

SHERMAN BOARD OF EDUCATION  
SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON CAPITAL PLANNING  
TUESDAY - MARCH 23, 2021  
MEETING HELD VIA ZOOM

**Vision Statement**

**We enable all Sherman Students to become the best possible version of themselves. We provide an environment where our children develop into empathetic, self-directed, critical thinkers who don't give up when faced with challenges.**

The Special Committee on Capital Planning meeting of the Sherman Board of Education was called to order by Mr. Vogt at 7:03 PM on March 23, 2021 via Zoom.

**1. PRESENT:**

For the Board: Mrs. Diotte, Mr. Laughlin and Mr. Vogt  
Committee: First Selectman Lowe, Ms. Merkel, Mr. Bonner, Mr. Silvay and Mr. McGuire  
Administration: Dr. Melendez  
Staff: Ms. DePuy

**2. DISCUSSED:**

New Members introduced themselves, including: Don Lowe - Board of Selectmen, Dave Silvay - Democratic Town Committee, Jared Bonner - Republican Town Committee, Kerry Merkel - Sherman Parent Teacher Organization, Tim McGuire - Sherman Education Association. Mr. Lowe expressed that he was pleased the members of the Committee were all working together on this project.

Mr. Laughlin then presented a set of draft goals for the committee to consider adopting to help guide its mission. These included:

- Replacing major infrastructure at the end of useful life (*roofs, windows, doors, playgrounds, exterior hardscape*).
- Replacing the "K-Wing" with an architecturally appropriate alternative befitting Sherman's town center.
- Modernizing building systems and components (*HVAC, plumbing, electrical, and life safety*).
- Enhancing safety and security (*bringing site and facility to modern standards*).
- Creating flexible educational spaces adaptable to changing needs and fluctuating enrollment.
- Exploring community uses and maintaining facility as Sherman's designated emergency shelter.
- Minimizing learning disruptions during required construction without the use of

portable classrooms.

Mr. Laughlin then presented a slide explaining state reimbursement types and timing. He explained the first type is a non-priority list project, which is to specifically remedy certain issues and can be applied for outside of the normal grant funding cycle. The second type of reimbursement is for a priority list project which are identified each year by municipalities submitting an application to the Office of School Construction and Grant Review which presents the list to the legislature who approves annually the total amount of bond funds available for school construction statewide. Applications are due June 30th of each year. A project will likely take 18 months to begin construction after submitting an application for priority list consideration by the June 30th deadline.

Mr. Laughlin explained the previously developed option of what was referred to as "Maintenance Over Time". Estimates provided were based on the Friar Report costs, escalated to 2022. The approximate costs to remedy outlined deficiencies along with rebuilding the K-Wing totaled just under \$12M. This scope of work did not appreciate a variety of factors including additional scope and costs identified once work had begun, staging needs, or how it would affect the student learning experience. He stated that there are many unknowns with this type of construction scope once walls start getting opened up.

Mr. Vogt stated that while this seems to be the most cost effective option on its face once we start opening up walls the unknowns can cause the costs to balloon. He stated that the Fire Marshall explained during the walkthrough that once you open one ceiling tile you are responsible for fixing that whole hallway. This approach would require multiple contractors that would need to be mobilized multiple times. Mr. Laughlin explained that this approach would likely not qualify for optimal state funding reimbursement, concerns had already been raised by state project partners about significant renovations to older, more poorly rated portions of the building. .

Ms. Merkel stated that from her experience in school design projects professionally she agrees that this approach could lead to cost overruns, and even if the costs do stay the same, \$12M does not do anything to enhance the quality of the school.

Mr. Lowe asked how this would be paid for. Mr. Laughlin stated that conducting these repairs over time would likely be spread over 10 years and cost \$750K - \$2M per year and require either small individual bonds or an increase in annual town spending to pay-as-you-go.

Mr. Vogt stated that the difficulty with repairs over such a long time frame is that you can't really get a grasp on the total costs of the work being conducted in a phased manner year to year, this method makes addressing unexpected costs difficult as projects are approached in a piecemeal fashion rather than comprehensively in a coordinated way.

Mr. Lowe stated that he believes it will be difficult to get town support for bond funding needed for comprehensive solutions, he expressed a preference to fix some items now and to wait for others. Mr. Vogt stated that their big concern is what we will get for the money that we spend. He expressed that repairs over time does not make sense in the long term, and dilute impacts of any funds spent. He continued that comprehensively addressing problems will encompass more work for similar costs, while repairing items over time may seem to save money, in the long term the costs could be equal to or greater than a comprehensive solution. Mr. Bonner stated that he

was very surprised at the issues with the school that he was unaware of until the walk through of the building. He stated that while he doesn't believe a \$25M dollar project is what we need, repairs over time would be a bad approach. He continued that would result in paying for multiple contractors coming in multiple times and that would be a waste of money.

Mr. Silvay stated the need to be very specific about what the problems are to help the public understand the value of the work and why it needs to be done. He continued that making significant repairs over time is problematic because the projects may be dictated by the sequence of construction that needs to happen. He continued to articulate his fear that doing this in pieces will result in major cost overruns and a contractor requesting additional funds and change orders every week. Mr. Lowe stated that we really need to know what we are spending money on and when we go to the public we will need to be clear about what we are asking for.

Mr. Laughlin then explained the next option would be to renovate existing built space, mainly the 1961 classroom addition, as previously proposed and preferred as "Option 2". Drawbacks of this approach were discussed, mainly the need for staging space that would require use of portable classrooms. As previously presented this approach would have a total project cost of approximately \$25M with an anticipated local bond contribution of \$19M. An anticipated construction timeframe of 3 years was likely and the unknowns of renovating older sections of the building, which have already been renovated twice, remain concerns.

Mr. Vogt stated that windows, doors, heaters, dead end plumbing, air handlers and fans all need to be replaced which result in essentially stripping this part of the building to the studs. This required level of construction intrusion, mainly to accommodate new HVAC and other merchaintials into twice renovated space, would not only result in forcing students into portable classrooms but also simply replicating what we have today for a very high cost. He continued that this approach is very similar to making repairs over time, but in a more concentrated and aggressive manner.

Mr. Laughlin stated that putting students and teachers in portable classrooms would be very problematic and detrimental to the quality of the education being provided without resulting in a project worth the value of the cost. Ms. Merkel agreed that the costs being that high only to result in the same poorly laid out school would not make sense.

Mr. Laughlin then presented that a third option could be to replace the 1937 (K-Wing) and the 1961 classroom addition with newly constructed spaces, which were smaller and less expensive than previous plans and repurposed more existing space, but that still met the previoulsy defined needs of students and teachers. He explained this approach would remedy repair issues in a comprehensive manner while improving the facility and site layout at a lower cost than previously proposed renovation plans. This would be a comprehensive plan to address all of the issues with the school for a bond cost lower than the renovation option. This approach would maximize state reimbursement, lowering cost to taxpayers and likely be provided through a construction manager at risk methodology that locks in overall costs at bid. This methodology would ensure that if costs exceeded the bid price they would not be charged to taxpayers, and be paid for by the construction manager.

Mr. Vogt asked the committee to consider the first draft recommendation that the Board of Education should adopt to outline capital project planning goals, there was limited discussion. Mr. Lowe voted nay with all other members voting in the affirmative.

Mr. Vogt then asked the committee to consider the second draft recommendation that the Board

of Education retain Tecton Architects to conduct additional activities including developing a new comprehensive facility and site plan, assisting with playground(s) location(s) with goal if interim actions to improve conditions this summer, and to work with the committee to engage stakeholders about the timing and options to extend a grant application submission at a cost estimated between \$14,500 and \$17,500. The draft recommendation also called for separate funding to retain a to be determined third party cost estimator to validate estimates prepared by Tecton Architects at a cost estimated between \$5,500 and \$7,500. Mr. Bonner asked if funds were available for these activities, Dr. Melendez stated that a small amount of operating funds were likely available. Mr. Lowe voted nay with all other members voting in the affirmative.

Finally, Mr. Vogt asked the committee to consider the third draft recommendation that proposed the designation of Tim Laughlin and Kerry Merkel as architectural liaisons to work with Tecton Architects, should the Board of Education approve additional services. Mr. Laughlin abstained with all other members voting in the affirmative.

**3. ADJOURNED**

Meeting adjourned at 9:10 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Matt Vogt  
Chair, Special Committee on Capital Planning  
Sherman Board of Education