

**STRATEGIC CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES
JANUARY 2, 2025**

1. CALL MEETING TO ORDER

Carl Johnson called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. in the Portland High School Media Center located at 95 High Street, Portland, Connecticut.

2. ROLL CALL

Present: Brett Betkoski, Christopher Dickman, Carl Johnson-Chair, Jennifer Martinez, Darcy Parmelee, Michael Pelton, Bob Shea, Ben Srb, Laurel Steinhauser

Others Present: Dr. Charles Britton (Supt. Of Schools), Michael Sorano (Friar), Bryce Sens (Friar)

3. APPROVE AGENDA

Laurel Steinhauser made a motion to approve the agenda, seconded by Jennifer Martinez, all were in favor, none opposed, motion carried.

4. APPROVE MEETING MINUTES: 12/11/24

Laurel Steinhauser made a motion to approve the 12/11/24 meeting minutes, seconded by Ben Srb, all were in favor, none opposed, motion carried.

5. PUBLIC COMMENT

Lou Pear, 227 William Street, told what had been rejected but emphasized that there is still a need to make the schools the best structurally and educationally. He asked that the committee consider a 2-school elementary model as this is what most schools in CT use. Consider repurposing Brownstone for town offices or rental. Parks & Rec has concern about a gym. If repurposing them, the gyms would be available. With a 2-school model, there is room for growth that might take place with the development of Brainerd Place. He talked about the savings the town could receive from State reimbursements. The capital improvement will not give you that amount of money. If you do a 2-school model, you would have to add on to Valley View but the addition would be smaller. This is a very important issue so that the schools can provide the best possible education.

Frank Magnotta, 395 Main Street, said based on the past, enrollment suggestions are unreliable. The economy and movements in town are difficult. Be careful to not get drawn in to this. You may have plenty of classrooms but then no one wants to pay the money to maintain them. Then 15 years later, you may need more classrooms and need to find a place to build a large school. It is better to keep sites in any shape not knowing what the future holds.

6. NOMINATE/ELECT VICE CHAIR

Michael Pelton nominated Laurel Steinhauser to be Vice Chair, seconded by Brett Betkoski, all were in favor, motion carried.

7. DISCUSSION/REVIEW FACILITIES STUDY COMMITTEE REPORT, FRIAR ARCHITECT REPORT; LAND AND BUILDING USAGE ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE REPORT

The meeting was turned over to Dr. Britton who walked the group through the Portland Facility Study to give a sense of how we got to the November referendum. There is a lot of good information that may need updating. He emphasized the resources that are available. The goal is to get to a referendum in May. The architects can expedite what we have to do. He pointed out the historical background and some decisions that were made. He pointed out some conditions stated in the November 2001 referendum about the condition of the Middle School making it severely inadequate. The basement is still used as a cafeteria and gym.

He told what was borrowed in 2002, what it would equate to today and what we could afford. He referred to his 11/18/24 email to David Eisenthal, the town's financial planner, asking how much we could borrow over a 30-year term, with principal and interest, based on an annual payment of \$1,610,000. Answer: \$24.7 and \$27.8 million. Ben Srb said he would like to see the answer with a 20-year note. We shouldn't finance something that has major deficiencies in 20 years.

Dr. Britton then went back to the Facility Study Report and the options listed on Page 11 and the decisions that were made regarding 6th grade and the reasons for it. He shared some details of the Sightlines report. Ben Srb questioned the accuracy of some of the statements. He pointed out why Portland did not want to move the 6th graders. The summary is on P. 15-16 of the report.

Dr. Britton referred to the Cost Analysis Matrix and some of the options listed. The least expensive was what was on the November referendum. The Facilities Study Committee voted to decommission Gilderlseeve.

Mike Serano said it is a complex system of rules as to what is reimbursed and not reimbursed. The decisions that were made are accurate. Based on the condition, you need a minimum to attempt to bandaid them; you can't approach them that way. He thinks you have heroic administration to keep them running and staff makes them look good but failures and safety are happening and not good things. They aren't going to last another 20 years. He explained why you can't use capital improvements for this level of renovation. You can't just swap out equipment. It won't meet energy code. Some of the equipment won't be manufactured any more. Most of the capital improvements are not eligible for reimbursement. You have to do a study to show that it is more efficient than a new school. Dr. Britton asked if he could help us identify things that are absolutely necessary to achieve our priorities and what is the most prudent way to go about it. Some ideas were tossed around.

Dr. Britton said we have to start making decisions. First, do you want three elementary schools. If not, which one do you want to close. And then start on the educational needs. A discussion ensued as to what some of the possibilities are as well as the problems with each scenario. Ben emphasized that we have to do what the majority of Portland wants. If it is too big for us to make the decision, let the taxpayers decide. Committee input was given regarding moving the 6th grade. Committee consensus was that they could be moved with some considerations and stipulations.

Ben Srb made a motion that, in the near future, we recommend that the 6th grade be moved up to the Middle School with the understanding that certain accommodations be considered, seconded by Bob Shea, all were in favor, motion carried.

In preparation for the next meeting, Carl asked that each member come back with what they want to do with all three of the elementary schools.

8. PUBLIC COMMENT

Lou Pear said when discussing Brownstone, they had to reduce the sq.ft. and the State said we could do that but the BOS didn't support it. When we have a large amount of sq.ft. with less students, the cost goes up. The other thing on the survey, 40% of people even though it cost 45 vs. 35, voted for that. The elephant in the room is the two schools. If you have one school what are you going to do with the other two? That is the dilemma.

9. ADJOURN

Laurel Steinhauser made a motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Ben Srb, all were in favor, and the meeting was adjourned at 8:11 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sharon Hoy

Sharon R. Hoy
Recording Secretary