

Wethersfield Board of Education
127 Hartford Avenue
Wethersfield, CT 06109-2798

Friday, August 30, 2024
5:00 Stillman Building Lower Level Conference Room
127 Hartford Avenue

Minutes for the Special Meeting of the Board of Education

Meeting was called to order at 5:05 PM.

Present:

Bobbie Hughes Granato (Chair)
Matt Laccavole
Jon Weiner
Janice DiRoberts
Marjorie Callan Carson
James Reilly
Liz Walters
Michael Emmett (non-BOE member, Superintendent)
Russ Morin (non-BOE member, Chair of Building Committee)

Call to order: Bobbie Hughes Granato

Pledge of allegiance was performed.

Motion: Jon Weiner moved that the Wethersfield Board of Education approve the Building Committee's selection of TSKP to carry out the pre and post referendum project management oversight for the Wethersfield Public Schools elementary school buildings.

Marjorie Callan Carson seconded.

Discussion:

Jon Weiner explained an overview of the work performed by the Building Committee (referred to as "BC" from here on out), specifically as it pertained to the selection of a firm (TSKP) to manage pre and post referendum project management oversight, as stated in the motion above. Jon commended the work of the BC as well as the Board of Education (BOE) and Town Council (TC) collaboration. Four interviews were conducted of possible firms/vendors. The firms agreed that the process up to this point had been handled appropriately and well by all groups involved. Some vendors had more extensive presentations than others, and consulting firms offered multiple options/packages. The BC felt that TSKP had a good track record, and employed Wethersfield residents, adding to their stake in a successful outcome. A Spring referendum is being planned, with no actual date set in stone yet.

Russ Morin, the Chair of the BC offered comments and took questions. He acknowledged the entire BC for their preparation, work, and bi-partisanship. He commended Jon for his efforts and for the constant dialogue between him and the group. Russ explained that the BC vote to approve TKSP was a 5-2 vote, with the 2 “no” votes getting behind the decision once it was made, in an amicable show of support for the process and BC work. References of TSKP were conducted. The firm is ready to start community outreach. The firm came highly recommended and is reputable, and the BC felt that their presentation and enthusiasm mattered most, not the cost, as TSKP was the lowest bid. Their homework was thorough and complete, they are enthusiastic and looking forward to the work this project entails.

Marjorie Callan Cason asked why their bid was the only one that excluded a cost estimate for phase 3 – grant submission, which was excluded per addendum. Russ will get back to her.

Bobbie Hughes Granato remarked that she was impressed by the cost discount offered from TSKP.

Liz Walters asked about the referendum date. No exact date is in mind yet, but Russ mentioned that TSKP suggested the spring, so as the process would not bleed into summer/vacation season, and because discussion and talk of this issue is current and ongoing in town. She also had questions, which she will be responded to after research. Those questions were: How many projects do they take on at once? What was the timeframe of the 50 projects they (TSKP) have worked on spanned? How many individuals will be solely dedicated to our project? When will there be a new timeline?

Michael Emmett offered that a state grant submission must be in by June 30, 2025 and the Town Council still must approve this group to sign the contract.

Russ offered to “police” the firm if anyone felt it was necessary.

Marjorie suggested that she was impressed by all of the bids/proposals, and reminded everyone that we are not alone – referendums are normal and have occurred in towns all around us. She asked about outreach and who would conduct it and what it would look like.

Jon stated that TSKP was the only firm to discuss the involvement of a PAC and that they are willing to run a website, amongst other forms of community outreach/engagement.

Russ stated that the firm will now go over various plan options, as well as explaining the cost to the town for these buildings if we do nothing – the cost of maintaining old buildings. He also mentioned that reimbursement rates from the state for builds like these hover around 55%.

Bobbie commented that when the community *knows*, it helps considerably, and they were not presented with enough of these facts last time.

Russ commented that the BC will be at the table when bonding language is crafted, because that matters too.

Marjorie wanted to make sure that TSKP is aware of the extracurricular activities that take place in our schools.

Russ stated that the building tour helped in the process and that TSKP wants to see a win here.

Matt Laccavole thanked the entire BC as well as the BOE and TC for their work on this. He stated that this is the second time he has been involved in the town referendum process and that how it has been handled and approached the second time around doesn't even compare to how it was handled the first time – this time is clearly more organized, planned, and well-thought out. He discussed the size and scope of a plan like this, and how it was imperative to incorporate a BC, which was done. Was impressed by the work of so many and their dedication to Wethersfield.

Bobbie claimed that this plan and process was built out of failure, but this was a better process. We need not worry about last time, because we learned from that and are moving forward.

Discussion ended.

Vote on motion:

Bobbie Hughes Granato (Chair), yea
Matt Laccavole, yea
Jon Weiner, yea
Janice DiRoberts, yea
Marjorie Callan Carson, yea
James Reilly, nay
Liz Walters, yea

James Reilly stated that he felt the process favored expediency over transparency.

Motion passed 6-1

Move to adjourn: Bobbie Hughes Granato

Janice DiRoberts seconded.

All in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Matt Laccavole, Vice-Chairperson – Secretary

Minutes Recorded by Ellen Goslicki, Recording Secretary