

## SCHOOL BUILDING COMMITTEE

Regular Meeting Minutes

February 22, 2021

Via Public Online Video Conference (Zoom)

6:30 PM

*\*Minutes are not official until approved at the next regular meeting*

Member	Position	Present	Absent
Superintendent Stevens	Superintendent of Schools	X	
Erika Wiczenski	Board of Selectmen Representative	X	
Mike Makuch	Board of Finance Chairman	X	
Niko Semerzakakis	Board of Education Staff	X	
Ann Grosjean	Board of Education Member	X	
Katherine Viveiros	Construction Industry Experience	X	
Gary Anderson	Member at large	X	
Nancy Bailey	Member at large	X	
Peter Latincsics	Member at large	X Arrived at 6:54	
Justin Niderno	Member at large	X	
Briana Ross	Member at large	X	

### CALL TO ORDER

Superintendent Stevens called the meeting to order at 6:35 PM.

### APPROVAL OF MINUTES

First Selectwoman Wiczenski MOVED to approve the minutes of January 26, 2021, Gary Anderson SECONDED the motion.

DISCUSSION:None

VOTE: 9 Yes, 0 No

## MOTION CARRIED

Member	Vote
Erika Wiecenski	Y
Mike Makuch	Y
Niko Semerzakis	Y
Ann Grosjean	Y
Katherine Viveiros	Y
Gary Anderson	Y
Nancy Bailey	Y
Peter Latincsics	Not present
Justin Niderno	Y
Briana Ross	Y

## PRESENT TO SPEAK

None

## COMMUNICATIONS

Mike Makuch noted that there was some communication on social media that implied misunderstanding about the committee, the school and the costs related to the charge of the committee. Mike Makuch and Superintendent Stevens responded to the comments on social media by explaining how to attend meetings, watch meeting recordings and read minutes so as to be more informed as well as to participate.

Superintendent Stevens made it clear that keeping the public educated and involved is something the committee will prioritize.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski can share the link to recorded meetings posted on YouTube on the town's social media and webpage. Residents can sign up for eBlast to receive committee agendas and minutes. Those who are already signed up for eBlasts will need to add the School Building Committee to their preferences because this committee is new. In addition, information about the School Building Committee will be shared in the Willington Wire.

## OLD BUSINESS

### a. Appointment of Chairperson

As per the vote at the last meeting, Superintendent Stevens is serving as acting Interim Chairperson

Katherine Viveiros offered to be the Chairperson of the Committee. Mike Makuch stated that he has worked with Katherine in that capacity before and therefore he endorses her as Chair.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski MOVED to appoint Katherine Viveiros to be the Chairperson of the School Building Committee, Mike Makuch SECONDED the motion.

#### DISCUSSION:

Katherine Viveiros asked if this appointment will begin at the next meeting. She said that she would take note of how Superintendent Stevens runs the remainder of this meeting. Superintendent Stevens recommended a friendly amendment.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski made a FRIENDLY AMENDMENT to the MOTION to clarify that the appointment will begin at the next meeting.

Superintendent Stevens and First Selectwoman Wiecenski stated that they will assist Ms. Viveiros in any manner they can. Members of the committee thanked Katherine Viveiros for volunteering to this position.

VOTE: 9 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain

#### MOTION CARRIED

Member	Vote
Erika Wiecenski	Y
Mike Makuch	Y
Niko Semerzakis	Y
Ann Grosjean	Y
Katherine Viveiros	Y
Gary Anderson	Y
Nancy Bailey	Y
Peter Latincsics	Not present
Justin Niderno	Y
Briana Ross	Y

#### NEW BUSINESS

##### a. Accessing Google Drive Folder Documents

Superintendent Stevens and First Selectwoman Wiecenski gathered background information for the group based upon questions from the last meeting. Superintendent Stevens showed the group a Google Drive folder the committee will have access to via email. It contains all of the documents shared at this meeting. He suggested that all documents become public on the website and asked the committee to consider that.

The SBC Google Drive Folder includes:

- Committee Information
- Educational Specification samples
- Friar Report 2017/2019
- Land/Property Information
- Prior School Building Committee Reports 1987/1992
- South Willington Preservation Planning Study 2015
- Statutes and Codes pertaining to school construction
- Facilities Study Survey 2019

Superintendent Stevens said that as we build the base of background knowledge and as we gather information, it is important to be as transparent as possible. He asked the committee to determine which documents will be most helpful to the public by the next meeting.

First Selectwoman Wiczenski concurred that transparency is key. The committee may determine that some things are more confusing rather than helpful to people and therefore do not need to be included in the public folder. However, all documents, whether included in the public folder or not, are always accessible to citizens at the Town Office Building. The only thing that is not public is committee work done in executive session. There was a brief discussion on the contents and what could be saved there. The SBC document container can direct people to such information as minutes and agendas as well as tell people how to access the recorded meetings on YouTube.

#### **b. Create Meeting Schedule**

Superintendent Stevens asked the committee how often they want to meet and what days' work best.

Peter Latincsics joined the meeting at 6:54pm.

Discussion was held on the best date and time for the committee to meet. It was determined that Wednesdays at 6:30pm would work best.

Superintendent Stevens asked about the frequency of meetings. Mike Makuch suggested that the need may vary so perhaps the committee could meet monthly and add more later on. Ann Grosjean suggested that the meetings be held the first and third Wednesday of the month, for example, so it holds the place of a meeting in case it is needed.

There was discussion to determine if meeting agendas would then have to be posted and cancelled every time? First Selectwoman Wiczenski commented that if there is a regular meeting schedule then it would need to be posted on an agenda stating that it has been cancelled. Gary Anderson recommends scheduling the meetings every other week because it is easier to cancel a meeting than to add them. Mike Makuch clarified that meetings would be held the first and third Wednesdays at 6:30pm.



First Selectwoman Wiecenski MOVED to hold the Willington School Building Committee regularly scheduled meetings on the first and third Wednesdays of the month at 6:30 PM beginning 02/23/21 through the end of December 31, 2021, Ann Grosjean SECONDED the motion.

**DISCUSSION:**

First Selectwoman Wiecenski said that any other meetings added would be special meetings therefore nothing could be added to the agenda. Discussion held on who would file agendas and cancel meetings. The staff in the Selectman's office can assist the Chair in filing agendas as needed. Superintendent Stevens said that as time goes on it will become clearer how often meetings will need to be held.

VOTE: 10 Yes, 0 No

**MOTION CARRIED**

<b>Member</b>	<b>Vote</b>
Erika Wiecenski	Y
Mike Makuch	Y
Niko Semerzakis	Y
Ann Grosjean	Y
Katherine Viveiros	Y
Gary Anderson	Y
Nancy Bailey	Y
Peter Latincsics	Y
Justin Niderno	Y
Briana Ross	Y

First Selectwoman Wiecenski noted that the 1990 school building committee used subcommittees. She asked Peter Latincsics for confirmation and whether or not that worked well because he was a member of that committee. Peter Latincsics said yes and that he found subcommittees useful at that time.

**c. Review Willington Land**

Superintendent Stevens shared information on Town owned buildings and properties.

**i. Town Building List**

Superintendent Stevens presented all of the town facilities. Some facilities are very small. Nothing on the list has enough land to use. Peter Latincsics asked to confirm that the committee can access this information on the Google file. Superintendent Stevens said yes, it will be accessible tomorrow. Peter then asked if it tells the square footage of the buildings. Superintendent Stevens said no but using the GIS and a parcel ID you will have access to the property card.

## ii. Town Property List

A list of 36 properties was shared. Ashley Stephens from the land use department made helpful notes like “all wetlands” and “usable” and the address was available. First Selectwoman Wiccenski noted that this information is all available on the GIS.

Superintendent Stevens showed that some properties are not big enough. He showed 19 Boston Turnpike, which is owned by the town, as an example of how to use the GIS. It is possible to look at the parcels to see specific details. They had to pay attention to whether or not roads were paved already because that is costly. One area for a professional to look at would be to find land that isn’t already developed. Where is it? Is it accessible? These things have to be factored in.

Gary Anderson asked what the general acreage limit is. Superintendent Stevens said that the recommended acreage is 19 acres because you need 15 acres plus 1/100 students. For example, Stafford Middle School’s field space is about 8 acres. It has one soccer field and 2 baseball or softball fields. Our district does not need any more field space than that.

Gary Anderson asked if the fields are 8 acres, then 19-20 acre lots can still be viable because you do not need all of the land to build on. Superintendent Stevens agreed and added that you almost always need a bigger lot because not all of the land will be usable due to things like wetlands and streams.

Superintendent Stevens said that properties can be copied and pasted into the GIS to see them in map form. Use a free website [mainstreetmaps.com/ct/willington/public.asp](http://mainstreetmaps.com/ct/willington/public.asp). This is accessible to the public.

Katherine Veveiros asked if hypothetically speaking we find property that is owned by the town and it is a good contender, is there then no cost? Superintendent Stevens said that if the town owns land, money will be spent to make sure it is suitable and accessible. So, there are savings on the cost of the property, but it will still cost to do the work to make sure it makes sense.

## iii. CES Property

Superintendent Stevens showed a pdf image of the land the school is on as well as the surrounding properties. Property #24 is the firehouse. It is about eight acres. Center is landlocked by houses.

Gary Anderson asked if the town bought property #25 as shown on the pdf image. Superintendent Stevens said no. The fire department bought it and it isn’t a good choice for a school anyway because kids would have to cross the street and there isn’t enough land.

## iv. HMS Property

The property’s Quit Claim Deed states that the land has to be used as a school or it has to be returned to the Hall Foundation. The second part of the Quit Claim Deed is the parking lot, which also belongs to the Hall Foundation. In 1965 the town bought two more lots to create the driveway and the lower field.

Those lots do not need to be returned to the Hall Foundation. In all, there are four properties used, and two of them are part of the Quit Claim Deed.



Ann Grosjean asked if the lower field is the soccer field and if it could still be used as recreational property. Superintendent Stevens said that it is down the steep hill. It is a small soccer field. It is very wet and would be hard to access because it has a steep slope and would need a driveway.

All four parcels are about fourteen acres. That includes eight acres of school space, four for the lower field, two for the driveway and about 0.4 for the parking lot.

Peter Latincsics asked if the Hall Foundation was ever asked if they could be flexible on the clause restricting the school as a school. Superintendent Stevens said no. It is a nearly seventy-year agreement but this question should be on a future agenda. The Hall Foundation should be asked if the building could be used for a town facility rather than an actual school if the town maintains it. The Halls don't want the building knocked down. At one point, in the South Village Study, there was talk of a \$20 million project to restore HMS to its original, smaller size. The building has historical value. It is on a site that is part of the national register as a historical building, although it is more of an honorary designee. It does not require all of the standards of a historic district. For example, the houses at the town green are in a historic district and certain paint colors must be used, for example.

Gary Anderson said there is a similar situation in Manchester. It means that they cannot tear the building down and it is lots of work to take part of it down. There is no committee overseeing little changes to keep the building part of history.

Superintendent Stevens said that in a former study to make the designation of a historical building, they considered making HMS a conference center or a bed and breakfast. It would be costly.

v. Youngerman Property

Superintendent Stevens reported that the information is based on the 1992 School Building Committee Report. The property is on Ruby Road by the bus lot. It is 18.7 acres. It is near protected open space. There is another Willington property near it. There are wetlands there. Access is difficult. It was deemed by the state to be undesirable because of costly site preparation, problems with the soil and the topography. Farmland and orchards are also costly because of soil quality.

Peter Latincsics recalled that the 1992 committee was perplexed by the situation back then. The objection had not been because of site costs but that the Department of Education said it was undesirable but it was never clear why. Superintendent Stevens said that maybe the State Department of Education didn't want to deal with the cost of wetlands. First Selectwoman Wiczenski said that page 5 of the report states that the property needed improved safe bus access, three phase electrical power to the site, and that it was too close to the truck stop and other industrial developments on adjacent land. The committee report was quoting the state in this instance.

Katherine Viveiros pointed out that the committee is trying to find land that meets an acreage requirement. This property clearly does not so perhaps it would be best to read through the report and then decide to no longer pursue this property.

Superintendent Stevens said that access and power was an issue. But it might work if a complex, like Stafford, is built. Mike Makuch said that the three pieces are equivalent to fifty-two acres. Usability

questions are obvious. It is worth investigating to some extent. For example, the three-phase power has been brought down that road because the truck stop and FedEx were built. An updated look at things is warranted at some level.

Discussion continued with questions of capacity of a narrow road and if anyone had ever walked the property. It was determined that previous SBC members had not been onsite. Superintendent Stevens noted that maybe the issues seen then are not issues any longer.

**d. Review Agenda Items for Future Discussion and How to Add Items**

**i. Creation of Frequency Asked Questions document**

Superintendent Stevens suggested that a subcommittee be formed to make a FAQ document.

**ii. Invite Colliers International for process overview**

Colliers offered to talk with the committee free of cost about possible pitfalls, timelines and to answer some questions. Superintendent Stevens thinks this would be a better conversation to have rather than to first meet with the Office of School Construction and Grants Review (OSCGR).

**iii. Initiate Hall Foundation to participate in meeting**

Superintendent Stevens said it is important to communicate with the Hall Foundation early on.

**iv. 2021-2022 BOE Capital Improvement Plan**

The committee members have access to the 2021-2022 Capital Improvement Plan Committee that includes what the Board of Education submitted. Some listed items have already been moved to other years.

**v. Review 2019 Survey and Data**

Superintendent Stevens asked what background information the committee needs on a future agenda sooner rather than later.

Mike Makuch said that as the committee starts to look at many areas, parameters will guide them to know what information to ask for. They need to narrow down and focus on an end goal and use good reason to eliminate some options.

Superintendent Stevens shared that he thought it would be beneficial to ask the OSCGR directly if they will support a renovation of either building.

Katherine Viveiros asked if it is already known that if Hall School were to be renovated it is under the estimated acreage. It is also known that there is not enough land to renovate Center School. To renovate both buildings defeats the purpose. She suggested asking OSCGR if they support renovation and what is the minimum acreage needed to do that. Superintendent Stevens replied that there is not a land requirement for a renovation.



First Selectwoman Wiecenski said that there had never been a formal ask of these questions.

Superintendent Stevens met with the OSCGR and Colliers in regards to the roof because he didn't want decisions about the roof to affect the grant process. They were glad to know right away. The OSCGR said they did not know if they would support one or two renovations because it is too costly. This needs to be in writing.

Mike Makuch asked if they have any flexibility for creative solutions. Younger students have to be on the ground floor but older students do not. For example, taller schools have less of an environmental footprint and if that was done could the older students have space on the top? Another example would be to ask if it is possible for the parking lot across the street from Center School to be used for staff thus freeing up the current parking area.

Peter Latincsics said that he agreed that these things should be asked of the OSCGR and if we are already involved with them, they will probably talk with us. Superintendent Stevens said that they always want to know about projects as soon as possible and that they will be blunt about what to pursue.

Peter Latincsics said it would be good to identify the stakeholders besides the Board of Education. It would be good to meet with the Board of Education to ask how they arrived at their decisions and what educational needs they have. Meeting with other groups such as the Board of Finance and the Economic Development Committee will offer some feedback and help the subcommittee talk more intelligently with the OSCGR.

Superintendent Stevens said that if the committee gathers questions, they could meet with the stakeholders to gather information.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski said that in the Friar study they kept saying to make the building lengthwise. She wondered why not build vertically for a smaller footprint. Katherine Viveiros asked if perhaps there was a height restriction.

Mike Makuch said that it is cheaper to build vertically because you can get more square footage in a square foundation and you have less of a roof. It is easier to heat and cool because there are fewer exterior walls for the square footage you have. Discussion continued on the possibility of a vertical building and making the answer to this possibility a priority as well as septic system concerns.

Superintendent Stevens suggested we speak with OSCGR prior to other stakeholders as it may rule things out and help the focus. He asked that the committee put together some questions and send a small group to present them. Superintendent Stevens, Mike Makuch, Justin Niderno, Peter Latincsics, and Katherine Viveiros volunteered to attend a meeting with the OSCGR and to bring back information. The group should look through the shared documents and come up with some questions to ask the OSCGR, then we could have a meeting via Zoom to ask them. We should first ask if they will support renovation of an existing school building.

The committee asked to have a presentation by Colliers at the next meeting.

Katherine Viveiros said that there is a need to narrow the focus and task list, and to make a rough schedule and timeline with milestones. State funding application deadlines occur in June so maybe June of next year can be a goal if enough progress is made before then. Superintendent Stevens advocated for a project manager. Although it can be costly, it is very beneficial because they know the state, they maintain a timeline and they know the process.

## **EXECUTIVE SESSION**

### **a. Review Potential Land Sites Identified**

First Selectwoman Wiecenski MOVED to enter into Executive session to discuss potential land sites, Gary Anderson SECONDED the motion.

### **DISCUSSION:**

Superintendent Stevens explained that the committee would be discussing properties and that it needed to be kept private.

VOTE: 10 Yes, 0 No, 0Abstained

### **MOTION CARRIED**

<b>Member</b>	<b>Vote</b>
Erika Wiecenski	Y
Mike Makuch	Y
Niko Semerzakis	Y
Ann Grosjean	Y
Katherine Viveiros	Y
Gary Anderson	Y
Nancy Bailey	Y
Peter Latincsics	Y
Justin Niderno	Y
Briana Ross	Y

First Selectwoman Wiecenski MOVED to exit the Executive session at 8:36 PM.

Discussion was held on what the committee's responsibility is to community members who express confusion or questions about committee business on social media. It was suggested that if members catch it and redirect people in a positive way with facts, not points of view. Interjections should be based upon fact.

Gary Anderson suggested that the committee have a small group of people to handle social media communications so there are not many people trying to address everything because it can get confusing. It might be something to think about for the next meeting. First Selectwoman Wiecenski said it is the



committee's responsibility to drive people back to factual information. People can participate in the open communication that the committee is offering. Members do not need to be looking for comments to correct or help, but they can help redirect people if they come across it and they feel comfortable doing so.

Mike Makuch said that the public communication with the board is typically driven through the Chair, but that it is ok for members to direct the public on social media with a unified message. This is critical for transparency. A subcommittee could help develop answers to questions and become the spokesperson of the committee with the approval of the Chair. What is released and how it is worded is critical in the public understanding.

First Selectwoman Wicenskisaid that it is ok to respond personally but one small comment can be taken out of context.

Superintendent Stevens said the more information out there the better.

First Selectwoman Wicenski said that is true, but not to end up holding committee meetings on social media.

Superintendent Stevens said the committee will need to decide what to make public from the folder. It was also suggested to add subcommittees, such as finance and land acquisition, to the next agenda.

It was determined the next meeting will be 3/17/21 and the 3/3/21 meeting will be cancelled. This will give the group enough time to look at all of the documents and develop questions.

Katherine Viveiros asked if it makes sense to schedule two meetings monthly or to schedule one for the next six months. It could be viewed negatively by the public if it appears that meetings are often being cancelled. First Selectwoman Wicenski said it is easier to cancel a meeting than to add one. She said that the second meeting could be used for speakers to come meet with the committee. The second meeting could serve as a placeholder for that.

Public comment in these meetings was discussed. The agenda allows for residents to speak at the beginning of the meeting. Peter Latincsics noted that public involvement is important. He asked how close we are to being able to meet in person so that people can come attend meetings and participate.

First Selectwoman Wicenski said that they are working towards a hybrid meeting. There is new technology we purchased that will make it easier. People will still need to be six feet apart and masked. She said that hopefully in person meetings can happen by summer. This virtual forum must be used to allow the public to attend.

First Selectwoman Wicenski said that citizens can email questions to the Chair, Superintendent Stevens or herself and it can be public. Even if they cannot attend there are ways to communicate with the board. Any public comment is just that. There is no back and forth.

## **ADJOURNMENT**



Mike Makuch MOVED to adjourn the meeting at 8:52 PM, Ann Grosjean SECONDED the motion.

DISCUSSION:None

VOTE: 10 Yes, 0 No


MOTION CARRIED

Member	Vote
Erika Wiecenski	Y
Mike Makuch	Y
Niko Semerzakis	Y
Ann Grosjean	Y
Katherine Viveiros	Y
Gary Anderson	Y
Nancy Bailey	Y
Peter Latincsics	Y
Justin Niderno	Y
Briana Ross	Y

Respectfully Submitted,

Briana Ross

School Building Committee Member and Recording Secretary

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