



Oswego Community Unit School District 308

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AURORA, JOLIET, MONTGOMERY, OSWEGO, PLAINFIELD AND YORKVILLE

Finance and Facilities Advisory Committee Minutes

District Administration Center

4175 Route 71, Oswego

Room 61

November 25, 2019

6:00 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.

I. Roll call

The sign in sheet was used in place of an official roll call. Meeting called to order at 6:05 pm.

Members in Attendance: Kenneth Blue, Robert Eberhardt, Tatyana Gorski, Kaila Mugford, Bill Mueller, Richard Powers, Erika Sieh, Jennifer Smith, Christi Tyler Chief Financial Officer, Brent Lightfoot and Ruth Kroner Board Member Co-Chairs

Members Absent: Rob Allison, Dr. Brent Anderson, Jaime Diaz, George Kalule, Phil Murray

Guests: Jennifer Volpe, Executive Director of Special Education, Other staff -Keith Mecklenburg, Darcy Durkee, Betty Augustine, Susan Benson, Sharon Burgfeld, Lisa Hrouda, Chris Kirkwood, Adrienne Cruz, Denise Baker, Debra Lueck and Aimee Pochron, Parents-Lori Reifsteck and Doug Collie, and student-Kamille Swanson

Recording Secretary: Carrie Szambelan

II. Approval of Minutes from Finance and Facilities meeting on October 15, 2019

Mr. Blue made a comment that he would like the topic of bond issues for a future meeting. Mr. Lightfoot mentioned nothing was callable last year so there was nothing to discuss. However, there may be one coming up. Mrs. Tyler mentioned that Mr. Bob Lewis has been invited to attend the January or February meeting. Mr. Lightfoot stated to email specific questions or concerns ahead of time to Christi.

A motion was made by Erika Sieh and seconded by Kenneth Blue to approve the finance and facility minutes from the October 15, 2019 meeting. All members in attendance agreed unanimously to approve the meeting minutes as presented.

III. Space Needs for Transition Center

Mrs. Jennifer Volpe, Executive Director of Special Education, shared a presentation with the committee members of the Transition Program. This presentation was on the agenda at the Facilities Advisory Committee in the spring. It has been updated to reflect the district's enrollment projections. Mrs. Volpe is recommending action be taken soon in order to prepare for next school year.

It is required as a public school district to ensure that all children with disabilities have available to them a free, appropriate public education that includes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment and independent living.

Transition planning begins at age 14 1/2 and student's age out of it the day before their 22nd birthday.

However, there is a current bill out there pending that might increase the age through 23 that could possibly affect future enrollment. Last year's enrollment was thirty-eight students. This year is forty-five. Every year after is increasing by almost ten students a year. By the year 2024, the program's enrollment will be approximately eighty-seven students. The further out the projections, the least accurate they may be. Administration has determined these results with their case loads of students from 7th through 12th grade.

Mrs. Gorski asked what the maximum capacity of the current building. Mrs. Volpe stated the current building holds up to forty students. However, students in wheelchairs require more space due to the size of their equipment needs. She invited the committee to come and take a tour of the facility.

Mrs. Kaila Mugford was not clear on past decisions of the program. Mr. Lightfoot gave a brief historical overview of what happened over the last few years. In 2012, this program was at Oswego High School. In 2015, it moved to Old Traugher. In 2016, a residential house was purchased at 13 Brock Court. The district's plan was to purchase a home to fit the needs of the students learning life's skills instead of a classroom setting. The unfortunate outcome was the home was acceptable, but the environment was not. The buses had a difficult time driving in and out of the cul-de-sac, while some neighbors cooperated; some did not. The district then made a decision it was not the best location and started to explore other areas. Then in 2017, Mason Square facility was purchased. This space was an empty shell that allowed operations to fit the needs of the program. The future projections back then were only supposed to be 33-35 students and the actual for this year is already 45 students.

Mrs. Volpe mentioned while the whole district's enrollment has been steady or decreasing, the special education students have been increasing. She stated a majority of students in the life skills program would be eligible for the Transition Program. For school year 20-21, the enrollment projections based on the current students in the program will be 57 students, which is over capacity. This does not include new students that might move into the district. This location will not be able to house this many students. Therefore, the Board will need to make a short-term decision this school year to decide where this program will be located for the next year or two.

Mr. Lightfoot questioned if have no options due to time constraints and we have to find a secondary location, what does that mean in terms of staff? A question was also asked about the fire code, what is the capacity in that building? A staff guest member answered the district has been compliant with fire drills and there have been no concerns. He is suggesting capacity is approximately 120 bodies in the 5,000 square feet of space. However, there is no way this would be functional with all the equipment needs and space.

Mrs. Volpe discussed the current space and the additional needs for this program with the projected enrollment. The space for educational and instructional needs will require six classrooms instead of three, a larger micro business area, a physical fitness/rec/leisure area and a student multi-purpose room. The space for student personal needs will require a nurse's office (which is already in place), two oversized restrooms instead of one (with Hoyer lift/changing area) and four student restrooms instead of two. The space for staff areas needed are a reception area/school secretary (security) that is not combined with the physical fitness/student lunch/rec area. A separate large conference room for IEP meetings that is not combined with the staff lunch room. Two related service therapy rooms and staff restrooms.

Mr. Eberhardt questioned if there are any regular requirements on when instructional times are during the day and how many hours are needed each day. Mrs. Volpe stated each student has their own individual plan. Most days are from 9am-2:30pm with the students checking in if they are working. They may come in to work on a lesson and then go to job site. However, some students stay for the whole day. Mr.

Eberhardt asked if the current space and staff is being maximized to its fullest potential at those times of service. Mrs. Volpe responded that her staff has been very creative in using the current space.

Mr. Mecklenburg added that the restroom space is the most difficult when staff is changing a student and another student can be in the additional restroom for up to an hour. Currently, there are eight students that need bathroom assistance. It becomes a student dignity issue. Also, DHH staff (deaf hard-hearing) have meetings in nurse's office. IEP meetings are being held in lunchroom area. When this happens, staff will sit in their cars to eat their lunch. It becomes a privacy issue. Also, the vocational service from the high school were meeting with students in the hallways. These are just a few examples of how flexible the staff is working in this program.

Mr. Blue asked what the needs are for the next two years. Mrs. Volpe stated a student multi-purpose large area, another student restroom with stalls, and three more classrooms. For every ten students an additional classroom is required. The one classroom is extremely small. Mr. Blue suggested focusing on a short-term solution with a long-term in mind.

Mrs. Volpe stated there is a dip with enrollment at the junior high level. However, the students identified at the preschool for all program is high and can be used to predict enrollment for long term planning. Since July, there were 180 additional SPED students that have either moved into the district or have been identified as needing special education services. However, overall enrollment for the district has remained steady or declined a bit.

Mrs. Volpe displayed three potential options for the committee to review. Option 1: Locate space in existing district buildings, Option 2: Lease space at Mason Square and Option 3: Purchase land/build out additional space in Mason Square.

Option 1: Last school year, administration utilized current space at the high school due to new section of the Stars program along with another section of the life skills program opening. The high school is out of room. Also, after reviewing East View Academy, the space is limited for current program improvements. Ideally, Transition Centers should not be located in a school, since it is supposed to teach adult life. In addition, transportation and administrative expenses would be incurred if this program were at different locations.

Option 2: In May, Mrs. Volpe stated she brought a recommendation to the Facilities and Planning Advisory Committee as a short-term solution that a 5,000 square foot space became available across the way from the current Transition Building location in Mason Square. ISBE confirmed that using IDEA grant funds for these monthly lease expenditures is appropriate. This is a flexible, mid-term solution that will require minimal renovation costs. The lease is approximately sixty thousand a year.

Option 3: Purchase and build-out additional space currently available in Mason Square. While this is a long-term solution, it does require significant funding of approximately \$850,000. Mr. Lightfoot recalled a cost of \$675,000 from acquiring the current facility. Mrs. Volpe stated she is not recommending this option at this time due to the current financial situation of the district.

Mrs. Volpe presented the costs for her recommendation with Option 2 is a one-time set up expense of \$74,250. In addition, the annual cost of the lease including utilities, custodial supplies and labor would be \$84,740. The district's annual expense out-of-pocket would be \$19,000 since the IDEA grant would cover the rest. Her recommendation for the district's short-term needs is to sign a two-year lease with hope the Board will take action in January in order to take occupancy in the spring of 2020. Students can begin to use the new facility in August 2020.

Mrs. Mugford questioned if the IDEA grant money would take away from other needs in the district. Mrs. Volpe mentioned over the past three years the district has used a significant amount of this grant money towards curriculum, instruction and assessments. This grant is around three million dollars. The needs of the district are carefully explored by administration.

Mr. Mueller questioned if there was a possibility of this grant not being funded. Mrs. Volpe answered there is no risk. This is not a competitive grant like other grants. Mrs. Christi Tyler added since this a federal grant, funds are more stable.

Mr. Lightfoot stated the timeline is too fast and we as a district will make a decision before spring so there is time for construction. However, taking this to the Board in December is not realistic. The committee needs more time to think about this decision and ask questions. Mrs. Jennifer Smith asked if there is a lease-to-own option. Unfortunately, Mrs. Volpe stated there is not with this particular space at Mason Square.

Mr. Lightfoot briefly mentioned he has some ideas; there is a building for sale currently in the district. We do not have to sell it and just sell the land around it to pay for the build out of this facility. However, we need more time to explore these options. If anyone has any further questions or wants further research done, email Mrs. Christi Tyler. This agenda item will be re-visited.

IV. Property Tax Relief Grant

Mrs. Tyler stated the district applied for this grant last year. However, it was not awarded.

This is an opportunity to lower the tax bills for the community. ISBE released information on this grant which “Provides school districts with high tax rates relative to other school districts with an opportunity to lower the property tax burden on local taxpayers with the state replacing a portion of foregone tax revenue with state funds”. This year the estimated maximum amount of property taxes we could abate is \$13,471,591, while the estimated maximum grant possible is \$12,392,664. If we were awarded the maximum amount, revenue would be reduced by \$2.15 million from fiscal years 2020-2022. Any money received through this grant is rolled into a school district’s Base Funding Minimum going forward. This is the ‘hold-harmless’ provision of EBF.

The state has allocated \$53.65 million this year to this program, which is enough to fund districts, ranked 1 through 37 - if they were all to apply. Last year we were ranked 267th and this year our ranking moved up to 187th. Due to this ranking, there is a slim chance the district would receive this grant. Something new this year is the requirement for school districts who are awarded the grant will need to abate taxes for two years. The obvious benefit to applying and receiving this grant is an opportunity to provide property tax relief to our community, even if the referendum were to pass. The disadvantages are the loss of revenue and our district’s ranking. However, the final step, if we were awarded a grant, would be to approve and file property tax abatement resolutions with each of the Counties by March 30th. Therefore, we could be approved for a grant, but not ‘accept’ the grant by not filing resolutions with the Counties. If the committee agrees, we would bring this to the Board as information and action at the December 9th meeting since there is only one meeting in December. The deadline to file is January 6, 2020. Mr. Lightfoot asked the committee if anyone thinks this should be considered by the Board. No members expressed concerns on not moving this forward.

V. Kendall County Land Cash

The county is asking for an updated appraisal from all the schools district’s property in unincorporated Kendall County. They are looking to calculate fair market values by school district using the same calculation that obtained the proposed fair market value of \$47,121 for the entire County (the weighted average of all lot sales on a dollar per acre basis throughout Kendall County for a 3-year period). The school district information, for sales both inside and outside municipalities, are as follows:

Oswego-\$58,328, Sandwich-\$52,141, Yorkville-\$49,328, Plano-\$43,844, Newark-\$20,752

The reason why Kendall County is doing this is due to the reduction in the EAV over the last few years. For example, the current fee for a four-bedroom house is \$2,233 and the proposed is \$1,463. Just to give you an idea of how many permits were issued this past year, there were seventeen, and not all were for this school district.

Mr. Lightfoot commented this only effects a smaller area of properties. However, the larger issue here is for the district to advocate to not reduce fees due to its current financial situation.

VI. Public Comment (3 minutes each)

Keith Mecklenburg, a SD308 program administrator. He thanked the committee for their time. We have an awesome team in place who is passionate about this program. In order for us to serve the students in this district, space is our biggest concern. Stop by anytime to come tour the building to see what we do.

Doug Collin, a parent. He has a daughter currently in the transition program. He’s not sure what the projections for overall student population will be over the next five years. However, he predicts ten to fifteen percent of the total enrollment will need services including IEP’s. Even if there is a gap in junior high now, there won’t be in the future. He thinks enrollment will be higher than 87 students by 2024. The committee needs to plan for long-term and needs a building that can be expandable.

Sharon Burgfeld, a vocational coordinator. She stressed the importance of privacy at the facility. We are always scrambling for space when trying to discuss concerns with students. Sometimes, meetings take place in the hallways. Student’s dignity and privacy is an extreme issue.

Erika Sieh, a committee member. She wants to know if staff members think the Mason Square location is ideal for this program. *Darcy Durkee*, a special education secretary, She feels that it is an important location and it helps the students feel like they are a part of a community. If they were in out in the middle of nowhere, there would be no exposure for them at all in the real world.

Parent, some children have been in the program for years together. She stated the high school setting was by far the best to have an inclusion feeling with other students. By having two locations, groups may be split up. It may be hard for them to adjust.

Parent, speaking for himself, feels a strip mall isn't an ideal location for his child. It is an open space for short-term needs, but not long-term. He is concerned of safety.

Darcy Durkee, a special education secretary. Even though the building is 5,000 square feet, space is limited due to a boiler room and all the equipment. Two wheelchairs will not fit in the hallway at one time. There are ten bus drivers with their aides that drop students off and sometimes need to use the restroom. There is a long line at the reception area sometimes out the door. It is very congested.

Teacher, in regards to Mason Square being a good location, being a part of the community is ideal. One building housing the entire program seems to be a better long-term solution.

Teacher, this program started in 2012 with only seven students, people were telling her that Kendall County has a great program and are moving here because of it. We are now serving higher functioning students compared to then also. She doesn't think enrollment projections could have predicted some of these factors.

Teacher, bigger classroom sizes are needed. Imagine 16 students in a 15X16 room with some in wheelchairs and some needing a one on one aid.

Teacher, worries about the security with the store front being all windows, these grown adults are still our students that need the same protection as the other students in the district. The staff there does a great job with people entering the building.

VII. Adjournment

Mr. Lightfoot asked for a motion to adjourn, Robert Eberhardt motioned, and seconded by Richard Powers. All present were in favor to adjourn.

Meeting was adjourned at 7:41pm.

Next meeting: January 21, 2020