

Eastford School Facilities Study Committee

FINAL REPORT

October 2009

History

The Facilities Study Committee has been meeting since October 2008 with the intent of studying the feasibility and estimated costs of several different options for the future of Eastford Elementary School. The 13 member committee was appointed by the Board of Selectmen and consists of members representing a wide range of Eastford's citizens.

Prior to this committee, a Facilities Committee already existed through the Eastford Board of Education. During its tenure, the BOE Facilities Committee commissioned school experts, Friar Associates, an architectural/engineering firm, to do a comprehensive study of the condition of the building. The BOE committee also issued a significant report called "Eastford Elementary School - Planning for the Future"

Because the future of the school will likely require a large expenditure of some kind, it was decided that the committee should be a town committee and was turned over to the Board of Selectmen.

Purpose

The committee's charge was to study three presented options, explore other options as it saw fit and present a recommendation for action to the Board of Selectmen and the Board of Education which includes scope and rough cost estimate. The options were 1) Renovation 2) Build a new school in Eastford and 3) Build a combined cooperative school with Pomfret. In addition to these options, the Committee has added a fourth option: Do Nothing.

Members

The original volunteers appointed by the Board of Selectmen were: Tom Latham, Brian Boyce, Steve Zinn, Herm Barlow, Linda Torgeson, Paul Homer, Kim Page, Amy Archambault, Brendan Owens, Bob DiQuattro, Dean Bunnell, Dale Warren, Dennis Barlow, Gerry Marmat and Garry Carabeau. Brian Boyce and Amy Archambault resigned because of employment obligations, and Dennis Barlow and Garry Carabeau were voted in from alternates to permanent members.

Activities

During about 18 meetings, the Committee engaged the following people to assist it in coming to a decision:

RON RICKEY. Chair of the Town of Union Building Committee involved in the new Union School project from early on and into the building's construction.

WILLIAM OROS. Superintendent of Union Schools and instrumental in the realization of the new building project.

POMFRET BOARD OF EDUCATION. Richard Packman, Superintendent, Richard Schad, Joe Miragliulo, Liz Carter.

RON HARRIS. Connecticut Department of Education Attorney responsible for monitoring and formulating regional school system procedures.

GLEN YEAKEL. Architect from Friar Associates involved in the building needs assessment that was done for Eastford Elementary 2 years ago.

HOLLY ADAMONIS-ZULLER, DAVID DEQUATTRO, STEVEN HUGHES. RGB Associates architectural and engineering staff specializing in energy efficiency and green building technology.

DR. GUY DIBIASIO. Superintendent of Eastford School District. Hosted comprehensive tour of the school building and provided valuable documentation and information from school administration.

RICH SITNIK. Construction project manager from Arcadis experienced in complete execution of school building and renovation projects from start to finish. Currently managing the building of the new Union school.

DAVID HART. Architect from Turner Group who designed the new Union School. Experienced with smaller one school communities and renovation projects.

COMMUNITY CONVERSATION. Highly structured input and opinion from a diverse gathering of 80 Eastford residents.

Findings

Without hiring an architectural firm to do a preliminary design and comprehensive cost estimate at significant expense, the Facilities Study Committee was unable to provide accurate cost information on any of the options. Estimates given are based on currently accepted costs per square foot for school construction and renovation. According to information from architects, the costs of construction have remained steady over the last 2 years due to the recession.

An option to “do nothing” was added to the original charge. The definition of “do nothing” is to leave the building as it is and continue with maintenance and improvements using funds from the regular budget. The majority of the building has remained largely unchanged for 46-60 years. It was decided that this option was not feasible and the committee voted to eliminate it.

The committee devoted significant time to considering the option to “combine with Pomfret”, including meeting with several members from the Pomfret Board of Education. Pomfret has been seeking to build a new school for a few years and have approached Eastford several times asking if the town would be interested in creating a cooperative arrangement between Eastford and Pomfret that would involve building a new K-8 school for both towns. The new building would most likely be built on land currently owned by the Town of Pomfret that is close to the “Eastford side” of town. Both towns would enjoy a significantly higher state construction reimbursement (around 72%) for building cooperatively. This school would be a large facility with approximately 720 students and would be about 103,000 square feet. It could cost around \$44 million with Eastford’s share being about \$11 million. With state reimbursement, the Town’s cost would be about \$3 million. The school would have many amenities and expanded educational opportunities as well as a full hot lunch program. There is debate over operating costs being reduced for both towns based on the economy of scale. Some reports show lower per-student operating costs for larger schools. Other opinions say that large schools, specifically coop/regional

arrangements, end up with higher administration costs and could end up costing more. Based on information from CT State Attorney, Ron Harris, a regional or cooperative K-8 school arrangement has never been done. All regional or cooperative districts have always involved high schools, and sometimes middle schools. Historically, towns have always kept their youngest students local. Also, based on the results of the Community Conversation held in Eastford, keeping the small community based school was important to many people. If a cooperative school were built in Pomfret, the distance and amount of driving and busing was a concern. In addition, the Town of Eastford would be left with a large building that would be expensive to maintain and operate and would most likely be difficult to fully occupy or lease. The committee voted to eliminate this option. It should be noted, however, that some discussion was given to tuitioning older students (6-8 or 7th and 8th grades) to Pomfret if they were to build a new school. Considering this possibility would fall into the hands of the Board of Education.

Consideration was also given to the “build a new school in Eastford” option. A new efficient and up to date facility built on new land would alleviate current space and educational program deficiencies as identified by the school administration and could include food service facilities. It may also provide lower operational costs as a result of greatly increased energy efficiency. Original cost estimates by the BOE Facilities committee were based on construction of a 24,596 sq/ft building. It was estimated that the building would cost \$10.5 million, not including land purchase, with a 60.7% state reimbursement rate, leaving the Town with a cost of \$4.1 million. However, the current building is around 36,000 sq/ft. Although the state reimbursement size requirement only allows 143 sq/ft per student, the building would most likely need to be larger than 24,596 square feet, possibly adding significant additional unreimbursed cost to the project. The school would probably not be in the center of town. In addition, Eastford would once again be left with the existing building to maintain and operate. The committee has also eliminated this option.

In discussing the “renovation” option, the committee has considered that the existing school is already a large building and does have a newer portion consisting of the gymnasium, classrooms and lobby that was built 17 years ago. Through discussions with architects, a renovation design could re-configure existing areas to alleviate current educational program and administrative space deficiencies. The design would also include major improvements in the building’s mechanical and electrical systems, ventilation, code compliance and safety. Also, greater energy efficiency would be enjoyed, reducing operating costs. There may be the need to add some additional space as well. One architect, David Hart, felt that a renovation could be done at a cost less than new construction, but this cannot be firmly established until a preliminary design has been completed. Some estimates from Friar Associates, and from the Town of Union, have shown that renovation may cost as much as new construction, depending on the scale of the project. State reimbursement is available, but varies dependent on the scope of the project.

Conclusion

The Facilities Study Committee recommends that the Board of Selectmen appoint a building committee and provide funds to engage an architectural firm to prepare plans for the renovation and possible addition to the Eastford Elementary School.