

**RYE SCHOOL DISTRICT  
SCHOOL USE FEASIBILITY COMMITTEE  
Thursday, September 14, 2017  
8:00 a.m. – Rye Town Hall**

*Members Present: Co-Chair Paula Tssetsilas, Co-Chair Peggy Balboni, Jeanne Moynahan, Salvatore Petralia, Gregg Mikolaities, Katherine Errecart, Andrea Papoutsy and Mark Sedam.*

**I. Call to Order**

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

**II. Review and approval of August 31, 2017 meeting minutes**

**Motion by Salvatore Petralia to approve the minutes of August 31, 2017 as presented. Seconded by Katherine Errecart. Vote: 6-0-1. Abstained: Jeanne Moynahan**

**III. Review of Today's Meeting Objectives**

Co-Chair Tssetsilas stated that goals of the meeting is to evaluate the pros and cons that have been discussed so far, given the criteria that has been established; educational impact, social impact (to the students and to the town as a whole), feasibility, flexibility, financial impact and safety.

**IV. Discussion of School Tours**

**Observations:**

**K – 8<sup>th</sup> Model in Greenland:**

**Pros**

- Student collaboration within programs
- Mentorship programs between the older and younger students.
- Wonderful space – dedicated lunch room, dedicated gym, flex space besides the gym (During town voting the school would not need to be shut down. Would not affect regular programming.)

**Cons**

- One Art Teacher /one student counselor- causes scheduling conflicts and heavy caseload
- Scheduling conflicts because of having one building with three different schedules.
- Class sizes of 25 to 26 students at 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade level.

**Rye Junior High:**

- A lot of storage space that could be more organized and used more efficiently.

- Downstairs storage space could be used for an after-school program for middle school students. The space could be used during the day for adults. Large space with separate entrance. Space could be very useful.
- Space could be repurposed to have more efficient use of the space based on decisions made by administration. Foreign Language room is only used in the mornings. Discovery Room may be able to be repurposed for something else.

**Rye Elementary School:**

- Limited storage space
- Not a lot of extra classroom space available – especially if the pre-school program and after-school program is housed in the school.
- One classroom could be freed up (STEM Room); however, that may be needed in two years when the current fourth grade, which is a small class size, is moved up to the junior high. Space that is opened up to use now will not allow for flexibility two years from now.
- The area that has the rooms that Rye Rec uses for after-school programming has a separate entrance. There is space for a bathroom to be installed. There is also storage space available. The space may have potential to be used exclusively for Rye Rec.

Member Mikolaities stated that he was not able to go on the school tours. He continued that his kids went through the elementary school in the late 90's early 2000's. There were modulars outside before the addition was built. His kids received a great education. He is still grasping with the fact that the town has spent 5 million dollars to build the additions on both schools. It really is convenience versus necessity. There has to be some happy medium. There will have to be some compromises made. He is on the committee from the Rye Rec perspective so appreciates what is being said about carving out rooms for rec. The rec department used to have more dedicated space available to them and it is gone now. Over the past 20 years, there has been no progress made for Rye Rec programming needs.

Co-Chair Tsetsilas stated that is why these meetings are so important. The Committee is taking into account everyone's varied perspectives and different life stages and balancing them.

**V. Review Recent Information Gathered**

- **School capacity based on School Board's recommended class size policy**

Co-Chair Tsetsilas stated that at the last meeting there was discussion on looking at classroom size, as defined by the School Board three years ago, and how that relates to current capacity. She continued that she put together a document that shows;

- Current enrollment;
- Number of classrooms per grade; and
- Number of students per grade.

What she has come up with is that there is space in the buildings for more students anywhere from 27, and deliver the same education, to 114. She explained that the School Board set a policy three years ago as follows:

- Grades K, 1 and 2 – Recommended class size is between 15 and 18;

- Grades 3 and 4 – Recommended class size is between 17 to 20; and
- Grades 6, 7 and 9 – Recommended class size is between 18 to 22.

She continued that using these recommended class sizes and the current student population, in using the low range the district can accommodate 27 more students. Looking at the high range, there could be 114 more students in the buildings.

Member Errecart stated she took this assignment a step further and translated these raw figures into percentages. At the low range of the School Board class size policy, the schools are currently using 91% of the capacity. At the high range for class sizes, it is at 76% of the current capacity. This is different than using the State statutes with the class sizes acceptable into the upper 20's which would be about 60%. She pointed out that they still have extra space but it is not as much as one might assume.

Member Papoutsy stated the way she calculates it is: “How many classrooms are needed with those capacities?” At the elementary school, there are currently three classes for every grade level, except 4<sup>th</sup> grade. If something is filled up, how is it going to get to two classes per grade level? There is not going to be a free room until a group of 20 can be put into other spaces.

Co-Chair Tsetsilas clarified that in that scenario the classes would be exceeding the recommending class size.

Member Papoutsy confirmed. She pointed out that space is not going to free up unless it goes to two classrooms from the three.

Co-Chair Balboni stated that when her kids went through school, there was room in the schools for each grade to have four sections. During the school tours she noticed that rooms had been repurposed where classes were once held but, they have spread now because the space is there for the specials (unified arts, special needs therapies). She commented that a lot of them are required and she understands that needs are different now. There may be a lot of special needs academics that require that space; however, it is important to keep an open mind about how those rooms can be used.

- **Change in student programming at RJH if 10,000 sq. ft. used for town space needs**

Co-Chair Tsetsilas reviewed the report sent from Marie Soucy, Rye Junior High Principal, regarding student programming if 10,000sf was used for town space needs.

### **Highlights:**

- The building plan for the junior high is attached showing square footage for each classroom. The plan did not account for the square footage of hallway space. There may be more room if that space is repurposed.

- 10,000sf is pretty much the equivalent of the entire bottom floor. That floor houses unified arts; art, music, chorus, band and life skills. The bottom floor could be freed up for town space but all of the unified art programs would have to be relocated. In some cases, some programming might need to be eliminated or reduced.
- Another option may be to give away space on the first and second floors. This would include five classrooms and several office spaces, which would require some teachers and staff to share space. This option would require the school schedule to work around space needs rather than student needs. The school schedule would need to be modified. It is likely that it would affect the middle school model that Rye has in place now.
- Losing classroom space would put some real constraints on being able to provide a true middle school experience for the students.
- Sharing classroom space, not having dedicated space and travelling from one classroom to another is undesirable for teachers. Rye could potentially lose some skilled teachers.
- A third option would be to eliminate teaching positions, which would increase class sizes. This would also affect the middle school model and would lead to operate more like a junior high.
  - Junior High Model – Contains mostly two grades; 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>, which would be the two transition years. A teacher specializes in one subject and may teach both grade levels. Therefore, it is not team-based by grade level.
  - Grades 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>; middle years. The middle school philosophy is much different. The students are given choices and are able to start making choices. The teachers have time in their schedules to be able to plan what the entire 6<sup>th</sup> grade group is doing so units can be integrated all together. Each grade level is a team so the teachers will be following the same group of children.
- There is space in the lower level of 2500sf, which has a separate entrance. This space would work well for an adult program during the day and after-school programming. Sound proofing is a concern as it is located under the gym and gym noise, such as bouncing basketballs, is excessive.
- **Impact on educational programming and space use if 6<sup>th</sup> grade students are relocated to RES to allow 10,000 sq. ft. of town space at RJH**

Member Petralia reviewed the document prepared by Suzanne Lull, Rye Elementary School Principal, regarding the impact on educational programming and space use if 6<sup>th</sup> grade students are relocated to RES.

**Highlights:**

- The impact would have a ripple effect on not only space but programs as well at the school.
- The 6<sup>th</sup> grade would be in the elementary school model not the middle school model.
- An additional four classrooms would be needed; three for grade 6 and 1 for grade 5. This would impact downstairs rooms, pre-school, world language and consolidation of occupational therapy (O.T) and physical therapy (P.T).
- It could have some impact on Rye Recreation and the pre-school programming. That could force the need for taking that space.

- The PTA after school program could be in competition with Rye Rec for potentially needing the gymnasium space, or vice-versa.
- STEAM Studio would need to be repurposed to allow for classroom space. This is not a full size classroom.
- There would be possible adjustments to World Language Programs. The Board and administration would need to look at potentially dropping world language options in kindergarten and 1<sup>st</sup> grade to add 6<sup>th</sup> grade.
- The lunch schedule would be impacted by the additional 30 minutes on either end; before 11:30 or after 1:05. This could impact gymnasium space for physical education because a portion of the gym is used during lunch.
- Music would also have an impact with regard to band and chorus.
- Special education case manager space would need to be reconfigured. This position could be shared with the junior high.
- After school sports - By adding grade 6, what would this do to teaming? Will there be 5/6 teams or grade level teams? Currently, only track and basketball is offered at RES. How will this impact PTA and the Rye Rec for space needs after school?
- Students in 6<sup>th</sup> grade are ready to move on. Their social and emotional needs change and the middle school model meets those needs.
- Minimum standard for the State regarding class size:
  - Kindergarten to Grade 2 - 20 students or less
  - Grades 3 to 5 – 25 students or less
  - Middle, Junior & Senior – 30 students or less
  - The current Rye School Board Policy is conforming with those standards and is actually a bit less. This was enacted in 2014 and revised in 2017.

Co-Chair Tsetsilas stated the thing that stood out to her is the piece about the 6<sup>th</sup> graders being emotionally and socially ready to move on. Also, there are so many implications of how it impacts the quality of education itself.

Member Sedam stated that he keeps going back to why this committee was put together and what the objective is. It is to look at other uses of the schools. So far, it seems that a lot of those uses to him seem really disruptive. He did not think their (this committee's) purpose was to figure out how to change the schools to accommodate town hall. He thought they were to look at what was available and see if something could be done. What he got from both principals was that theoretically these things are possible but incredibly disruptive adjusting the educational style and adjusting the educational philosophy. He totally believes this is beyond the scope of what they (the committee) were supposed to do. He is open to figuring out if there is space that could be repurposed. However, he is not at all interested in anything that is going to change the philosophy of how the schools are run. He thinks it is inappropriate.

Co-Chair Tsetsilas stated that exploring partial use of the space for town needs is part of what this committee is supposed to do. In looking at the warrant article, it says “can any of the space be used for town needs?” She continued that about six months ago, there was a notice that went to the School Board from the Board of Selectmen that asked if there was space available for town use. She stands firmly that the educational sustainability is first and foremost. As the committee goes through the process, some of this will be vetted out so at least the town people

will know that this has been looked at, explored and for certain reasons the committee does not, or does, recommend exploring it further.

Co-Chair Balboni stated that the committee is looking at the space. It (committee's conclusions) will go back to the School Board and they will decide in terms of the education. This committee needs to stay focused on where that space is.

Member Errecart stated she is very much in the position of thinking about the long term. Her worst-case scenario is that the town experiences continuing decline in enrollment but hangs on to the status quo as tightly as possible so the quality declines. The programming declines and the town is unwilling to evolve. She is okay with doing more to max out the capacity if it means the schools can continue to evolve. She agrees that she does not want anything overly destructive to the academic and educational experience. She trusts that the administrators are going to push back if that area is encroached upon. She is open to different scenarios with the idea in mind that some of the committee's mandate is not simply "is it free space? Is it easy? Okay, let's use it". The reason the committee has even been pulled together is because there is a very high per pupil cost, there is a variable enrollment that could go either way and the town is trying to begin to think about longer term scenarios. She does not want to write off anything right away.

## **VI. Evaluate Pros/Cons of School Configuration Alternatives**

**The Committee discussed several options. The summaries of the pros and cons are attached in an addendum and are a work-in-progress.**

- Pre-K-6<sup>th</sup> grade at RES; 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade and shared town office space at RJH
- Pre-K-4<sup>th</sup> grade at RES; 5<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade at RJH; Rye Rec with more dedicated space at both schools for programming.
- Consolidate K-8 in RES; full town use of RJH building
- Consolidation within SAU
- Maintain established school building use
- Marketing plan for the town/schools and retention plan for transition to RJH to increase and stabilize enrollment (looked at in conjunction with "Maintaining established building use" but can be considered with other models as well)
- Tuitioning students into Rye; Tuitioning Rye students to PMS (due to time constraints this discussion was tabled until the next meeting)

## **VII. Public Comment**

**Mike Schwartz, 161 Wallis Road**, stated that putting potential change in place is not easy, especially, when talking about education and the children of Rye. He commented that it might be good to look at how making any of the options might be possible, instead of just looking at the pros and cons. He asked the committee to spend more time looking at the financial and budget impacts for Rye and whether it could be a cost savings, or not, for the town. He continued that as an educator and a parent, he would not be talking about any of this if he

thought it was an educational detriment for the kids. He does not think it is necessarily bad to have a class of 21 or 22 students, as opposed to 14. Sometimes it creates more social opportunities for students. If there is class size of 14 with only four boys or four girls, it is pretty hard for any one boy or girl to interact with other kids of the same gender. (He submitted a copy of the Greenland School Budget and the Rye School Budget to the Committee.) He commented that he went through the budgets and identified the major costs for Greenland and Rye.

**Highlights:**

- Greenland Budget - \$10,086,000
- Rye Budget - \$14,020,000 (40% higher)
- Greenland per student cost - \$13,636
- Rye per student cost - \$19,535 (43% increase)
- Greenland enrollment – 395 students
- Rye enrollment – 430 students (8% difference)

Mr. Schwartz stated there is a difference in similar categories in the budgets, such as operation of grounds, guidance and nursing. Rye is spending \$85,000 more than Greenland in areas that he thinks would be reduced if there was one building. He pointed out the numbers do not include health care and retirement. For any personnel that is consolidated, there is probably another 30 to 40% in savings. He stated that by combining buildings and reducing costs, this would free up money to pay for social studies teachers, to pay for a curriculum coordinator and pay for things that are more valuable for students than having two physical buildings. He feels this may be an opportunity and he wanted to give the committee some information that might help in its considerations.

**Peter Crawford, 171 Brackett Road**, reviewed his summary of the schools’ enrollments for the past 8 years, which was based on the District’s Annual Reports.

**Joe Cummins, 999 Washington Road**, spoke to the committee in regards to the district allowing some RJH space for an independent charter school.

**VIII. Next Steps/Agenda Planning**

1. **Talk to administrators about educational impact of Pre-K-4/5-8 configuration (Paula, Sal, Suzanne, Marie)**
2. **Talk to Rye Rec to determine their space needs and interest in moving into space at the schools (Peggy, Gregg)**
3. **Would it be possible (physically and academically) to accommodate Greenland 6-8 or 7-8 students at RJH?**

- **Thursday, October 12<sup>th</sup>, Working Session, 8:00 a.m. at Rye Town Hall**
- **Wednesday, October 25<sup>th</sup>, Public Forum, Rye Junior High, 6:00 p.m.**

**Adjournment**

**Motion by Jeanne Moynahan to adjourn at 10:25 am. Seconded by Salvatore Petralia. All in favor.**

Respectfully Submitted,  
Dyana F. Ledger



