

JOINT SESSION

FEBRUARY 9, 2023

At a JOINT SESSION of the Town Council, School Committee and School Building Committee of the Town of South Kingstown, County of Washington, in the State of Rhode Island, held at the Town Hall, in and for said Town on the 9th day of January 2023 at 7:02 PM.

- PRESENT:
- Town Council
 - Rory H. McEntee, President
 - Michael K. Marran, Vice President
 - Patricia A. Alley
 - Deborah D. Bergner

 - School Committee
 - Paula Whitford, Chairwoman
 - Michelle Brousseau, Vice Chairwoman
 - Melissa A. Boyd
 - James L. Restivo
 - Carol A. Vetter

 - School Building Committee
 - Lucas Murray, Chair
 - Brian Mahoney, School Facilities Superintendent
 - James Manni, Town Manager
 - David Palazzetti
 - Raquel Pellerin, School CFO
 - Mark Prince, School Superintendent

1. A. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE TO THE FLAG

The Pledge of Allegiance to the flag is given.

B. LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT STATEMENT

The Land Acknowledgement Statement is read.

2. ROLL CALL

Roll Call of the Town Council is taken and four members are present. Councilwoman Jessica Rose is absent.

Roll Call of the School Committee is taken and five members are present. Christie L. Fish and Katherine Macinanti are absent.

Roll Call of the School Building Committee is taken and six members are present. Katherine Macinanti and Chip McGair, High School Principal are absent.

Also present: Brian Silvia, Finance Director.

James Manni, Town Manager reviews the single family parcel count and median value, and Net Debt Service reports provided. This evening a presentation of the School Building Initiative will provide the project status and activity update, with discussion of project alternatives, funding, financing and a potential school bond referendum.

JOINT SESSION

FEBRUARY 9, 2023

3. Lucas Murray, Director of Administrative Services and Chairman of the School Building Committee gives a brief overview of the purpose and goals. Mr. Murray reviews the Preservation option costs for deferred maintenance at Broad Rock Middle School; West Kingston, Matunuck and Peace Dale Elementary Schools; the Hazard building; and South Kingstown High School. Immediate needs total \$37.5 million, and the 10 year forecast totals \$102.8 million.

Mr. Murray reviews Innovation option costs, including Programmatic Improvements. A new High School building with associated athletic facilities is estimated at \$125 million; programmatic improvements at the Broad Rock Middle School total \$2.5 million; relocation of administration and deferred maintenance at the Hazard Building is \$2.5 million; and Elementary School programmatic improvements are estimated at \$16 million including gymnasiums at West Kingston and Matunuck, media centers, restrooms and teacher planning.

The School Building Committee has reviewed various project scenarios and determined four primary project options. Project Option #1 provides for a new high school facility at Columbia Street with associated athletic facilities at a cost of \$125 million; district wide deferred maintenance at the elementary and middle schools at a cost of \$20 million; programmatic improvements at Broad Rock Middle School at a cost of \$2.5 million; and relocate administration and deferred maintenance at the Hazard building at a cost of \$2.5 million for a total project cost of \$150 million. Project Option #2 is a new high school building at Columbia Street with associated athletic facilities off site at a cost of \$125 million. Funding Options #3 and #4 address Preservation only, with immediate needs at school buildings at a cost of \$37.5 million and a 10 year forecast at a cost of \$102.8 million.

Discussion ensues regarding the eligibility of athletic fields or facilities for State funding reimbursement. Field houses are not eligible, but new fields at new locations are eligible. The cost of constructing a new high school facility includes \$6 million for athletic facilities.

Discussion ensues regarding immediate needs and the useful life of improvements.

Mr. Murray advises that the School Building Committee supports a new high school project.

4. Mr. Murray notes that State reimbursement bonuses run out at the end of this year. Current reimbursement is up to \$0.525 for every \$1 plus 15% provided as Pay Go funding. A potential increase of 5% in State Housing Aid could increase South Kingstown's share to 57.5% including bonuses. After December 2023 the simple reimbursement rate is up to \$0.35 for every \$1 and no Pay Go funding.

Discussion ensues regarding Pay Go projects that the State provides up front funding for at 15%.

Brian Sylvia, Finance Director reviews fiscal analysis assumptions, including a 20 year bond term, bond issuance in FY 2025-2026 with a slow ramp up of funding, and an estimated 4.25% interest rate. Mr. Sylvia reviews an analysis of prospective debt levels at various bond amounts. Pay Go projects benefit the Town by lowering the total amount of the bond needed. The State and Town debt payments and percentages are compared for each project option.

Mr. Sylvia reviews the property valuation summary, and the impact on median home taxes for each project option. Based on the median assessed home value of \$424,200, the estimated annual taxpayer cost ranges from \$130 to \$435.

JOINT SESSION

FEBRUARY 9, 2023

Discussion ensues relative to tax payments, percentage increases, and fiscal impacts on the community.

Discussion ensues relative to operational efficiencies, and the potential for school consolidation plans to provide opportunities for savings.

Mr. Murray reviews the School Building Committee activity report. Latest activities include the completion of wetland flagging at Curtis Corner and Broad Rock Middle Schools recreation areas. The timeline includes obtaining approved legislation from the RI General Assembly which must then be signed by the Governor. There will be a need for swing space for students during construction. It is proposed to house students in place at the high school during construction. Discussion of a potential land swap involving Hazard Field has received a positive response from RIDEM. The SBC needs clear guidance on the projects to be funded so that bond legislation can be prepared and submitted for approval.

The Town Manager notes the Town is looking at its surplus properties and potential reuse, operational savings at the schools and staffing levels. Discussion ensues relative to the timeline for closing Wakefield Elementary School when the pre-school can be relocated, and Curtis Corner Middle School being taken offline in 2023.

Mark Prince, School Superintendent notes that they cannot discuss the School District budget as it is not on this evening's Agenda, but notes that some savings in utilities, maintenance, technology etc. may amount to \$170,000 to \$230,000 in the realm of financial alternatives for the Stage II application.

Carol Vetter, School Committee member comments that the school department is realizing savings but costs are going up, they can only estimate savings at this point. Responding to Councilwoman Bergner's question, she notes that closing Wakefield Elementary School last year saved approximately 15 full time employees. They don't know what proportion will go from closing more schools, and notes that the School has lost some State Aid funding and is facing increasing costs.

Michelle Brousseau, School Committee Vice-Chair agrees with Ms. Vetter, noting that they don't know what they're going to do with the pre-school until a school facilities project is chosen and funding is known. SKHS is no longer a good facility for educating high school students, with the current type of teaching and learning.

6. COMMENTS FROM INTERESTED CITIZENS

Dave Palazzetti, member of the SBC is present and comments that Phil Conte is a conservative architect, \$125 million for the SKHS is the right project and we need \$150 million to address deferred maintenance, and notes that arts and athletics are key drivers in enrollment.

Dorald Beasley is present and comments that the Town Council has funded school budget increases while enrollment has dropped.

Laura Erban is present and comments in favor of getting the maximum amount for a school facilities project, investment in our facilities is needed, and notes that State reimbursement comes from our tax dollars.

JOINT SESSION

FEBRUARY 9, 2023

Dorald Beasley comments on using another method for calculating the property tax transfer to fund the schools to meet the state maintenance of effort requirement, and affordable housing opportunities at SKHS or CCMS.

Council Vice President Marran notes that voters rejected the proposal to move SKHS to CCMS.

Laura Erban questions how green design is incorporated into school building plans.

Mr. Murray responds that it will be looked at, there may be an additional reimbursement bonus for green design, and some federal grants may be available.

Mr. Palazzetti notes that some federal grants have restrictions.

5. Council President McEntee concludes that the Town Council probably won't be able to vote on their choice of a school facilities project tonight.

Mr. Murray notes the SBC goal is to have a decision by March 1st.

Councilwoman Bergner comments on having a broad plan for what the school district is going to look like.

James Restivo, School Committee member comments that the Town Council is asking for answers for 5 to 6 years from now. The group is making efforts to consolidate and making decisions as they come.

Council Vice President Marran comments that it seems the School Committee can't give numbers, not won't give numbers. Some buildings will be closed and become available for other uses, some operational savings will be realized. All agree that the Town needs a new high school.

Discussion ensues relative to scheduling another meeting on February 23rd at 7 PM.

UNANIMOUSLY VOTED: to adjourn at 9:21 PM.

ADJOURNED,

Susan M. Flynn, CMC
Town Clerk