

SPECIAL MEETING – MANSFIELD TOWN COUNCIL
March 1, 2011

Mayor Elizabeth Paterson called the special meeting of the Mansfield Town Council to order at 6:30 p.m. in Council Chambers of the Audrey P. Beck Building.

I. ROLL CALL

Present: Keane (by phone), Kochenburger, Lindsey, Moran, Paterson, Paulhus, Ryan, Schaefer, Shapiro

II. OPPORTUNITY FOR PUBLIC TO ADDRESS THE COUNCIL

April Holinko, Middle Turnpike, presented a position paper in support of a planned program of renovation and maintenance for the schools from the Republican Party. (Statement attached) Ms. Holinko also read a letter from Gordon Allan, a former school administrator, who is also in favor of preserving and maintaining the existing buildings. (Letter attached)

Terry Bertholet, Coventry Road, commented on the importance of preserving the quality of education in Mansfield and the need for additional security measures at the schools.

Jay Rueckl, South Eagleville Road, thanked the Council for their hard work and urged small schools for small children. Mr. Rueckl opposes the One School Option as it would change the current system which he feels is working.

Katherine Paulhus, Board of Education member, speaking as a parent this evening, commented that based on the current fiscal uncertainty she is not sure that it makes sense to do anything but eliminate the One School Option.

Jeff Smith, former Mansfield Director of Finance, feels the Two School Option would be an educational and financial disaster. Mansfield has always hired the best teachers but with the pressure to fund the debt service as a result of this project the Town would likely be forced to cut programs and lower the quality of the teachers. Mr. Smith also noted that although Mansfield currently enjoys a low debt service obligation we are beholden to the State for much of our revenues.

Richard Pellegrine, Clover Mill Road, reminded members that when we think of schools we need to think of teachers, staff and the custodians. During his tenure on the Board of Education Mr. Pellegrine knew of custodians who took pride in their schools and went beyond what was expected of them. He feels the expectations have been lowered in the last few years because people know that something different is going to be done with the schools. He supports the tradition of three schools.

Cristina Colon-Semenza, Woods Road, spoke for the parents who are against the One School Option as she feels it is not in the best interest of the children.

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Robin Blomstrann, Eagleville Road, spoke in favor of renovation and, if not that, would be supportive of the Two School Option if Goodwin School is one of the schools.

Megan Meikle, Depot Road, agreed with the comments of Ms. Blomstrann and quoted former Board of Education Chair Tim Quinn as saying, "small schools for small children, large schools for large children."

Bill Caneira, Candide Lane, noted the teachers' survey was overwhelming against the One School Option.

Bev Allen, Patriots Square, expressed her support in maintaining the 3 schools with renovations and is concerned with the hidden cost associated with changes.

III. OLD BUSINESS

Town Manager Matt Hart reviewed a timeline prepared by staff and consultants which outlines the necessary steps for the School Building Project. Members discussed the information provided regarding the possible changes to the reimbursement rate and its applicability to a project approved and submitted prior to the June 30, 2011 deadline.

In an effort to capture the impact of these projects the Town Manager presented a 10 year forecast of revenues and expenditures which includes details for the Two School Option, the MMS renovations, a increase in the fund balance to 10%, an increase in the General Fund contribution to the Capital Improvement Program, the water and waste water infrastructure for the Four Corners area and current and future police needs. A review of the debt service fund was also presented. Mr. Hart noted that the forecast does not include all the Capital Improvement Projects currently scheduled. Director of Finance Cherie Trahan reported that in a recent review Moody's expressed the need to increase the fund balance to 10%, up from the current fund balance of just below 5%.

Mr. Ryan requested further confirmation on the reimbursement rate.

Ms. Moran moved and Mr. Paulhus seconded that the sense of the Council is to remove the One School Option from consideration.

The motion passed with all in favor except Mr. Ryan who expressed concern that the Town will not be able to maintain current educational operating levels as a result of the cost of the facilities.

The Council invited School Board Chair Mike LaPlaca to join them at the table.

Mr. Paulhus moved and Ms. Lindsey seconded to support the Twenty Year Improvements to All Buildings (Cash Basis) Option.

The motion was defeated with Keane, Lindsey and Paulhus in favor and Kochenburger, Moran, Paterson, Ryan, Schaefer and Shapiro in opposition.

Members debated the concept of spreading the project out over a number of years either building the two elementary schools at different times or building both elementary schools at the same time and delaying the middle school project until a later date.

Ms. Moran moved to proceed to referendum on May 24, 2011 with two schools and the middle school renovations with the provision that the elementary school sites are designated no later than March 14, 2011.

The motion passed with Kochenburger, Moran, Paterson, Ryan, Schaefer and Shapiro voting in favor and Keane, Lindsey and Paulhus voting in opposition.

Director of Planning Gregory Padick reviewed a general listing of locational considerations for the siting of a new school and offered more specific information about the three existing elementary school sites.

Mr. Paulhus moved and Ms. Lindsey seconded to designate the Southeast and Goodwin sites as the locations for the new schools.

Motion failed with Keane, Lindsey and Paulhus voting in favor and Kochenburger, Moran, Paterson, Ryan, Schaefer and Shapiro voting in opposition.

Mr. Schaefer moved and Mr. Ryan seconded to designate the Southeast and Vinton sites as the locations for the new schools.

The motion failed with Moran, Ryan, Schaefer and Shapiro voting in favor and Keane, Kochenburger, Lindsey, Paterson and Paulhus voting in opposition.

Mr. LaPlaca suggested the need for more public input regarding the location of the schools.

The siting of the schools will be on the March 14, 2011 Town Council agenda.

IV. ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Moran moved and Mr. Paulhus seconded to adjourn the meeting at 10:30 p.m.

Motion passed unanimously.

Elizabeth Paterson, Mayor

Mary Stanton, Town Clerk

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