

Katie Merrow called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m. Present were: Kevin Chittim, Arnold Coda, Harrison Thibault, Katie Merrow, Sue Batchelder, Larry Keniston, Bill Carozza and Kathleen Callahan.

Ms. Merrow gave a brief recap of last month's meeting, and the main purpose of tonight's meeting, which is to share data and decide where to go from here.

Mr. Chittim affirmed that our job is to collect information, determine points of agreement among committee members based on data, and to decide on any recommendations to make to the full facilities committee. He voiced a concern that there may be perception that our committee is 'selling' the recommendations for building improvements made by the school board and administration, when in fact we are striving to make objective determinations based on the data collected through members' research efforts.

Mr. Coda mentioned a recent Concord Monitor article that noted a projection for a statewide decline in population in coming years. This is consistent with state cohort analysis.

Mr. Thibault noted that he spoke with Bruce Ellsworth and collected a phasing report and a regional data report, and he spoke with Mike Wilkey to determine the methodology for determining projections. Mr. Keniston spoke with Mr. Wilkey as well, and while he did not obtain specific data on building permits, Mike Wilkey expressed concern about the high number of building permits for new residential dwellings. A phasing report is used to help town planning boards determine the effects of building development projects on enrollment projections; if certain criteria are met, a board may require developments--even existing projects--to be completed in phases to avoid a critical impact on the school system. From what Mr. Thibault and Mr. Keniston were able to determine, Hopkinton has met the criterion to implement phasing.

Lengthy discussion was held regarding the methods used for determining projections from data sources. For example, of the 44 recent permits issued in 2003 in Hopkinton, 16 were for condo units. Should the average of 0.5 children per one-bedroom-dwelling apply to this project, even if there is little likelihood that these condos will be inhabited by families with children? If a school is determined to be at capacity and one more home is built, then the school becomes beyond capacity. Is this an accurate reflection of the community's growth? How does a school district determine the percentage of capacity used, and are there alternate methods that may provide alternate projection outcomes?

According to data provided to the committee, the current school population is 1041. Based on the average number of building permits issued over the past several years, which has been approximately 25 per year, there has been a school population increase of 1-2%. Current projections place the school population somewhere between 927 and 1,081 for 2011, with the greatest likelihood to be under 1,000 students. These projections are based on recent growth trends, and to date the subcommittee has not found any factors that are likely to significantly change growth trends and affect this projection. Subcommittee members are still gathering more data on building permits and employment growth in Concord, which may affect these projections.

Mr. Coda spoke with the Contoocook Village Merchants Association and the Economic Development Committee. He found no information on new businesses planning to locate in Hopkinton, and one business, Three Season Landscaping, will be leaving Hopkinton for Henniker. While current employees are unlikely to move, any new employees probably won't move to Hopkinton.

Ms. Merrow reported that Bob Gerseny met with a Mr. Gottlieb, an economist on the seacoast with experience in working with school districts. Mr. Gottlieb feels that the cohort analysis is inadequate

because there is not enough emphasis on economic trends. In discussion, the committee was in some disagreement about whether the cohort analysis would in fact take economic growth into account, but including in-migration in the student growth. Ms. Merrow will follow up with Mr. Gottlieb, specifically to look at correlations in data on residential permits, enrollments and employment in the economic region in the past twenty years.

Mr. Chittim concluded that the data indicates that the total enrollment will stay level or slightly decline in the next several years. All three schools will be able to stay open; the facility issues for the leadership team are programmatic rather than enrollment capacity issues. Discussion returned to the methods for determining capacity at the schools. The high school capacity is at 98%; this means that every room has a scheduled use every period, but that includes non-classroom uses, such as for planning and meetings. If those uses are dropped from the total, he determined that the capacity drops to 85%. Mr. Thibault noted that Hopkinton uses a higher standard – lower student per classroom numbers – in determining capacity than those recommended by the state. Mr. Thibault noted for example that the State might use 22-25 students per classroom and the Hopkinton District has adopted a higher standard of 17-20 students per classroom. The 17-20 Hopkinton student standard per classroom is used when determining capacity to be at 98%. Mr. Chittim went on to conclude that, in his determination, Harold Martin School capacity is at 99%, Maple Street School capacity is at 87% (slightly lower than the district's determination of 90%), and the Middle High School is at 87% rather than the district's computation of 98%.

Mr. Thibault suggested a two-step process in dealing with current capacity issues: first, fix the functioning capability of the existing schools, and then look to building additions in the next 5-6 years. In short, the increased capacity needs are not driven by a population increase, but by programmatic changes and additions. Ms. Merrow noted that the requested changes may indeed be necessary, but they are not being driven by enrollment numbers; the charge of our committee is to clarify this point.

Ms. Merrow reported that she met with a member of the Conservation Commission. The ongoing issues surrounding BioEnergy are not anticipated to have an impact on population; if burning proceeds it may impact housing values in certain areas, but no net reduction in population is expected. There is a large amount of protected land in Hopkinton, limiting the amount of buildable land; the pattern of high-end, single-family development is anticipated to continue.

As there were no other outstanding issues discovered by the committee, Mr. Chittim suggested he work on drafting recommendations for discussion at the next meeting. Discussion followed as to whether it was this subcommittee's charge to weigh in on the district's list of proposed capital improvements, and the conclusion was that if there is agreement among the committee members regarding specific requests, recommendations will be offered for those requests. It was noted that our recommendations are not expected to address all items on the list of requests from the school board, because not all items are enrollment or capacity issues. If no agreement exists, no recommendation will be made to the larger facilities committee. The subcommittee also discussed issuing a minority report in certain areas if necessary.

Further discussion was held regarding the function of the existing space. It is possible that there could be a more efficient arrangement for students in the existing buildings; perhaps this could suffice for a period of time during which space needs can be studied for any necessary additions. Ms. Merrow pointed out that new construction is often less expensive than rehabbing existing buildings. The methods for calculating financing costs must also be factored into any decisions. Ms. Merrow will also check into the percentage of special education students who have moved to the district in recent years and how this percentage compares to state averages, in order to more accurately project whether there will be any changes in special education enrollment that may drive facilities needs. Brief discussion was held on the

increased programming and facilities impact on a proposed law requiring students to remain in school until their eighteenth birthdays.

Each member of this subcommittee is asked to email recommendations to Mr. Chittim to be included in first draft of subcommittee recommendations. To sum up findings so far, the subcommittee expects a slight decline in enrollment figures based on demographic factors and in-migration, primarily based on figures provided by Doug Brown. Requested facility changes are drive by changes in school programming rather than increased enrollment. For the next meeting Ms. Merrow will research correlations between employment and enrollment and data on recent special education population enrollments.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:30 p.m. The next meeting of the Data and Planning subcommittee will be held on Thursday, February 16, 2006 at 7:00 p.m. at the Maple Street School conference room.

Submitted by Sue Batchelder.-----

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