

SPECIAL MEETING – MANSFIELD TOWN COUNCIL
June 7, 2012

Mayor Elizabeth Paterson called the special meeting of the Mansfield Town Council to order at 7:00 p.m. in the Council Chamber of the Audrey P. Beck Building

I. ROLL CALL

Present: Freudmann, Keane, Kochenburger, Moran, Paterson, Paulhus, Schaefer, Shapiro
Excused: Ryan

II. OPPORTUNITY FOR THE PUBLIC TO ADDRESS THE COUNCIL

Nancy Tomastik, Maple Road, again urged the Council not to schedule the school budget referendum at the November election. (Statement attached)

Anthony Kotula, Maple Road, suggested deferring this major financial decision until the larger economy has stabilized. (Statement attached)

Ric Hossack, Middle Turnpike, agreed the referendum should not be held in conjunction with the November election and requested the Mansfield Middle School Project be separated.

June Krisch, Farmstead Drive, stated the project has been studied extensively by the Board of Education and the Council and the resulting recommendation is to build two new schools. Ms. Krisch thanked the Council for their diligence.

Eric Moyer, Stafford Road, has a daughter who goes to Vinton and stated he feels the present school siting situation is similar to having 3 satellite schools surrounding the Middle School. Mr. Moyer expressed concern that a decision to eliminate one of those schools would alienate a section of Town.

Peggy Beckett-Rinker, Hillside Circle, stated she trust the Council will make the right decision after reviewing all the facts and listening to the comments from the public. Ms. Beckett-Rinker thanked the Town Council and the Board of Education for their work for the community.

Dave Garvey, Jonathan Lane, expressed appreciation for the work of the Council and Board of Education and urged the Council to move forward with the two school option in order to secure the best future for our children.

Bill Caniera, Candide Lane, stated his support for the Vinton School site, noting that it is the hub for the families in the area. Mr. Caniera is torn between renovating the existing schools and the new schools.

Marie Cantino, Dog Lane, spoke in support of two new schools stating it will provide educational opportunities and it makes fiscal sense.

Carrie Silver-Berstein, Jonathan Lane, spoke in support of building two new schools noting this option will offer the best education for our children. Ms. Silver-Bernstein believes location is not as important as educational opportunities.

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Brian Anderson, Ridge Road, stated he is a Goodwin School parent but is in favor of the best educational situation for all of Mansfield's children. Mr. Anderson is in favor of the two school option and believes it is a good time to build.

Randy Walkonis, Mansfield City Road, stated he is a proud Vinton parent but believes all the schools are good but there are problems with the existing schools. Mr. Walkonis stated the money saved by reducing redundant staff and energy savings from the three schools will be put to better use in the two new schools.

Caragh O'Brien, Oak Hill Road, spoke in favor of the two school option commenting our students are worth the reasonable projected cost. Ms. O'Brien urged the Council to move forward.

Jay Rueckl, a member of the Board of Education but speaking as an individual, distributed a handout listing the strengths of Town's schools, the sustainability of the educational budget and a cost comparison of the two vs. three school plans. (Handout attached)

Alison Hilding, Southwood Road, stated her belief that suggesting a senior center be located in one of the locations is pandering to a group of citizens and that recent information regarding additional hiring at UConn would impact school enrollment figures. Ms. Hilding believes the renovation options have not been fully explored and provided correspondence between architect Rick Lawrence and Paige Farnham of the Bureau of School Facilities. Ms. Hilding also provided information regarding referendum voting during elections. (Handouts attached)

Pat Suprenant, Gurleyville Road, asked the Town Council to consider the possible impact the hiring blitz at UConn, the development of the technology park and the building of the Storrs Center project might have on school enrollment figures.

Margaret Rubega, South Eagleville Road, requested the Council do what needs to be done for the students. The current buildings are old and will fail taking money away from educational uses. Ms. Rubega urged support for the two school project.

Holly Matthews, Storrs Heights, spoke about difficulty of change and timing. Ms. Matthews noted this proposed change is a deliberate intentional approach to the future and the timing is optimal given the current bonding rate.

Shamim Patwa, Greenfield Lane, thanked the Town Council for the time they have given to this project and urged them to forward the question to a referendum and let the citizens vote.

III. SCHOOL BUILDING PROJECT

Director of Planning and Development Linda Painter reviewed the matrix she prepared using the criteria of the Sustainability Committee.

Mansfield School Superintendent Fred Baruzzi distributed and spoke to information regarding enrollment figures for the three schools. Superintendent Baruzzi discussed how the current students could be absorbed into two schools using the art, music and enrichment rooms and indicated that similar plans could be part of the new schools in the case of enrollments beyond the projected numbers. The proposed schools will have larger and consistently sized rooms.

Mr. Kochenburger moved the Town Council proceed with further review and public input on the conceptual project for the Town's elementary and middle schools consisting of:

1. The closure and demolition of the Annie Vinton and Dorothy Goodwin schools and the construction and equipping of a new elementary school on each of these sites, including if necessary or desirable to accommodate the new school design, the purchase of land adjacent to either of these sites, and related work and improvements;
2. Specific renovations to the Mansfield Middle School, including but not limited to roof and window replacements, installation of solar panels, and the replacement of modular classrooms, and related work and improvements: and
3. The closure of Southeast Elementary School, the future use of which is undetermined at this time.

This project shall be referred to the Planning and Zoning Commission for a report pursuant to Section 8-24 of the Connecticut General Statutes.

The motion was seconded by Mr. Shapiro.

Council members discussed the pros and cons of the two school option as offered. Discussions included the siting of the schools, the state reimbursement rate, bonding and construction costs, the physical condition of the schools, the holding of the referendum at the November election, enrollment projections, the current student/teacher ratio, the findings regarding schools in the current Plan of Conservation and Development, and the exploration of renovations options.

The motion passed with all in favor except Ms. Keane, Mr. Freudmann and Mr. Paulhus.

The next steps as suggested by Town Manager Matt Hart include referring the project to the Planning and Zoning Commission as stated in the motion; working with staff and legal counsel to prepare a purchase proposal for land near the Goodwin site for Council consideration; engaging in an informational program for the community and deciding on a referendum date.

The Council was in agreement with this plan.

IV. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Paulhus moved and Mr. Shapiro seconded to adjourn the meeting at 9:35 p.m.

Elizabeth Paterson, Mayor

Mary Stanton, Town Clerk

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