress from the basement installed
4. Exits marked per NFPA 101-38.2.10
5. Utility rooms, storage areas and other hazardous areas separated from remainder of occupancy
6. Abandoned oil tank and uncapped fuel and vent lines in the basement removed.

7. Annual testing of all fire/life systems
8. Extinguisher training instruction

M. Shevenell said the Fire Marshall did not address ADA requirements so he has asked the Town Building Inspector to visit the SAU (blue building) and Special Services (green building) offices to provide a report on what is needed to bring both buildings into ADA compliance. M. Shevenell said he will then talk with the architect to get an estimate of the total cost of renovations needed to bring these buildings “up-to-code” so the District can decide if the final result meets its needs and is worth the cost.

Discussion included the following:

- A combined Central Office is not a new concept. Perhaps the PBC should document all the work it has done for over 20 years toward a proposal to combine all administrative functions into one central office to provide better, more efficient service.
- The Brentwood property was purchased for the location. The site is big enough to accommodate the proposed Central Office, has utilities on site and is close to both the center of town and the high school. The building was a non-conforming structure since it was only 6” from the property line. There was no way to renovate and bring it up to code.
- Merrimack can learn what worked and didn’t work for Administrative space by looking at what other Districts have done: The Manchester School District rented commercial space for its Administrative Offices and used taxpayer dollars to renovate that space but it no longer uses the space because of cost.
- The former Rite Aid property is a triple net lease and would require significant renovations to be used as a Central Office. If rented by the District, the renovations would have to be paid for by the District.
- Major concerns for the Administrative Office space are confidentiality, safety and adequate appropriate storage spaces.

Committee Questions/Administration Answers

Discussion on the questions that the Committee had sent to the Administration included the following:

1. What is the plan and how will it be funded if the Fire Marshal or the School Board shuts down either or both Admin buildings?
 - Since the buildings became school offices in 1973, the Fire Department has not inspected them nor has the School District requested an inspection.
 - A possible plan might be “build a new central office and put the current buildings out of service.”
2. What staff potentially could be located in a school?
 - Administration indicated Special Services staff, the Computer (Power School) manager, Technology Department staff and Title I Coordinator could be located in schools, but the preference is that these staff members be located in the Central Office due to frequent daily interactions with the other Administrative members.

3. How would locating staff in schools disrupt Admin functions, never mind the school functions?
 - There would be a need to create separate, secure entrances for various Administrative staff functions like Registrar and Special Services to eliminate need to school staff to escort visitors to and from the Administrative offices
 - Administrative offices would have to be located away from normal in-school “traffic routes” to such things as to the cafeteria or gym.
4. How often do members of the public need to meet with these staff?
 - On average, five members of the public plus numerous other school employees visit the Administrative or Special Service offices every day.
5. What is the cost for new furniture?
 - Current furniture will be utilized to furnish the new space and if other furniture is needed, the cost will be included in the cost of the build.
6. What is the student population of each school and what is capacity of each school?
 - Estimated fall 2024 populations:
 - Mastricola Elementary - 400 students
 - Reeds Ferry - 500 students
 - Thorntons Ferry - 550 students
 - Mastricola Upper Elementary - 530 students
 - Merrimack Middle School - 500 students
 - Merrimack High School - 1100 students
 - Capacity figures for each school have not been updated since kindergarten was introduced in the schools. Plus, actual utilization of the space in the schools has changed and Administrative Rules for school space requirements have been updated.
 - There is not a large amount of available, adjacent space in any of the schools. Schools would have to reorganize how current spaces are used to find some space that could be used for Administrative staff.
7. What would the cost be to build the building as pre-fab like the 2013 proposal?
 - The 2013 proposal was a steel pre-fab, panelized building. Many considered it as a short-term, temporary fix.
 - The School Board would like to final, long lasting solution.
 - Snow load on the roof was mentioned as a possible problem.
 - When this proposal failed, the School Board decided to wait until the middle school bond was paid off before putting forward another building proposal.
 - The 2013 proposal did get a majority vote, but a bond requires 60% approval.
8. What is the plan for the green and blue buildings?
 - If both buildings were renovated and brought up to fire and ADA codes, combined they would have less than 5,000 total square feet of space which is not sufficient.

- The Special Services building will be taken down so the space can be utilized as part of a new traffic and parking plan at the high school. More handicapped parking is needed at both the high school and the Administrative offices.
 - Some members suggested that since storage space is an on-going issue, instead of building new storage space in the new Central Office, possibly the current SAU building should be used for storage rather than demolished. However, a change of occupancy permit would have to be approved, which means the space would still have to be brought up to current fire codes and the needed renovations would trigger need to meet ADA access codes as well.
9. Is putting SAU and Special Education in the same building potentially riskier (for information security/confidentiality) than leaving those two functions in separate buildings?
- The Administration told the Committee that properly designed office space as well as location within the Central Office is what is needed to ensure information security and confidentiality.
 - Special Services has a high bar on confidentiality.
10. Can we see the \$3M plans that were considered in 2021? What caused the \$1M cost increase from 11/2021 to 5/2022? Was more added to the plan?
- The administration offered to bring the old plans to another meeting and discuss changes and costs at that time.

Additional discussion included:

- Demographics/projections show that there is a potential increase in student population due to the number of new developments all over town.
- The School Board wants to improve communication within the Merrimack community.
- The cost of doing nothing is not nothing.
- There is currently a window of opportunity in the construction industry to get good bid since cost margins are coming down.
- The goal of this discussion is to improve communication with the voters as well as develop a plan that the voters will approve.

Next Steps

M. Shevenell told the Committee he will continue his work determining the costs to correct the code discrepancies listed in the Fire Marshall's letter as well as look into ADA compliance costs.

L. Rothhaus asked that Next Steps be an agenda item again because the Committee also need to think about the steps needed to promote the new Central Office proposal.

Other

K. Bernier asked when the Committee would discuss the Capital Improvement Plan (C.I.P.). and asked about adding air conditioning to it.

M. Shevenell said the District has begun putting split air conditioning systems in the schools and it is looking into adding such units a regular budget item as well as adding this as an on-going item in the C.I.P.

B. Olsen said that many school programs are now held at the middle school since it is air conditioned.

M. Shevenell said he will ask the PBC to review next year's C.I.P in late fall.

Next Meeting Date

S. Albuquerque proposed September 4th as the next meeting date and said the Committee would be a meeting with the architect. The Committee will discuss future meeting dates at this meeting. By consensus, the members agreed.

Approval of Prior Minutes

K. Bernier made a MOTION to approve the minutes of May 8, 2024 and May 22, 2024. Second: A. Santoriello. MOTION PASSED unanimously.

K. Bernier made a MOTION to adjourn. Second: F. Rothhaus.

S. Albuquerque declared the meeting adjourned at 8:34 pm.