

**South Kingstown School Committee, School Building Committee,
and Town Council Joint Meeting
Thursday, February 23, 2023**

A Joint Meeting of the South Kingstown School Committee, School Building Committee, and Town Council took place on Thursday, February 23, 2023.

1. A. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE TO THE FLAG

The Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag was led by the Town Council.

B. LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT STATEMENT

The Land Acknowledgement Statement was read by President McEntee.

2. A. ROLL CALL

Roll Call was taken:

The following members of the Town Council were present: Rory H. McEntee, President, Michael K. Marran, Vice President, Patricia A. Alley, Deborah D. Bergner, Jessica L. Rose

The following members of the School Committee were present: Paula Whitford, Chairwoman, Michelle Brousseau, Vice Chairwoman, Kate Macinanti, Melissa Boyd, Carol Vetter, and James Restivo. Christie Fish was absent.

The following members of the School Building Committee were present: Lucas Murray, Chairperson, Mark Prince, SKSD Superintendent, Raquel Pellerin, SKSD Chief Financial Officer, Brian Mahoney, SKSD Director of Facilities and Transportation, Kate Macinanti, School Committee Member, James Manni, Town Manager, and David Palazzetti. Chip McGair, SKHS Principal was absent.

Also present was Brian Silvia, Town Finance Director.

3. A. Discussion regarding school operating budget and potential savings due to consolidation/reorganization as it relates to funding of a school building project.

Mr. Manni presented a quick introduction as to the work that Mr. Silvia had been doing to obtain the most accurate numbers to provide the Council with to possibly decide whether or not to decide on a bond amount. Mr. Manni presented the following example if the Town was to approve a bond of \$150,000,000.

Fiscal Year 2025 - The Town would need to raise \$1,260,000 for the school bond debt; the tax levy increase would be 3.2 %.

Fiscal Year 2026 - The Town would need to raise \$1,253,000 for the school bond debt; the tax levy increase would be 3.14%

Fiscal Year 2027 - The Town would need to raise \$705,000 for the school bond debt; the tax levy increase would be 2.42%

Fiscal Year 2028 - The Town would need to raise \$1,578,000 for the school bond debt; the tax levy increase would be 3.44%

Fiscal Year 2029 - The Town would need to raise \$1,097,000 for the school bond debt; the tax levy increase would be 2.82%.

Over these years, this would mean that there would be a \$0.84 tax increase on every thousand dollars of the property assessment on the school bond only.

Mr. Silvia discussed the effect to the Town's bond rating, debt service, tax rate, and tax levy. Discussion ensued regarding issuing bond anticipation notes and the process that would need to be followed.

5. A. Public Comment

Jane Estes - Ms. Estes stated her concerns with construction costs, questioned the potential sale of South Road School, and the possibility of regionalization of a career and tech school.

Jim O'Neill - Mr. O'Neill asked for confirmation on the square footage of the existing high school as well as the proposed building project; stated his concern with the projected enrollment figures and the issuance of bonds and the effect on the taxpayers. Discussion ensued amongst committee members.

Paul Brown - Mr. Brown questioned whether or not there was any thought to regionalizing with the Town of Narragansett. Discussion ensued amongst committee members.

Maura Gazerro - Ms. Gazerro stated her support of the school facilities plan being put to the voters at a bond referendum. She commented that many students are leaving South Kingstown because of uncertainty.

Joe Martin - Mr. Martin shared his experience of being a long-standing member of the school board in Philadelphia. He suggested that building expansion options be part of any building plan to allow for growth in the future.

Viera Levitt - Ms. Levitt stated she would like to see an increase in the quality of education within the district so that young families will be attracted to moving here.

Dorald Beasley - Mr. Beasley stated his concerns with the square footage planned for a new high school facility, the construction costs per square foot; the cost of the bond, and reimbursements by RIDE.

Greg Sweet - Mr. Sweet stated his concerns with the affordability of building a new high school and the Pay-Go portion of the building project.

Martha Andrew - Ms. Andrew stated that she has three (3) children who are currently attending charter schools. She is in support of a new high school.

Christian Blaney - Mr. Blaney explained how a high school is the "crown jewel" of a Town. He feels home buyers are choosing to locate elsewhere due to the state of the high school facilities. He supports a new high school.

4. A. Discuss and act upon a potential bond referendum to include bond amount, stipulations

Mr. McEntee stated that the Town Council would not be able to vote on its choice of a school facilities project as they had hoped to receive more information to help them to make their decision. Another meeting will be scheduled to further discuss the options.

Ms. Bergner stated that she does believe there is a general consensus that a new high school is needed but there are still many questions with regard to funding and that information is required before a decision can be made.

Ms. Whitford stated that at this point, she feels stuck in the process as the School Committee has provided the information it can provide at this time. A decision has to be made.

Ms. Bergner stated her concern that the Town Council needs more information from the School Committee.

Ms. Whitford explained that the Council is asking for information that is not yet known specifically. Estimates have been provided to Council as to what the School Committee feels the operational savings will be.

Ms. Vetter commented that since 2017, the school department has achieved savings by closing Wakefield Elementary School, by the planned closing of Curtis Corner Middle School, by relocating the preschool, and by turning Wakefield Elementary School back over to the Town. There is the issue of declining enrollment and that is real. The school budget has been level funded for the past three years and this coming year as well. Operational savings have been made and they have been used to offset increased costs. Over these past years, the schools have saved the Town twelve percent. This is a great opportunity for a school facilities project while we are assured of RIDE reimbursement rates, knowing costs are only going to go up.

Mr. Marran stated that we are dealing with a lot of uncertainties and the clock is ticking. This project has to be decided on shortly because we have deadlines to get a bond enabling legislation bill to the General Assembly and we have a deadline for bonuses that would be available from RIDE.

Ms. Rose stated that there is a consensus that the Council does want a new high school.

Ms. Whitford stated this issue needs to be brought to the voters so that they can make the decision. She is fearful that they could reject the plan if it is too high and we would then lose out on RIDE funding. The entire community needs to be behind this plan.

Ms. Macinanti agreed that community approval is essential. The School Building Committee has determined that the \$150 million project is the right plan and this project needs to be done right. She stated her disappointment that the Council will not make a decision tonight.

Mr. McEntee stated that the Council wants to make an informed decision and they intend to meet next week to make an affirmative decision.

Ms. Alley stated that it is important to answer everyone's questions, to have the Council members united so that they are one voice to the community.

Discussion ensues regarding the next meeting. Meeting is scheduled for Thursday, March 2, 2023 at 6:00 PM.

Meeting is adjourned at 8:26 PM