

**NORWALK BOARD OF EDUCATION  
FACILITIES COMMITTEE  
DECEMBER 13, 2016**

ATTENDANCE: Mike Barbis, Chair; Dr. Yvel Crevecoeur, Bryan Meek

STAFF: Thomas Hamilton, Chief Financial Officer;  
Dr. Steven Adamowski, Superintendent

OTHER: John Ireland, Silver Petrucelli.

Call to Order

Mr. Barbis called the meeting to order at 7:07 p.m. and noted the members in attendance as listed above. He acknowledged Norwalk Public Schools staff present in the audience: Director of Communications Brenda Williams; Director of Facilities, William Hodel; Ponus Ridge Teacher and NFT Vice-President Joseph Giandurco, and Principal of Columbus Elementary School Medard Thomas. He thanked members of the school community for coming out to attend the meeting.

Dr. Adamowski prefaced the meeting and outlined that the focus was the South Norwalk options.

Discussion: Recommendation for South Norwalk School:

Dr. Adamowski asked Mr. Ireland to review the presentation, and he provided an overview of Modern Schools for a Growing Cit- School Facilities Feasibility Study – 2016-2017 project planning, focus on South Norwalk.

Mr. Ireland outlined the research and analysis of the feasibility study and highlights of the power-point presentation. He referred to schematic maps and architect renderings of location, building site plan and positioning and outlined the size and catchment area of a proposed school recommendation. (It is noted that the presentation is posted on the NPS website)

Dr. Adamowski spoke on the outcome of the study and summarized the recommendation indicators that were presented at the last committee meeting.

He distributed the following outline of the recommendations for South Norwalk Elementary Schools:

### Assumptions

1. 450 of the 900 student seats needed to avoid over-enrollment should be provided in South Norwalk, the fastest growing area of the City.
2. Schools in South Norwalk should offer robust intra-district magnet programs necessary to achieve racial balance guidelines of the Connecticut State Board of Education.
3. Schools should be planned in a manner to eliminate the “unassigned” status of students and reduce bussing.
4. The opportunity of a new school in South Norwalk should be used to “raise the bar” for the education of Norwalk students.
5. Current assets and community preferences as expressed at public forums and through Stakeholder surveys should influence and shape school recommendations for South Norwalk and the District as a whole

### Nathaniel Ely Campus Building Site

1. Proposed new construction for current Columbus School
2. PreK-8; 450 students; two sections/classrooms per grade; “paired” grades.
3. Maintain and expand intra-district magnet school program: Bank Street/HOTS (Progressive Model)
4. Neighborhood preference in lottery to students in .25 mile “walk zone” preference to families residing in income restricted housing.
5. Partnership with Odyssey to provide pre-school
6. Partnership with Grass Roots Tennis to provide tennis lessons and team experience for all students utilizing outdoor and indoor tennis courts.
7. Building designed to support K-8 Bank Street Integrated Curriculum requirements e.g. auditorium to hold 450, outside gardens, STEM Lab, etc.

### Columbus School Building Site

- 1 “Renovation as new” for new K-5 intra-district magnet school
2. K-5; 450 students; 3 sections/classrooms per grade
3. Intra-district magnet school program: International Baccalaureate Early year Programme for students ages 5-10. The six subject areas of the IB International Curriculum are language, social studies, mathematics, arts sc and personal social and physical education.
4. Neighborhood preference in lottery to students in .25 mile “walk zone” current unassigned or assigned to Jefferson.
5. Renovation designed to support the IB. EYP, e.g., world language lab, learning commons. However, most programme requirements are accomplished in traditional school space.
6. Enrollment as an International Baccalaureate Early Year Programme School would begin in the 2022-23 school year.
7. This IB Early Years Programme is a feeder to Roton Middle School and Brien McMahon High School for the I. 6-10 Middle Years Programme and 11-12 Diploma Programme\*

\*This decision would commit the Norwalk Public Schools to development of an IB 6-10 Middle Years Programme for the 2025-26 school year.

Dr. Adamowski further explained that Columbus would move to the new school at Ely and summarized the following:

- There would be approximately 450 pre-K through eighth graders from South Norwalk, which is the fastest growing area of the city
- 900 South Norwalk children are being jammed into other schools
- This plan to create 450 seats at Nathaniel Ely is the best option needed to avoid over-enrollment to other schools and raise the bar for the education of Norwalk district.
- There are also nearly 400 children who are stationed in 20 portable trailers at Jefferson Elementary School, where many South Norwalk children are sent,
- The proposed Nathaniel Ely school would include 450 pre-K to eighth grade students in two sections, or classrooms, per grade, and it would maintain and expand the intra-district Columbus Magnet School program called Bank Street, a progressive model that has been successful, including in Stamford.
- It will also have a neighborhood preference in lotteries for students in a .25 mile walk zone, or a preference to families and income restricted housing.
- Included is the partnership with Odyssey, which provides early learning to schools and a partnership with Grass Roots Tennis, another nonprofit for members.
- The school would also have an International Baccalaureate Early Years Program for students ages 5 to 10, including six areas of focus – language, social studies, mathematics, arts, science and personal social and physical education. The I.B Early Years would be a feeder to Roton Middle School and Brien McMahon High School, according to the committee. Barbis expects the first year of the magnet school to be 2021.

Following this discussion, Dr. Adamowski then asked Mr. Ireland to go through the rest of the presentation to highlight the areas as outlined.

Mr. Barbis asked for comments and questions from the Committee members. Mr. Meek stated that he fully supported the Superintendent's recommendation and was in agreement with the rationale and outline of the plan.

Mr. Barbis then asked if members of the audience had questions and/or comments.

State Rep. Bruce Morris said the schools are good, but people from South Norwalk don't have any time to challenge the notion of anything, let alone the new school. Mr. Morris asked for more time to thoroughly process all of this information and outlined that this represents a tremendous impact on other schools and the entire district. He reviewed that the basic premise is all our school buildings need investment and upgrades and for the past thirty years, South Norwalk students deserve options closer to home. He questioned the survey methods and stated that the questions were designed to get a specific desired outcome and did not adequately represent or reflect the diversity of Norwalk...there is a major concern ... a lot of the decisions that this group has made without input from the community... the timing was not adequate or appropriate because people in South Norwalk have to work during the week and Wednesday is Bible-Study night. The survey was nowhere near close to the questions that need to be asked for the people of South Norwalk.

There was an exchange of comments and dialogue from the Committee members to clarify the suggested direction and desired outcome and what were the alternatives Mr. Morris asked for more time to thoroughly process all of this information and outlined that this represents a tremendous impact on other schools and the entire district. He added that Flax Hill was a site that would work better with the location and property and there should be an evaluation of the site in greater detail.

Mr. Barbis asked Mr. Petrucelli to go back to the section of the presentation and show why Flax Hill would not work. There was further discussion on the limitations of ledge and property with that location.

There was an exchange of comments and dialogue to clarify the property evaluations and the feasibility study that has been undertaken by professional consultant experts for the last year.

It was noted that this Committee would bring this to the Workshop Meeting on December 20.

Ms. M.J. Chironna said she has twins at Ponus Ridge School and has served on many NPS boards and committees including the School Governance Council. She said she agrees with Mr. Morris and the Board is going too fast for working parents, although she said the ideas were excellent, and she applauds the Superintendent for all of the work. She added that given the timeline and the holidays, it's challenging for working parents to attend December meetings, and this is all just very fast. She added that January is just around the corner and she asked Mr. Hamilton when the last day was to do this with the financial deadlines and timetables.

Mr. Hamilton outlined that he has to give rough numbers to the City in December for the capital budget plans and he reviewed the state deadline of June 30. He reviewed the proposed timing and reiterated the need to have approval action mid-January.

Mr. Barbis explained the state reimbursement guidelines and the State Education Specifications Committees that need to be established. Ms. Chironna reiterated her concerns and asked for another meeting or public information session and added that if the district is going to have these magnet schools, people need to have to choices, yet this was not been communicated to the people.

Mr. John Mosby spoke on his concerns with the way this Board is handling building a new school and stated that South Norwalk students deserve better. He reiterated his concerns with the lake of minority inclusion with meetings that have not included the community, and said he agrees with Reverend Morris that this is all just very fast.

Another member of the public (name not given) asked why there has to be a magnet program and stated that transportation costs should not be the driving force and this should not take away funding from neighborhood schools.

Dr. Adamowski reviewed the rationale of the IB program and magnet school concepts. He asked Principal Thomas to explain the magnet school lottery process.

Dr. Adamowski explained the current minority racial balance is 62% and the guidelines are this can go up or down by 15%. Mr. Barbis said, although a recent racial balancing survey showed that there aren't enough non-minority kids in the area to support a neighborhood school, in light of state regulations, and would have to be a blended school, a combination of a neighborhood school and a magnet school, which has been done successfully in Stamford.

Mr. Morris questioned the enrollment projections and disputed the need for a school and referred to his calculations that there is only an increase of 52 students. There was discussion on the studies done by the consultant and the depth of analysis and research by Milone and McBroom. Mr. Morris added that rather than 'assumptions' there should be more concrete data and a well-defined plan for the district and all Norwalk Public Schools students.

Dr. Adamowski said that the population growth in South Norwalk is the reason for the enrollment increases that are burdening the school system. Even with a new school, some South Norwalk children will have to be bused to other areas, as parents will have a choice, and Norwalk is going to become a school district of choice.

Mr. Barbis added that we cannot wait another year as school enrollment projections are that we need seats. He explained that the goal is to file forms with the state by the June 30 deadline, and then design the schools next year, ground breaking would be in September 2018 and construction would take about a year and a half. In September 2021, the two new schools would be opened and would be getting transition kids.

Dr. Adamowski explained that a key major conclusion is both schools would have a themed program providing robust choice and state racial balance compliance. Mr. Barbis added that Columbus and Jefferson are still planned for renovation as new, by no later than 2024-25.

#### Timeline and next steps

Mr. Barbis said next week's Board Workshop meeting is devoted to outline this recommendation to the full Board for discussion on December 20 and is expected to vote on January 17.

Mr. Meek noted that the item on the agenda was missed and asked for a review of the minutes to be deferred to the next meeting.

#### Adjournment

**\*\* MR. MEEK MOVED TO ADJOURN  
\*\* DR. CREVECOEUR SECONDED THE MOTION.  
\*\* MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting was adjourned at 9:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Marilyn Knox,  
Telesco Secretarial Services

Norwalk Board of Education  
Facilities Committee  
December 13, 2016  
Page 5 of 5