

2020 Danbury Public Schools Task Force

Special Meeting Minutes

Monday, June 15, 2020

6:00 p.m.

Zoom Virtual Meeting

Committee Members Present: Mayor Mark Boughton, Rachel Chaleski, Erin Daly, Antonio Iadarola, Richard Jannelli, Warren Levy, Dr. Salvatore Pascarella, Frederick Visconti, Kevin Walston

Committee Members Absent: Tim Maroney, Lisa Ruffles, Terry Sachs

Also Present: Roberto Alves, Dr. Kara Casimiro, Kate Conetta, Gladys Cooper, Henry Hall, Richard Jalbert, Sen. Julie Kushner, Courtney LeBorious, Dr. Anne Mead, Taylor O'Brien, Albert Russo, Sandra Sanchez, Farley Santos, Kelly Truchsess

Call to Order and Introduction

Mayor Boughton called the meeting to order and explained the effect of COVID19 has had on normal operations. Prior to this meeting, the Board of Education had been updated with the following presentation. The Mayor recognized the attendance of a state legislator at the meeting and offered opportunity for comment. There is potential for a state legislative session in July. It is unclear if there will be a bill for school construction, however, plans for the influx of students should be prepared in the meantime. Prior to the pandemic, the 2020 Task Force had been working on utilizing various spaces in different ways. Mayor Boughton and Mr. Iadarola had met with the owners of the Summit Building to discuss a potential school space within the building. Prior to the pandemic, Dr. Sal and a few from his team had toured the building.

New Business

The City asked the Summit to develop drawings using the vision of Dr. Sal and his team for a "school within a school" for about 1,100 students. Originally, the idea was to establish a lease-to-purchase agreement with the owners. Mayor and Antonio met with the facilities division of the State Office of Policy and Management to discuss Danbury's space issues. For those who support the charter school, the charter school was also discussed. If passed legislation does not include the charter school, Danbury must still accommodate the growth in student population. The idea to lease with an option to purchase after about 20 – 25 years was discussed with the state. There was interest to support the project and revisit once plans could be made. The drawings were created without commitment to any specific design. It was thought the lease-to-purchase idea could be complicated as it translates to a school construction bill. Therefore, it was considered to purchase with a design-build. Given specifications, the owners would design and build the space. The plan would be to purchase and seek reimbursement from the state. There is some preliminary legislation being drafted. Danbury is seeking the same reimbursement rate, about 80%, that other major cities receive. The Danbury delegation will be provided the same presentation. The Mayor has discussed this with the Governor.

The project is called the Danbury Career Academy. The idea is to connect with various businesses, agencies, and non-profits in Danbury to provide a training opportunity for our students, as well as academic classrooms.

Athletics would be provided by Danbury High School. In the next phase, the state would be provided a tour of the building, and the goal would be to pass the plans through legislation. The Mayor recognized there were some council members at the meeting. The project would be presented to City Council in a bond package to be voted on by residents. The agreement with the state is the total project cost will not exceed \$45MM (prior to reimbursement). Antonio stressed that the drawings about to be presented are only renderings. There is a considerable amount of work yet to be done to portray the space that will hold the Board of Education's academic program. He said the concept of a "school within a school" that Dr. Sal and his team have developed is exciting. There have been a few other districts that have successfully implemented similar programs. Antonio has scheduled a presentation and tour of the space with the state on this Thursday. Antonio will continue to meet with Summit to work on several building adaptations necessary for the academic program. The Mayor added that if the City were to use its procurement and bid specifications, the cost would not be within the \$45MM. Using a design build method is unique to the state, which is the reason for legislation. The advantages of a design build are that it is quicker (about 18 months versus about 3 years to the traditional building retrofit) and cheaper (~\$45MM versus ~\$100MM).

The drawings were presented. The school will have its own entrance and exit. The gymnasium would be an addition to the building. The facility will have segregated utilities and mechanicals and will not use the building's electric, heat, etc. The building has Ground through Fourth floors. This facility will occupy two pods and a gymnasium. Every room has windows to provide required sunlight. The bottom floor will be enclosed and serve as a reception area with stairwells and elevators. Buses will not go through the building, but around the outside of the building. The gymnasium will hold a small stage at one end, lockers rooms, restrooms, office and storage areas. The stage could be used for smaller events. The Summit will have a 1,000-person convention center, which can be used by agreement. A typical suite of classrooms (10 classrooms, offices, student lounge and dining) on the first floor was shown. The interior classrooms will have half-high walls with glass on top. The hallways will have floor to ceiling glass. The building will hold grades 6 through 12, segregated by floor and staggered times. The drawing included a kitchen, which could be used in different ways, such as a warming kitchen or testing/classroom as determined by the Board. The Summit building already holds a full kitchen that could be used, which would save on cost.

The Committee was presented with the remaining floor plans, which contained a media center, conference rooms, pupil services, teacher lounge, etc. in addition to classroom space. A typical classroom was shown. The Mayor mentioned again that the drawings do not constitute actual plans, but this provides the Committee with a vision for the use of the building, as well as help to determine square footage and classroom space. The State will not pay for excess space and requires that space be built according to the anticipated student growth as forecasted by a demographic study.

The presentation went on to include the exterior of the building. There is some acreage adjacent to the building, which could be acquired dependent on cost. The drawings contained some outdoor seating areas, exterior courtyards, potential outdoor classroom space and outdoor electric area.

Conclusion

The Mayor concluded that the budget for the project has been relayed to the building owners. There have been positive discussions around the design build model. The project will depend on the amount of state reimbursement. The academic programming will depend on decisions made by the Board of Education. The layout is subject to change. The space is contained in two pods of the building, although a bit more space would be ideal. Common space will drive the square footage amount. Antonio is working to utilize as much common

space as possible. He will have a better idea for it by end of next week. At this time, the Committee is not required to take any action. The purpose of this meeting was to update the Committee on the work being done in preparation to accommodate student growth. The timeline to open the facility would be a year to 18 months upon approval. Dr. Sal confirmed that the Board will have to develop the educational specifications. He recalled the concern upon learning of the projected growth at the middle and high school levels. Consequently, Dr. Casimiro and her team had researched and visited the Academies of Nashville. The Board will have to work through the complexity of this Grade 6-12 concept in order to accommodate enrollment, but also to create other academic pathways, like the Danbury Early College Opportunity (DECO) program. The Academies of Nashville has strong connections with area businesses. The business section is a key component. The next step of the board is to create the educational specifications that would fit into and be used by the design. Dr. Sal had discussed with Antonio the idea of the middle school being much like the Freshmen school in DECO. The Freshmen wing is a school within a school. ACE is also a program that has access to programming at DHS. The idea the Board could consider is creating academic pathways that can lead to DHS, as well. The opportunities would be wonderful, if students at the magnet complex can access various pathways. Dr. Sal inquired as to next steps regarding the timeline for the educational specifications, if the state determines a reimbursement. Antonio stated that discussions with the District should begin early in the process. Concurrently, Antonio will work with the state to determine a best course of action as the project moves forward with a design build that follows the traditional review method. Antonio will work with Dr. Sal and the architect on a model of educational specifications. There should be a determination of whether the project moves forward by next fall. Dr. Sal will have time to work with the Board and his staff. Antonio confirmed that the approach to renovate an existing building allows the City to address the projected enrollment growth. The District should be able to occupy the building prior to the anticipated enrollment surge and allow the District to grow into the space. Dr. Sal agreed that phasing into the building has many advantages, particularly with resources. Dr. Sal said he will begin discussions with the Board. He mentioned that one priority of the Board would likely be that exclusive space for core instruction be designated for each middle and high schools. Antonio confirmed that the theme of separation is included in the approach. He mentioned the regional education service center CREC has taken this approach with a few of its schools. CREC has been a leader in some unique academic programs and has shared its success of a "school within a school" model. There are some examples of what has worked and what hasn't worked and therefore opportunity to build upon them.

The floor was opened for questions and comments. Mr. Russo thanked the Mayor, Antonio and teams for bringing this concept forward. He asked about the bond being put before voters and if, with the anticipated state reimbursement, it would still need to be put to a vote. The Mayor clarified that the state requires the full cost of the project before reimbursement to be voted on.

Adjournment and Next Meeting

The meeting was adjourned at 6:41 p.m. The 2020 Task Force will reconvene in two weeks.

Respectfully Submitted,

Rachel Chaleski