

**RYE SCHOOL DISTRICT  
SCHOOL USE FEASIBILITY COMMITTEE**

Thursday, August 31, 2017 – 8:00 a.m.  
Rye Town Hall

DRAFT

*Members Present: Co-Chair Paula Tsetsilas, Co-Chair Peggy Balboni, Craig Musselman, Salvatore Petralia, Paul Goldman, Gregg Mikolaities, Marc Sedam, Katherine Errecart and Doran Morford.*

*Ex Officio Members: SAU 50 Business Administrator James Katkin, Town Administrator Michael Magnant, Rye Junior High Principal Marie Soucy, Rye Elementary School Principal Suzanne Lull.*

*Others Present: Rye School Board Chair Scott Marion, Peter Crawford, Julie Struble*

*Not Present: Jeanne Moynahan, Andrea Papoutsy*

**I. Call to Order**

**Co-Chair Tsetsilas called the meeting to order at 8:05 a.m.**

**I. Approval of Minutes – August 3, 2017**

**Motion by Marc Sedam to approve the minutes of August 3, 2017 as presented. Seconded by Paul Goldman. All in favor.**

**II. Review of Meeting Objectives - School space needs and suggested school use options**

**III. Discussion of Information Gathered**

- **Town real estate overview – Paula Tsetsilas**

Co-Chair Tsetsilas stated that she has spoken with two realtors. Her prediction was that as the community ages there would be an increase in inventory. The report from the realtors was that the market has been very stable for the last three years, in terms of the number of listings. The trend that she was thinking might come is not there. It stands to reason that it will come; however, it is unknown as to who will move in. She continued that about 30% of the current buyers in Rye are families. That means about 70% of the buyers are purchasing a second home,

are retirees or people without children. That is something that the committee should keep in mind when thinking about the future of the town and the demographics.

- **Consolidation reports review – Paula Tsetsilas**

Co-Chair Tsetsilas stated that she shared with the committee some information she received from the New Hampshire School Board Association. One is a document about school consolidation in New Hampshire, which was from the N.H. Center for Public Policy Studies. The other document is a doctoral thesis by Bob St. Cyr a principal in Candia, N.H. He looked at the decision making process during enrollment decline and how communities can respond to it. She continued that the thesis underscored the work they are doing as a committee, in that it is a big responsibility and is significant for the town. The process is very important in obtaining town buy-in. In terms of a process, the document suggested a process called PROACT; defining a problem, specifying the objectives, talking about alternatives, considering consequences and evaluating tradeoffs.

Referring to the PROACT process, Member Errecart stated that in some ways the committee is naturally following this process. In her mind, specifying objectives includes identifying criteria that will be used to assess the options that the committee identifies.

Co-Chair Tsetsilas stated that criteria for her falls a little more under alternatives and consequences. In terms of the objectives, the committee set out four objectives; (1) study enrollment, (2) understand the town space needs, (3) preserve a high quality education and (4) To present fiscally responsible proposals to the Town. As the committee moves through the process, they should take a step back and ask how they know they are successful. She was able to speak with the superintendent and the principals of the schools. The thought is that the committee should deliver to the town and the school board three or four ideas to further pursue. To her, this is the committee's objective. This is the "what". The "how" is looking at the enrollment and understanding the town's needs. As far as criteria and how those different options are evaluated, that needs to be established as a group. She asked the committee if they agree that the ultimate goal is to present to the town approximately three options that the committee collectively feel are the best to pursue.

Member Goldman stated that his take away from the St. Cyr document is that there needs to be a robust process. Also, conclusions that happen on a national basis cannot be generalized. A conclusion on a national level does not necessarily apply to each situation. If the committee is going to articulate a process, it has to really be followed and should be specifically driven to the town's situation. Otherwise, it is just generalizations.

Co-Chair Tsetsilas agreed. Each situation and town is unique. She commented that through declining enrollments there may be opportunities that will arise.

Member Musselman suggested that they hold judgement on what their conclusions are going to be until the process is gone through. He is not yet convinced that any of the alternatives that are

on the table merit a next step. He is also not convinced that the three of them wouldn't. Assuming that the committee is presenting three or four things, assumes that there are three or four things that the committee thinks are all viable. It presumes that this group will reach no conclusion. He would not start the process by having that be the committee's objective. Member Mikolaities agreed. He continued that he is good with the five steps getting to viable options. He just didn't want to say "let's come up with three" before the committee even gets started. It could be three, two or even one.

In regards to the timeline, Co-Chair Tsetsilas pointed out that on October 26<sup>th</sup> there will be a town wide meeting. The committee will share their findings with the town and get town input. There is a follow-up meeting scheduled for November 9<sup>th</sup>. That meeting will result in the final written report. There are two meetings scheduled prior to the town wide meeting. One on September 14<sup>th</sup> and one on October 12<sup>th</sup>.

Referring to the timeline, Member Errecart stated that she cannot imagine a scenario where the committee will be able to comprehensively examine the different options and have anything conclusive. The committee may have different insights that could be shared on areas that need further exploration. However, in her mind the timeline is a pretty big constraint.

Co-Chair Tsetsilas stated that she thinks that there will be some things the committee will be able to say and there will be some things that have already been ruled out. It will get to a point where the committee can say that they have looked at a certain option and were able to rule it out. She continued that anything the committee does is not written in stone. This is a first step in a process. The process is going to take some time.

Member Errecart commented that she would rather come to a place that the committee feels comfortable with rather than rush through the process.

Co-Chair Tsetsilas stated that she would like to talk about the criteria and how the options will be evaluated. The committee needs to understand the financial impact and the social impact from a town perspective and a school climate. How will it affect the education? She would like to talk about the criteria and how they can add to it.

Member Errecart stated that safety should be added.

Member Sedam stated that the warrant article talks about the criteria. It talks about the financial and the high quality of education. He thinks that is the task at hand. Whatever is discussed should have that criteria. He also thinks safety should be added because that is one of his biggest concerns.

Member Petralia stated that part of the evaluating piece from a committee's perspective is to establish the pros and cons of each proposal.

Referring to the criteria, Member Errecart stated that they should also look at the flexibility. The other criteria should be the feasibility, both from a resource perspective, space and public will. Referring to public will, Member Morford stated that he does not know what the critical mass of people will be that say “we don’t want anything that has any financial implications”. Some will say they don’t have school aged children and don’t want this affecting them. Some others will have children that don’t go to Rye schools. He thinks the committee should be prepared to speak to that factor. He thinks this is an element that could come out in the public will as the committee begins to propose options.

Member Musselman stated that as the committee thinks about alternatives and talk to the staff about what those alternatives mean, one of the options may be to have larger class sizes. An option to have no financial impact may be to go with larger classes and have fewer classes for each grade. That would have impacts on staff and on the school board decision making process. Rye is at half capacity and using every classroom in both buildings. Consolidating things to free up space is not going to be a simple issue. There may be issues beyond quality education. Somewhere in there is a class size criterion that needs to be evaluated.

Co-Chair Tsetsilas stated this falls under quality of education; pros and cons. During previous school board meetings, this came up as a parent concern. At that time, there was a standard put in place for the protocols for class size that was approved by the school board. The work has already been done on determining the limit on class size so education is not compromised. She feels the committee should work within those guidelines because the work has already been done.

Co-Chair Balboni commented that once the classes started hitting 20 that was the upper limit.

Member Musselman asked if there is a study for this. He asked if they could see the policy and information.

Co-Chair Tsetsilas offered to provide this information for the next meeting.

Co-Chair Balboni noted that right now in Grade 4 there are 40 students and only 2 classes. In Grade 1, there are 3 classes with 43 students in that grade; however, they are younger. It would be difficult to put 20 students in a class for the younger grades. The older grades could probably handle larger classes.

Member Musselman commented this is something that they will need to understand by the time the committee finishes.

Member Sedam stated that they should be looking at the school buildings and the facilities, not necessarily what happens inside. The recommendation might not be to repress school classes. It might be look for 400 square feet in the schools to be freed up to do something. Telling the schools how to perform is not the committee’s job.

Member Musselman stated they should not constrain themselves in that way. A question to the staff on some of these alternatives would be “what are the impacts if we change?” He thinks they ought to be open to all alternatives. The committee should look at what the alternatives are to create space and what impact it will have on education quality. He does not think they should constrain themselves into not getting into how the schools are managed because that is a part of each one of the alternatives.

Member Goldman stated that if there is a robust process and the information is collected, it will lead to the right answers. However, the committee cannot be afraid to explore what those possibilities are. An opportunity that might have a positive impact might be missed. He agrees that they should have a good process, good information to feed into that process and let that tell what the results are.

Member Sedam commented that his concern is that this could take forever. If the committee does not have boundaries on what they are looking at, they will never resolve the problem. He keeps going back to the warrant article and what they were asked to look at. He is not saying don't examine other issues. He is saying the process has to end.

Member Goldman stated that one way the process may end is that the committee takes it as far as they can and indicate what the next steps may be. It may be something that continues. This is the first time that the town has dealt with all of this.

Co-Chair Tsetsilas asked for comments regarding the school consolidation reports.

Member Errecart stated that in looking at the School Consolidation N.H. Report, the impacts, whether it be financial, academic or otherwise, varied widely. It seems that the core reason that consolidation is being considered is from a financial perspective and even those are not guaranteed. It makes sense that if Grades K through 8 are going to be combined there are going to be costs associated with altering the building or creating new space that might dampen the effect of any reduced per pupil cost down the road. She continued that something else that stood out was a quote that said “cost savings are most evident not through combining individual schools but by combing smaller districts into larger districts”.

Ex-Officio Member Katkin stated that he is not sure he agrees with this. It depends upon what districts being looked at. There is a big difference between Rye, N.H., versus Colebrook, N.H. based on cost. He continued that 5 or 6 years ago, there was 228 students at the Rye Junior High. There is now 150 students. The elementary school had about 350 students. This year there is 275. The town has lost a large segment of the population. Like it was said, only 30% of the people moving into Rye are families. More retirees are moving in and replacing the family oriented homes. There is space in the schools. From what is projected for at least the next 5 years, the town is going to continue to lose students. The town is not in a position to be gaining them at this point in time.

Member Sedam stated the N.H. Center for Public Policy Report addresses this issue. He wants the committee to be careful and not think it doesn't apply when there are studies that show other schools that look very similar to Rye. The studies are good for looking at broad sets of data. There are trends that are ebbs and flows of this stuff. He wants to make sure they are using the data that is collected. It is important to use a data approach to make some of these decisions.

Member Goldman stated that one of conclusions he got from that report was for the committee to do their own study, have a good process and come to its own conclusions.

- **Rye Junior High building review: current floor plans – Marie Soucy**

Co-Chair Tsetsilas noted that the documents were uploaded into the files for the August 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting. The committee members have had a chance to review the information.

Ex-Officio Member Soucy stated that they need to be careful when looking at the capacity of the building compared to the enrollment because right now all the space is being used. She noted that there are three grade levels, 6, 7 and 8, at the junior high. The students travel in pods throughout the day. There are three classes for the core classes, math, language arts and science, and those teachers also teach social studies at some point in the day in those same classrooms. The students travel off team to go to their unified art class. At any given point in the day, there are going to be classrooms that are open but every classroom is being used throughout the day.

Current Enrollment:

- 6<sup>th</sup> Grade – 45 Students
- 7<sup>th</sup> Grade – 46 Students
- 8<sup>th</sup> Grade – 43 Students

Floor Plan:

- Lower level – Unified Arts Programs – music room, technology education room, woodshop, art, life skills
- 1<sup>st</sup> Floor – library, gym, cafeteria, main lobby, 6<sup>th</sup> graders are housed on this floor for core classes
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor – 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade classrooms – world language, computer lab & computer technology room

Member Mikolaities stated that he thought the projected enrollment was 151 students and he just heard 134.

Ex-Officio Member Soucy noted that quite a few current 6<sup>th</sup> graders transferred out to private schools and some students moved out of town.

Member Mikolaities asked if an analysis has been done to see why these students are leaving.

Member Petralia stated that the principal does an exit survey so the district has the data. There were situations where families completely relocated out of state and there were students who went to private schools.

Co-Chair Tsetsilas noted that this was something that concerned her when she became a school board member because the schools have a lot to offer. The school board is studying it and has asked the administration to provide updates of the school population throughout the year. It is something that they are trying to get a handle on.

Member Musselman asked if the 45 students per grade are split up into three classes during the day. He also asked if they are on the verge of being able to have two classes per grade instead of three per grade.

Ex-Officio Member Soucy explained that it depends on what the town wants to provide for the students in the school system. This would be a totally different makeup of the school. The town could face losing more families because the schools have larger classroom sizes. This could have a large impact on the whole structure of the school, the philosophy and makeup. It would be a question of what is the town willing to give up.

Co-Chair Balboni stated that she knows that when the school does have the space they find a way to utilize it effectively. It is possible to make larger classes but what it will change is the whole dynamic of the middle school philosophy. That is why there are three core classes. If that is changed, it changes the way the services are delivered and the way the teachers relate to the students. It is a philosophical change if that formula is changed. With that being said, there is potential space, such as the workshop space. It would be interesting to see what can be done with the space if the committee continues to explore the idea of having town offices in the building.

Co-Chair Tsetsilas reiterated that it is important that whatever they look at remains flexible for the future.

Member Musselman stated that it is important, from a town's perspective, that they look at alternatives and decide if it's pursuing. The fundamental question is, "If we were under either the alternatives of leaving the configuration as it is or changing to a K through 6<sup>th</sup> at the elementary school and 7<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> at the junior high school, what would it take for change in order to free up 10,000 square feet on the southern side of that building?" He needs to understand the answer to that. It may be that it can work or it may be that everyone is going to say that it will not work under the current arrangement. He thinks they need to assess that. The town does not need to worry about what has to be done to free up 2,000 square feet. That does not solve any problem at the moment. If 10,000 square feet can't be done right now, there still might be a long term option that could be kept on the table; however, the town is going to have to move in another direction with respect to its problem. He continued there will not be any final conclusion but it should be known if this is something that is really on the table in the foreseeable future or not. He asked if they can get an assessment of what can be done with

grades 6 to 8 with 10,000 less square feet and what can be done with 7 to 8 and the implications of that.

Co-Chair Tsetsilas commented that the other thing they will have to think about is how it impacts the elementary school. That has a huge impact in delivery of education if the 6<sup>th</sup> graders will now be housed in self-contained classrooms.

Ex-Officio Member Soucy pointed out that they are offering some really great things to students because they have the flexibility. If they did not have the space it would really add constraints. The enrichment and the flexibility is what is going to set the school apart from other schools.

Member Petralia stated that he encourages the committee to visit the schools to see the schools in action during the day to see it first-hand.

- **RES building review: current floor plans – Suzanne Lull**

Current enrollment:

- 275 Students

Floor Plan:

- First Floor – lobby & offices
- The primary wing is on the left from the lobby – Room 102 is the pre-school room, 1<sup>st</sup> grade, 2<sup>nd</sup> grade and one kindergarten class is housed in that room. The rooms are used fulltime every day.
- Rooms 190 & 191 - kindergarten rooms that are used fulltime every day.
- Rooms 187 & 124 - maintenance and the HVAC system.
- Room 178 - reading specialist which is used fulltime all day.
- Room 174 - gym and also serves as the lunchroom. A screen blocks off half the gym during lunch time. It is used in this manner from 11:15 to 1:30 every day.
- Room 171 - kitchen & storage.
- Room 168 - storage closet that is accessed from outside.
- Room 164 – music room
- Room 163 – art room
- Room 165 – S.T.E.M lab
- Rooms 155 & 153 – grade 4 (that grade will be leaving in two years and another classroom will be added.)
- Rooms 151 – Staff room – work room, lunch room & co-teaching room.
- Room 150 – work language
- Room 149 – computer lab
- Room 148 – library
- The cluster of rooms on the front are the special education rooms.

- The only room that is empty is Room 127, which is used for a couple of students who need an empty room for a break.
- Rooms 135 and down – 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and 5<sup>th</sup> grade classrooms
- Lower Level – 2 classrooms & storage
- Room 100 – Occupational Therapy room – shared by 2 teachers – also used by Rye Rec. for after school program.
- Room 200 – Rye Rec. – used for English as a Second Language part-time

Co-Chair Tsetsilas noted that the projected kindergarten numbers were 38 students and there are 50. That represents almost a 25% increase from the projections. She thinks this is encouraging and that they need to follow kindergarten enrollment over the next several years to see what happens.

Member Mikolaities stated that according to his notes the enrollment was supposed to be 280 students. It is now 275.

Ex-Officio Member Lully stated that the 280 number was where the school was at the end of the year. A class of 60 5<sup>th</sup> graders graduated. That number is not what was coming in. It is what the number was at the end of the year.

Member Mikolaities stated that there are 490 enrolled students out of a capacity of both the schools of 680. That is 60% capacity. The school needs to understand that this is a real number. This effects what is going to happen to the Town Hall, the rec, the library and the public safety building. Those buildings being at 60% capacity is huge. The buildings are 40% empty. That is a significant number. To him, that is really eye opening.

Ex-Officio Member Katkin explained that the way the size of the kindergarten class is determined is by progression ratios. That takes the number of students that were born in town five years before they go to kindergarten. In looking at that number it becomes very flexible because there is move-ins and move-outs over the five years. The year by year ratio is based on a fraction of 15 and that shouldn't vary by 10% at any given time. When trying to determine what the kindergarten is going to be, it is done from live births five years prior. It tends to skew the number for kindergarten. It corrects itself in 1<sup>st</sup> grade. After kindergarten, the actual number of students is used and tracked on a yearly basis.

Member Morford stated that they have to be careful in how they define capacity. Does the town want every classroom absolutely full all the time? What does that do to how education operates? Are we trying to do more with less or more with what is available?

Speaking to Ex-Officio Member Lull, Member Musselman asked if the committee could get an assessment of what she would do if it was decided that 6<sup>th</sup> graders were going to be moved into the Rye Elementary School and what impacts that would have. That is one of the things that need to be looked at to determine whether that is an option or not. If the committee is going to be meeting with the public in October, this information has to be known in September.

Co-Chair Tsetsilas commented that all along the committee has said that the research is going to drive this process. She thinks this is an exercise that is worthy of doing.

Member Errecart stated that the committee is already articulating the research plan and asking the administrators for their data. She wonders if the committee should identify the list of alternatives so if there are additional tasks for the principals that can be taken into account. She asked if they know whether the 680 capacity is based on the current philosophy about class size.

Dr. Marion explained that the capacity is based on State Statute of how much space is needed for a specific number of students.

Member Musselman asked if they can look at the capacity with respect to the class size policy.

Member Mikolaities stated that he has worked on a number of different schools all over the State. It is a formula that is used. That is how they are designed, built and staffed.

Member Musselman commented that with respect to the desired class size in Rye there is a different capacity. He is interested in knowing what that number is.

Dr. Marion explained that the State talks about an elementary class of approximately 25 and a middle school class of 30, which is more than the school board's recommendation on class sizes.

#### **IV. School Use Options – brainstorm session**

*The following documents are available for reference:*

- **Wedgewood land deed description – Jeanne Moynahan**
- **School deeds description – Jim Katkin & Jeanne Moynahan**
- **RES & RJH grading and site plans – Gregg Mikolaities**
- **DOE building requirements and codes – Paula Tsetsilas**

Referring to the consolidation report, Co-Chair Tsetsilas stated there was one thing that really stood out to her. There were 23 research studies that recorded that the smaller the environment for students the better, as it relates to their participation in the school community and extracurricular activities. A question she had asked the Committee in a previous meeting was: If there are going to be grade sizes of 30 and 35 at the junior high level ten years from now does the town tuition out to have access to a wide range of programming? The only place that Rye could tuition out to is Portsmouth Middle School. Hearing this data tells her that this would not be in the best interest of the students. The smaller the community the more likely the students are going to be a part of it. It is also going to disengage parents because there will be more distance between the student and the school itself.

Member Morford stated that consolidation has a big personality component built into it as well, as far as students feeling ownership and where they fit in. That is another component that comes in to play.

Member Musselman stated that he would question the group whether or not they should scope out what it means to consolidate both schools on the elementary school site. That option would require construction at the elementary school. Is that going to be dismissed in the process this year or is it going to be assessed? If it is going to be assessed it needs to be thought about at the next meeting in some detail.

Member Balboni stated that if they are going to look at consolidating the schools they will also have to look at the costs to renovate the current junior high building for town purposes.

#### Brainstorming Ideas:

- Maintaining existing configuration with a marketing campaign to attract and retain students.
- Adding onto the elementary school for a k-8 building; RJH becomes town space
- Pre-K(or K) through 6<sup>th</sup> grade at elementary school. 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> at RJH with town offices.
- Pre-K through 4<sup>th</sup> grade at the elementary school. 5<sup>th</sup> grade through 8<sup>th</sup> at the middle school.
- Possible consolidation within SAU 50.
- Utilizing more space at the elementary school to meet Rye Recreation's needs.
- After School Program for the Rye Middle School Students per the Rye Recreation Plan.
- Tuitioning out at the junior high level to Portsmouth.
- Tuitioning in at the junior high level.
- Embrace a certain specialization to make the schools more attractive.
- Expansion of programs.

#### **V. Next Steps/Agenda Planning**

- **Assignment of follow-up items**
  - Adjust the schools' capacity taking into consideration the School Board's recommendation on class sizes – Paula Tsetsilas
- **Site visits**
  - Scheduling tours of the schools – Marie Soucy & Suzanne Lull
  - Set up a walk-through of another K through 8 school in the district – Sal Petralia

- **Educational impact review**
  - Principals' feedback on how the loss of space would impact the schools – If 10,000 square feet had to be created at RJH, what would that look like? What are the educational implications of Pre-K through 4 and 5 through 8?

## **VI. Public Comment**

**Peter Crawford, 171 Brackett Road**, spoke in regards to projecting enrollment for the future and suggested the Town initiate a census to have a firm understanding of current town demographics.

**Scott Marion, School Board Chair**, spoke in regards to enrollment data. He also spoke in regards to the alternatives being considered. He suggested the Town consider some flexibility to the 10,000 square foot figure being proposed for sharing school space.

- **Next Meeting – Thursday, September 14<sup>th</sup>, 8:00 a.m.**

## **Adjournment**

**Motion by Craig Musselman to adjourn at 10:15 a.m. Seconded by Paul Goldman. All in favor.**

Respectfully Submitted,  
Dyana F. Ledger