



**TOWN OF MANSFIELD
SPECIAL TOWN COUNCIL MEETING**

Tuesday, February 26, 2013
6:30 PM
Council Chambers
Audrey P. Beck Municipal Building

AGENDA

Call to Order

Opportunity for the Public to Address the Council

Old Business

1. Discussion with the Mansfield Board of Education regarding the Proposed School Building Project (Item #4, 02/11/13 Agenda)

Adjournment

TOWN OF MANSFIELD
OFFICE OF THE TOWN COUNCIL



ELIZABETH C. PATERSON, Mayor

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February 12, 2013

Mansfield Board of Education
4 South Eagleville Road
Mansfield, Connecticut 06268

Re: Joint Meeting on Proposed School Building Project

Dear Board members:

I am writing today on behalf of the Town Council. As you know, at a special meeting held on January 23, 2013, the Council unanimously approved the following motion regarding the proposed school building project:

- 1) That the Council not send the proposal for two new schools to a referendum at the present time; and
- 2) That the issue of repairs to the three elementary schools, as well as the Mansfield Middle School, be referred to the Board of Education, which is within their expertise and jurisdiction, for their prioritization of repairs and improvements needed to maintain the schools.

Also at the January 23rd meeting, the Town Council agreed by consensus to hold a joint meeting with the Board of Education to discuss the action taken by the Council and expectations for the Board.

As a threshold matter, the Board may wish to know why the Town Council decided not to send the proposed project to referendum at this time. In recent months, the Council has noted several key reasons that led to this decision, including concerns about the cost of the project, particularly during difficult economic times, and whether the proposed project had strong support from the community at-large. Other Council members have expressed concern that two new schools may not have sufficient capacity to accommodate increased enrollment that might result from development at the University and within the community. Also, some Councilors have indicated a preference to maintain three smaller elementary schools that are geographically dispersed and to preserve existing infrastructure as opposed to constructing new facilities. In addition, some Councilors have expressed a desire to fund repairs, alterations and improvements to the existing schools on more of a cash basis as opposed to issuing bonds. Furthermore, I would add that some Council members still believe that the proposal to build two new elementary schools has merit, and should be revisited at a later point when financial conditions improve.

Turning now to the parameters of the Council's referral to the Board, I will first address the repairs at the three elementary schools. The Council would ask the Board to work with our professional staff to develop a list of critical repairs necessary to maintain the existing buildings for the next seven to 10 years. This timeframe is important as it would allow all three elementary schools to qualify for renovation status under the state's school construction program. Consequently, future Boards and Councils would be in a better position to consider renovation options in addition to new construction.

For the Mansfield Middle School, the Council would like to see a similar list of critical repairs for the next seven to ten years, as well as options to phase in the planned heavy alterations.

With respect to project financing, the professional staff should explore the merits of a performance contract for some of this work, particularly the energy improvements. Consistent with our long-time practice, less expensive repairs and equipment could be funded through the Town's capital improvement program (CIP). It would also be important to consider establishing a reserve or sinking fund in the CIP to cover unanticipated repairs at the schools. For the middle school, we would ask that the Board consult with the Town's professional staff to look at funding the heavier, more costly repairs and alterations in a phased manner, utilizing the CIP and potentially one or more bond issuances.

The Town Council welcomes the Board of Education's leadership and direction on these issues. I hope that this information is helpful to you and I look forward to our joint meeting on February 26, 2013. If you have any questions in the interim, please contact our Town Manager, Matt Hart.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Elizabeth Paterson".

Elizabeth Paterson
Mayor

CC: Fred Baruzzi, Superintendent of Schools
Matt Hart, Town Manager
Cherie Trahan, Director of Finance
William Hammon, Director of Facilities Management