

**JOINT SPECIAL MEETING OF  
THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS  
AND THE BOARD OF EDUCATION**

**MINUTES**

Tuesday, August 28, 2018  
7:00 p.m.

Lincoln Center Hearing Room  
494 Main Street, Manchester

**BOARD OF DIRECTORS PRESENT:** Mayor Moran, Deputy Mayor Hackett, Secretary Gates, Directors Castillo, Floyd-Cranford, Galligan and Jones.

**ABSENT:** Directors Devanney and Eckbreth.

**BOARD OF EDUCATION PRESENT:** Chair Chris Pattacini, Peter Conyers, Deborah Hagenow, Tracy Maio, Tracey Patterson and Melanie Stefanovicz.

**ABSENT:** Peter Meggers, Jason Scappaticci, and Darryl Thames, Sr.

**ALSO PRESENT:** General Manager Shanley and Superintendent Geary.

**1. Meeting Called to Order.**

**Mayor Moran** called the meeting to order at 7:00p.m. All present participated in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

**2. Presentation of the SMARTR2 Committee.**

**Mayor Moran** thanked the SMARTR2 Committee members: Chair Cheri Eckbreth, Peter Conyers, Pamela Floyd-Cranford, Matt Galligan, Steve Gates, Deborah Hagenow, Tracy Maio, Brian Murphy, Chris Pattacini, Superintendent Matt Geary, and General Manager Shanley.

**General Manager Shanley** indicated SMARTR2 has been meeting for the past 4 months and is here to present the mission, outcomes of discussions and recommendations to move forward. Several years ago, the SMARTR1 Committee made recommendations to the Board of Directors and Board of Education. The Boards agreed, as did the voters, on a set of principles which would be used to determine the appropriate size and location of elementary schools in Manchester. The mission of SMARTR2 is to determine next steps in the elementary school project.

Guiding principles include the development of 21<sup>st</sup> century learning environment, sustainable racial balance, ease of traffic flow at schools, optimization of state funds, maintaining classroom sizes between 17-22 students and contiguous neighborhoods for schools. SMARTR2 has tested a variety of options against these principles and are presenting their top three recommendations tonight.

**Superintendent Geary** stated Manchester is projected to have a substantial increase in the number of elementary level students over the next ten years, so an important factor is the allowance for growth in the schools.

**Randall Luther**, TSKP Architecture, explained the 4 school option includes renovations to Bowers, Buckley, Keeney and Martin Schools. To optimize State funding, schools need to have certain square footage dependent upon how many students are enrolled. Both Bowers and Buckley have excess square footage compared to the number of students enrolled. This option does not maximize State reimbursement. Total estimated cost to the Town for this option is \$33M.

**Superintendent Geary** further explained this option does not achieve parity and equity in terms of school enrollment. Martin would have 212 students while Bowers would have 341 students. This option underutilizes State reimbursement. SMARTR2 recommended against this option.

The 2 school option includes Bowers or Buckley and Keeney or Martin Schools, depending on which school can best accommodate expansion. There is great disparity with this option, as Highland Park would have only 330 students whereas the 2 renovated schools would have close to 580 students.

**Mr. Luther** stated with the 2 school option, substantial square footage would need to be added to accommodate the programs. The reimbursement rate from the State of Connecticut would be between 61-68%. Total estimated cost to the Town for this option is \$22M.

**General Manager Shanley** explained Manchester's maximum reimbursement rate from the State of Connecticut is 68%. He explained the cost effectiveness of expanding was examined with all options.

**Superintendent Geary** stated the 2 school option was not recommended by SMARTR2. Though it does provide for parity and equity of facilities, and does maximize the State reimbursement rate, if these buildings are increased to accommodate 580 students, there is no room for expansion in the future. It is important to leave room for expansion as our population grows.

**Superintendent Geary** described the 3 school option would include renovations to Bowers, Buckley and Keeney Schools. It also proposes to repurpose Martin. This option provides for racial and socioeconomic balance to the schools, and would allow for future district growth.

**Mr. Luther** explained this option would include renovations similar to those currently being done at Verplanck and Waddell Schools. The variables between the 4, 3 and 2 school options are the number of classrooms and the size of the cafeterias, gyms and kitchens. Total estimated cost to the Town for this option is \$28M.

**Superintendent Geary** stated the SMARTR2 Committee recommends the 3 school option. This option creates three schools of 400 students which do allow for future expansion. It also creates an opportunity for a second preschool center in Manchester, at Martin School. It achieves better than 50% state funding while accomplishing community goals.

**Mr. Luther** explained that recommended renovations to Bowers would include improvements to site circulation for students, cars and buses, and additional parking. More continuity of classrooms would be achieved, and the administrative office would be relocated closer to the parking areas. STEM, art and project rooms would be together on the lower level.

Recommendations for Buckley include expanded on-site parking, increased gym size and increased class sizes for grades K-1. A new addition at the main entrance would accommodate administration and family

resources, and the library media center would be at the front of the school. An elevator would be added to provide handicap access. There is also consideration for an additional exit off the back of the property.

Recommendations for Keeney would include expanded on-site parking and a bus loop separate from the parking area. An addition would connect the now separate classroom wings to create continuity and contain the STEM, art and project rooms. The gym would also be expanded.

The proposed schedule for implementation is for a referendum in April of 2019. If successful, the grant application would be done by the State's yearly deadline of June 30<sup>th</sup>. A priority list would be established by the State of Connecticut in December of 2019, and funding would come through in May when the State budget is approved. Design of the first school would then begin, with construction starting in the Spring of 2021. Following the same schedule for schools #2 and #3, all schools would be completed by 2024. This is the ideal timeline.

**General Manager Shanley** explained SMARTR2 also discussed redirection or a new committee to explore the re-use of Martin, Robertson, Nathan Hale and Washington Schools. Martin School would be considered for a preschool center, in large part because it is built according to current codes for preschool. Other possible re-uses include Robertson as a community center, Nathan Hale possibly for private use and Washington for recreation, BOE office space or adult education. We need to fully utilize these buildings going forward.

### **3. Discussion.**

**Secretary Gates** stated there are many impacts when closing a school. The re-use plans for the schools will require taxpayer investment to return them to valuable use within the community. Net cost to the Town should include the cost to re-use the vacated buildings.

**Mr. Pattacini** stated repurposing Martin School as a pre-K center is a very cost-effective solution. We have the need for an integrated pre-K program in Manchester and Martin is very well suited for this use. The committee did talk about incorporating funds into the referendum to look at repurposing these buildings. This would provide the best opportunity for voter support. The committee members want to ensure the community has all the information they need in order to make an informed decision.

**Mayor Moran** pointed out there will be a new Governor in November and asked if we have concerns about the reimbursement changing once new administration takes over. Because of the anticipated population growth in Manchester, it is important we have the option to expand our schools. He asked if we had a cost estimate to repurpose Martin School as a preschool and also asked if it could be used as an elementary school in the future if population growth goes beyond our expectations.

**Mr. Luther** explained things are changing rapidly in regard to State grants. He doesn't anticipate major changes in the way the program works, but the State is constantly looking at ways to reduce Town reimbursements. There has been discussion about setting up a meeting to try to get more information about where the State expects this program to go in the future.

**General Manager Shanley** indicated it is far more cost effective to add classrooms to an existing infrastructure to maintain parity. A cost estimate to repurpose Martin as a preschool would need to be done. Preschools require bathrooms connected to the classrooms which is already part of the infrastructure at Martin School. Those are expensive investments to make.

**Director Floyd-Cranford** has concerns about the disparity of student population when comparing Highland Park School to Verplanck School. She asked what the capacity is for Highland Park School.

**General Manager Shanley** indicated the renovations at Highland Park School started the discussions on how to take a broader look at the elementary schools. Those discussions drove SMARTR1.

**Superintendent Geary** believes Highland Park School is close to capacity but he will check the numbers.

**Director Floyd-Cranford** indicated most of the students that have been moved to get the racial parity are our black and brown students. The schools that were closed were in areas with a higher black and brown student population. We continue to move this population but Highland Park School is more like a private school when compared to the high number of students in the other schools. She would like to see the options for Nathan Hale School to focus on the children in that community. When moving students, we need to readdress the school numbers.

**Mr. Pattacini** stated Highland Park School was renovated prior to a plan to create the equity in the schools. It is the poster child of what can happen if we build schools that are too small. Though we could add classrooms, the common areas in Highland Park School are not large enough to accommodate the additional students.

**Ms. Stefanovicz** agrees the 3 school option makes the most sense but she would like to include the funds needed to repurpose Martin School added to the referendum. This would also position us for future growth at the schools with 375 students. She would like to see the disparity at Highland Park School addressed and suggested adding classrooms to bring it closer to the number of students at Buckley and Bowers Schools.

**Superintendent Geary** commented it is possible to drive the Highland Park School student number up some and drive the Verplanck and Waddell School numbers down, but when the demographers worked through these maps, they did not want to move students again.

**Vice Chair Hackett** asked that all materials produced by SMARTR2 get posted for public viewing. She agrees with Ms. Stefanovicz's suggestion to include Martin School repurposing in the referendum. She asked what other uses were considered for Martin School.

**General Manager** responded one discussion was to expand Martin School instead of expanding Keeney School.

**Mr. Pattacini** indicated there was community input on other possible uses. SMARTR2 members went to East Hartford to look at an elementary school that was renovated into a pre-K school. The set-up of Martin School was a natural fit as a pre-K school.

**Director Floyd-Cranford** stated if the referendum includes plans for Martin School, it should also include plans for Nathan Hale, Robertson and Washington Schools. We represent all of Manchester, not just one sector. We need to be transparent, honest and committed to these communities equally.

Interestingly, the East Hartford preschool center is on the border of Glastonbury. Most children in head start are low income and don't live in that area of town, and East Hartford doesn't provide transportation.

Martin School is a distance from the low-income neighborhoods in Manchester, but we do provide transportation. Martin School is definitely pre-K ready and that's one of the reasons we should consider it for this use.

**General Manager Shanley** indicated, with respect to reutilization plans, we had commissioned a significant study at Nathan Hale for possible housing or a community center. The cost to make it a community center was \$6M at the height of the recession. There are a lot of questions to be answered before we can estimate reutilization of the closed schools.

#### **4. Public Comment**

**Scott Aiken**, 92 Laurel Street, a resident since 2002, is a parent and a small business owner. He was in the Washington School PTA for a number of years. He said he is here to speak to the parents, to tell them it doesn't matter how much supporting evidence you provide, how many hours you spend in the Hearing Room or how many signatures you get on a petition. You will get smiles, handshakes, praises of empathy and appreciation for your involvement. Your time here won't matter and the deck is stacked against you. Save yourselves countless PTA meetings and sleepless nights. Focus on your own kids and their experiences; it will be worth a lot more in the long run.

**Mayor Moran** thanked the SMARTR2 committee for its work. Unfortunately, not everyone will be happy with whatever option is chosen, but the previous referendum was passed by the community. Cheney Bennet is a beautiful new building and Waddell School is opening next week. There are a lot of positive things going on in our community. He thanked Mr. Till and Mr. Luther for their help in opening the new buildings.

**Director Jones** asked for clarity on what the expected outcome was for this evening's meeting. She wanted to make it clear to the community what the next steps are.

**General Manager Shanley** stated there is a large amount of backup documentation that the SMARTR2 Committee has seen for each of the options. Background information will be posted to the Town webpage. The Boards will reconvene in a few weeks, either separately or together, to provide some direction for the SMARTR2 Committee. The SMARTR2 Committee will then take this information out to the neighborhoods to get feedback. We need the Boards' approval before bringing this to the community. The initial plan was to start visiting neighborhoods in September.

**Ms. Stefanovicz** asked if other options could be considered, one that includes Martin School re-purpose and another option that includes reuse of Washington and Robertson Schools. The community needs to know all the options being considered.

**General Manager Shanley** indicated the combined Boards need to provide direction for the SMARTR2 Committee. If we are considering an option to include repurposing the closed schools, we need specifics on what the Boards are recommending for each of the schools. Once we have clarity, we can put together a cost estimate for each school.

**Mr. Pattacini** stated the SMARTR2 Committee struggled with these issues, as members couldn't decide on what each school would be repurposed as until they had consensus from the combined Boards. He asked what delays would do to the proposed timeline.

**Superintendent Geary** responded this would push back the timelines. We would like to consider an April referendum for many reasons. Local elections are next November.

**General Manager Shanley** noted there is also a referendum on roads/sidewalks in November.

**Mr. Pattacini** indicated the most complete package we can bring to the community is the 3 options proposed and inclusion of re-use of Martin School as a pre-K.

**Vice Chair Hackett** is concerned that if we rush to meet a deadline before we have the public weigh in, we will not have the best outcome. We first need to find out what the community wants. This is very important work by the Boards on behalf of their community.

**General Manager Shanley** explained the SMARTR2 Committee gave a lot of consideration to the timing and recognized that if we don't put an application in for June 2019, it would have to wait until June 2020 for approval by the State in May of 2021. That would delay any construction until 2022-2023. The Committee's intention was to have a broad recommendation for the Boards to review. Once we had a recommendation by the Boards, we would then ask for public feedback.

**Ms. Stefanovicz** said one of the suggestions from SMARTR2 was to have a new committee or a redirection for SMARTR2 to look into reuse options for Washington, Robertson and Nathan Hale Schools. She would like the referendum to include funding needed for researching the reuse of these schools.

**Mr. Pattacini** indicated SMARTR2 was a working group, looking for clarity on what the next steps for the committee are. His understanding is that the Boards would like SMARTR2 to look into cost for pre-K at Martin and present that information along with this proposal to the community for their feedback.

**Superintendent Geary** would be more comfortable if reuse of Washington School, which will be offline next year, is looked at in addition to Martin School. Robertson School is still being used for the next few years and Nathan Hale is currently being looked at for other options.

**Secretary Gates** agreed SMARTR2 needs to make it a priority to look into reuse options for each of the sites, based on when the schools are closing. We need to ensure the community knows we are looking at this. This is a holistic plan which includes the entire community.

**Director Floyd-Cranford** wants to ensure we go out to every neighborhood, as they are all affected by the changes in the schools. All taxpayers are going to pay for what we do with the schools. Nathan Hale, Robertson and Washington communities should be brought to the forefront because promises were made to these neighborhoods years ago. She wants to ensure all communities are treated equitably. The schools that have been offline the longest should be repurposed first.

**Director Jones** stated this entire process has felt stunted. SMARTR2 did not include community members in the same way that SMARTR1 did. We are already behind in terms of the voices that were a part of this plan development. Not yet an elected official, she voted no on the SMARTR1 referendum because she didn't trust that we would do what we said we were going to do. She understands why the recommendations were made but needs time to review the material before she can support any of the recommendations put forth. She also wants to ensure we are actually looking for community feedback and not just starting a sales pitch for a referendum.

**General Manager Shanley** stated SMARTR2 recommended an April referendum because November would be difficult for a number of reasons and because of the way the State finances and approves. We are looking at a 5% increase for each year that we push it off. The promise that was made is that all the schools will be addressed. The Boards are driving the timeline. It is evident that we need to get community feedback this fall in order to have an April referendum.

**Mayor Moran** reminded Board members that these were concepts presented by SMARTR2, not plans. He asked what the deadline is for an April referendum.

**General Manager Shanley** indicated explanatory text of the referendum needs to be published and available to the public. It needs to be very clear to voters what the referendum is and when the voting is. That should be done by February.

**Mr. Pattacini** indicated there was public comment during SMARTR2 meetings but the community felt they should have been better publicized. It is important that we share what we have. He asked for clarity on what the next steps are for the committee. Tonight's presentation was a preliminary recommendation. After the public forums, SMARTR2 could then put together a more formal recommendation to present to the Boards, looking for formal adoption.

**Mayor Moran** stated SMARTR2 did a lot of work to put forth this presentation. This is a recommendation. To not put their work out there is not doing due diligence to the process.

**General Manager Shanley** explained SMARTR2 had a lot of discussion around whether to make a recommendation to the Boards or just provide information to them. It was determined to provide options from all the data collected and reviewed. They are now looking for feedback on the options.

**Director Jones** said public input is vitally important. She isn't prepared to give recommendations to the committee until she has more time to review all the materials.

**General Manager Shanley** explained there was no vote scheduled for tonight. This was a presentation to the Boards. He suggested the Boards reconvene in a few weeks to give further guidance to the committee.

**Mayor Moran** thanked Mr. Till, Mr. Luther, Mr. Staye, Superintendent Geary, General Manager Shanley and town staff for their work. Mayor Moran suggested reading the article in Better Manchester Magazine on the rejuvenated Manchester High School. It's a great story about the strides we've made. We are doing good things in our schools.

#### **ADJOURNMENT:**

The meeting adjournment was moved by Director Castillo and seconded by Mr. Pattacini.

Meeting adjourned at 9:50 p.m.

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**APPROVED:**

**ATTEST:**

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**Secretary, Manchester Board of Directors**