

Steering Committee Meeting Minutes
June 29, 2016, 6:00PM

Location: WPS Phillips Building, Innovation Lab (Third Floor), 30 Common Street, Watertown, MA, 02472

Present: Steering Committee co-chairs John Portz and Elizabeth Yusem; Steering Committee members Toni Carlson, Pete Caron, James Carter, Michael Dattoli, Elaina Griffith, Chris Lowry, Alyson Morales, Lindsay Mosca, Vincent Piccirilli, and Michael Shepard; Watertown Town Auditor Thomas Tracy; various members of the community

Members of the Steering Committee not present: Jean Fitzgerald, Charles Kellner, Debra King, Steven Magoon

Co-chair John Portz began the meeting at 6:22PM. He thanked the Steering Committee and members of the community for attending and apologized for the meeting's late start time. He and co-chair Elizabeth Yusem asked the members of the community to keep their questions and comments to a minimum until the end of the meeting. Mr. Portz reminded everyone that because the Steering Committee was appointed by the School Committee, all Steering Committee meetings are subject to Open Meeting Law. He suggested that each meeting begin with the approval of minutes from the previous meeting. The minutes from the June 15, 2016 meeting were discussed; some minor revisions were suggested by a Steering Committee member.

Dr. Michael van Hamel began his presentation with an overview of the Community Forum that occurred on June 27, 2016. At the Forum, he said he had displayed the Watertown school buildings, reviewed transformation maps done with the Leadership Team, examined 5- and 10-year demographics and enrollment trends, and asked the community to reflect and brainstorm about the future of Watertown Public Schools.

Dr. van Hamel displayed aerial views and floor plans of Watertown's schools. He displayed a chart of School Transformation and Development Mapping that was completed with input from the Leadership Team at a prior meeting. The chart explored the schools' traditional teaching methods, initiatives for change, beginnings of transformation, and completed transformations. Dr. van Hamel said that this chart illustrated the beginning of understanding how and where the district can move forward by means of remodeling, interior renovations, building additions, and new buildings. He said that according to the DecisionInsite Enrollment Report presented at the June 13, 2016 School Committee meeting, Watertown is not expected to experience a significant population boom, but noted the district does not currently have adequate space for all of its current educational programs. Dr. van Hamel asked the Committee for their ideas, no matter how outlandish, on how more space might be created.

A Steering Committee member asked to know more about the elementary schools that Watertown used to have. Another Steering Committee member replied that a handful of school buildings were decommissioned in the 1980s.

Dr. van Hamel noted that the goal of the Master Plan Facilities Study is to determine the best solution for Watertown Public Schools for the next five to ten years. Beyond that time frame he said there is too much uncertainty.

Dr. van Hamel led a discussion among the members of the Steering Committee about their concerns regarding the existing school facilities. Various members contributed to the conversation. One noted the lack of space for the art and music programs at Cunniff. Another said he thinks Watertown residents

would be unhappy with a solution that eliminates neighborhood schools. Dr. van Hamel said that keeping cohorts of students together will be important during phasing, or when changes begin to take place. Another member noted the importance of the schools' layouts and the "number of steps" that students must take in between class periods. Another member said Watertown High School seems to lack a campus which could be lessening a sense of community there.

A member of the Steering Committee said he noticed discrepancies among the enrollment projections by DecisionInsite and Watertown's elementary principals. He said solutions will likely vary from school to school because of their differing sizes. Dr. van Hamel said that most of Watertown's school buildings predate World War II and the city's educators are finding creative ways to fit modern teaching methods into outmoded facilities. A member of the Steering Committee commented that while enrollment has not drastically changed over the last few years, specialized programming has increased and that is why more space is needed within the schools now.

Dr. van Hamel asked the Steering Committee for their grandest ideas of how more space might be created within Watertown's schools. A Steering Committee member said that Bedford has a successful school for just kindergarten, first grade, and second grade; the facility was created for that particular age group.

A Steering Committee member noted that Watertown has controlled its Special Education costs by expanding spaces and training teachers in-house. Another member said flexibility for specialized programming will be key moving forward. Dr. van Hamel said architectural designs that work for non-traditional students will work for all students and that SMMA is committed to designing learning environments that are appropriate for everyone.

Dr. van Hamel asked for the committee members' specific ideas for the high school which is landlocked, has little parking, and no adjacent outdoor space for its students. A Steering Committee member suggested an enclosed bridge connecting the high school to the Phillips building which could be converted back to classrooms if the administrative offices were moved elsewhere. Another Steering Committee member commented on the distance students must walk to their athletic fields. Another member noted the Phillips building is underutilized and suggested building a taller facility in its place. Two members commented that the Senior Center could be a resource for the high school. A member suggested moving the administrative offices from the Phillips building into the empty police station, freeing up space at the Phillips for classroom usage.

At 7:40PM, Dr. van Hamel asked the members of the community if they would like to speak or ask questions. One community member suggested SMMA produce architecturally exciting designs that merge the existing buildings with modern additions. She requested that any plans protect the Senior Center and are considerate of the community in general. Another member of the community asked that SMMA and the Steering Committee respect the limited green space in Watertown. A suggestion was made to avoid building on top of Victory Field as it is currently being renovated to include an improved playground, new lighting, and an expanded track. A community member suggested looking into available land near the Arsenal; another community member said that property is already spoken for. Dr. van Hamel said SMMA is looking into any donated land that might be available.

A member of the Steering Committee asked if there is enough land at any of the elementary schools to build additions; Dr. van Hamel replied there is some space but interior renovations may prove to be most beneficial.

A member of the Steering Committee asked if there would come a point when the existing facilities will no longer be able to serve the community well. Dr. van Hamel replied that the existing facilities have "good bones" and he thinks that interior renovations will be important to expanding the buildings' lives.

The Steering Committee briefly discussed their upcoming tour of the schools and chose the date of July 13, 2016 with the tour beginning at Watertown Middle School at 7:30AM. A member of the community asked if there will be an opportunity for the public to tour the schools. Ms. Yusem responded that no date has been chosen yet for a public tour.

The meeting adjourned at 7:55PM.