

Strategic Planning Committee Meeting No. 3
September 29, 2017
Kent County Middle School

Committee Members present: Dr. Jeff Grotsky, Dr. Karen Couch, Mr. Joseph Harding, Mrs. Shelley Heller, Mr. Richard Kalter, Mrs. Tracey Williams, Mr. Joseph Wheeler, and Mrs. Francoise Sullivan Others in attendance: Trish McGee and Shelley Schofield, and David Lever.

Dr. Grotsky, Committee Chair, called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m. He stated the purpose of the meeting was to review our notes and discuss the community input meetings held earlier in the week. He emphasized the meeting was not to write the plan but to allow committee members to share their thoughts. Mr. Harding stated that perhaps we could eliminate some of the options this committee cannot support so we don't spend time researching options that don't make sense.

Dr. Grotsky asked for general discussion on school facilities and asked everyone to check their notes. Mrs. Sullivan stated what stood out for her was general conversation about what our schools should look like in twenty years. She added that Dr. Costa brought up a good point about opening our facilities for more after school programs. Dr. Couch stated we should be mindful of the cost and staff requirements for after school programs including increased operating costs associated with these programs. She noted that in the past, the District utilized grant funding to support after school programs; however, could not sustain the programs due to funding. Dr. Grotsky indicated he has seen school districts hire contractors to staff these programs. Dr. Couch referenced the AlphaBest program at Garnet for before and after school care. Mrs. Sullivan stated the program is costly and the Parks and Recreation program seems to be more affordable. It was noted AlphaBest is focused on instructional programming while the Parks and Recreation program is focused on recreational activities. The committee agreed after school programming is not off the table. Dr. Lever noted that the State will participate in up to 3,000 square feet of capital improvements needed for community use spaces, but that this must be addressed in planning and design in order to obtain the State funding.

Mr. Harding stated he was struck by comments from each elementary principal noting they were presently utilizing every available space. He questioned whether we should expect that a school operating at the optimal usage level would be experiencing similar problems noted by the principals. He wondered whether it was typical for schools operating at the optimal usage level to experience similar problems with space and circulation. Dr. Lever stated if the facility is well designed you shouldn't experience these problems. He noted the design at Rock Hall and Galena Elementary seems half hazard and has contributed to the problem. He added there are areas that could be converted into additional classroom space.

Discussion took place on whether elementary schools were able to house additional grade levels in existing spaces. Dr. Couch noted the middle school consolidation pushed fifth graders back into elementary schools. Mrs. Sullivan asked whether it would be cost effective or cost prohibitive to consider completing renovations on three different schools for a K-8 configuration. Dr. Couch

noted one of the rationales for middle school consolidation was to ensure we were able to provide equitable programs for all students. She was concerned about recruiting highly qualified staff for three middle schools, especially due to the teacher shortage. She noted that the district would be facing some real challenges hiring staff for K-8 schools and worried that we might be setting ourselves up for failure if we adopt a configuration that will be difficult to staff. Maryland teacher certification and requirements to teach 8th grade subjects were reviewed. Mrs. Williams also noted science is tricky and challenging because many are specialized in certain areas such as biology, chemistry, and physics.

The committee discussed a middle school contained within the high school. Mrs. Williams stated the high school was built to allow students to freely move about the school; therefore, we would need to consider renovations to accommodate these students from the high school population. Mr. Harding stated the middle school and high school could share “systems” and infrastructure which could be more cost effective. He added that if we build a new addition that includes a new boiler room, that new system could accommodate both buildings and it would be a real investment that could increase the lifespan of an older building. Dr. Lever stated he thought the State would be generous to Kent County because we have not requested funding in a very long time. He stated there is a sense of equity when the State considers the allocation of capital funding. He also noted that the HVAC system in the high school was upgraded as part of the 2005/2006 renovations, and perhaps the central mechanical space could also serve for the middle school.

Dr. Lever stated there are some high school spaces that could be converted into an 8th grade academy if this is something we feel is worthy of consideration. He added that fundamentally, the district needs to decide whether K-8 is worth the risk, i.e. considering equity of program and staffing concerns. Mr. Harding stated we haven’t really discussed how we don’t want to be the only county in the State of Maryland with the oldest facilities. He added, at some point, are we ever going to get to that discussion regarding how the children in this county will always be attending schools that are older than their parents. He stated as a general condition, does that make any sense, and emphasized that at some point a change in the pendulum to improve our facilities needs to happen. Mr. Harding said he would feel guilty if we come up with a plan that dooms this county to maintaining 100-year old buildings. Dr. Grotzky said that this is what this committee needs to be thinking about, we need to get on the docket for State funding. Mr. Harding stated if it’s a well thought out plan with a well thought out budget, let’s move forward with the request. Maybe people will say they don’t want to build a new school but let’s give people a chance to say yes. At least as an alternative, let’s develop a plan that by the year 2030, there is a new school building in the plan.

Mr. Kalter stated it seems to him that the fundamental question is whether we should have a K-8 system or an elementary, middle, and high school system. He stated he was not sure whether this committee is the one who should be making that decision. Dr. Lever noted that in order to present valid recommendations to the Board, the decision about school configuration is necessary. He also stated that this committee could model what a K-8 configuration might look like with respect to our facilities; however, he stated it would be very time consuming. He

added that Garnet is a very tight site and quite frankly it was very hard to imagine any kind of expansion, noting it would be problematic for each elementary school. Mrs. Williams asked whether anyone is swayed to consider having a middle school campus that was in close proximity to the high school in order to share resources. Mrs. Schofield stated she attended the high school meeting, attended the Commissioner's meeting, and has done a lot of research on this topic, including listening to the discussion at this meeting. She stated what would sway her is knowing what the State and the County were going to pay for, what kind of timelines we are looking at, the cost for renovations, and the risk for finding teachers to staff K-8 schools. She added that at some point the stress needs to be taken off the adults so that they can take the stress off their children. She said we need to make a decision and if it turns out it needs to be a central campus decision then we should begin making plans. Mrs. Schofield said let's do our best to get some new buildings in place by grabbing the most money we can from the State. Dr. Lever stated one of the advantages of this approach would be that we could get some capital improvements completed.

Dr. Grotzky stated we have serious facility issues throughout the district that needs to be addressed. He added that we should not be designing what the school system configuration should be and consider bringing forward a plan that is doable. Dr. Lever stated that if we decide just to renovate what we have, then we are in fact determining the future of this district. He stated the investment will be large and once renovated, the district will not be able to come back to renovate these facilities for a number of decades. He added that if we do not have the space for K-8, then we need to consider whether we should relocate the middle school. Mr. Kalter asked whether there was any possibly we could use the structure at Worton to house some portion of the middle school add a connection to the high school, allowing some commonality for dual use. Mrs. Heller asked whether we could consider a massive renovation with an addition to house the middle school population.

Dr. Lever stated that we can actually save money by moving the board of education office at the same time we build a new school and renovate. He stated it is a way to capitalize on your investment. Some discussion occurred on the constraints of existing schools and how moving one population may impact decisions about another facility. He asked Dr. Lever to share approximate short term and long term timelines for renovations and construction for a new building. Dr. Lever stated if we relocated the middle school, a new building could potentially be ready for student occupancy in January 2022. However, if we are only looking at elementary school renovations beginning with the school in greatest need, the first school could potentially be ready by Spring of 2020. Dr. Lever stated that many factors play into the timing as it is based on availability of funds at both the local and state level, adding that if we are looking at ambitious large projects, we could also consider a few small projects to address spaces that need work.

Dr. Lever added that a single middle school has helped to create equitable programming for all students. Mr. Wheeler stated that he always believed that the community center should have been a centralized middle school. The committee agreed that the community center could provide more after school services if the middle school was located at the Worton campus. It was generally agreed that the district could reduce transportation costs and increase after school

intramural sports programs. Dr. Lever stated it is a good idea to run options in parallel to explore capital and operating costs. He added that running an analysis of a stand-alone facility with close proximity to the community center was an excellent choice; however, he thought we also needed to examine the possibility of joining the facility to the high school. He added this would provide us with a good model. However, it would at least provide us with a beginning point to consider whether it should be a 7th-8th grade school, or a 6th-8th grade school. He added that even a 5th-8th grade school could provide more capacity at the elementary schools for future growth.

The committee briefly discussed the utilization of the closed elementary schools. Dr. Lever stated we need to think about the implications of moving the board of education building into a centralized location. Most agreed we cannot really discuss the fate of these schools until we have a plan. Dr. Lever will put together a draft of options with costs for consideration and discussion at the October 26th meeting. The committee would meet again on November 9th to discuss what will be presented at the community wide meeting on November 15th. If the committee has not solidified a recommendation additional meetings may need to be scheduled. Dr. Lever indicated members should communicate with him directly if they have additional ideas.

Mrs. Williams asked whether the committee was interested in obtaining input from high school students. Committee members agreed soliciting input from students would be a good idea. It was agreed that the committee should meet at the high school during the day to look at the site and take advantage of a few hours of daylight. Therefore, it was determined that the meeting on October 26th would be scheduled for 4:00.

Meeting was adjourned at 6:00.