

RSU 16 PUBLIC FORUM #2
AGENDA / NOTES
Whittier Middle School Proposed Addition

Monday, February 27, 2017
7:00 PM
PRHS Auditorium

Meeting opened at 7pm.

John Hawley introduced himself and the speakers that would be presenting, Alan Kuniholm, Principal Architect to Portland Design Team and Tina Meserve, Superintendent of RSU 16.

John began with a PowerPoint presentation that explained the school overcrowding, a summary of what is being proposed, and the planned replacement of modular classrooms, returning shared spaces to the high school and increase building security. He explained the slide showing the proposed expansion and stated that Alan would go over design plans and why we are looking to add the building.

Alan had discussion of the original buildout in 1997 when the existing high school / middle school project began. He discussed all steps taken to get to this point that included meeting with education staff, police, fire, state, DEP etc. He explained how difficult it was to build on this site originally because of naturally existing limitations. He presented the proposed central vestibule for security. He then reviewed the current floor plan including modulars. He stated the desire to maintain the current access road around the building. Another slide displayed a future floor plan laid over google earth image. He explained the new entryway for one central location to enter building for all people entering. This project includes renovations for the current high school entry as well middle school entry and additional space. He explained the displayed proposed changes in administration offices and additional resource room. He spoke to current building access once you get through the high school entry and how unsafe this is for the children and staff. He also stated the intent to use current drop off areas, power and utilities.

The present cost of the proposed addition and renovations is \$8,500,000. The analysis of energy use in the new space would be about \$12,500 per year.

Tina spoke about the costs. It would need to be a locally funded project as there are no state funds available. Proposed is a 20-year bond, the cost will start at \$637,500 in the first year and decrease to \$400,000 in the last. Estimated increase in taxes to a home valued at \$100,000 Poland – \$114.73, Mechanic Falls – \$152.54, Minot \$145.43. This will all be additional funds. Those amounts are based on state evaluations. Tina explained that based on state formulas Poland will be receiving a tax break because of the evaluations vs population. The committee choose to go to referendum in November to allow more time to educate the public and answer the questions that may be out there. Our primary care is for the kids. We understand taxes and money are important and need to take the time to discuss this with the public properly. By going to a November referendum, we are also hoping that the voter turnout is higher because of the voting season versus a June vote.

Public Q's

Norm Beauparlant : John...because the original project was State funded, we had to meet State standards which restricted our building size and shortly after the building was built we knew it wasn't going to meet our needs going forward I am assuming we are not working with same state restrictions? -

---Answer: Allen – we are basing this design with state guidelines in mind but we are certainly working with our best interested in mind. A locally funded project is not restricted to State standards. Modulares came on site upon consolidation because we needed space and state requirements at the time were not same as today.

Joe Parent: We are gaining how many classrooms? John H - two science and one special education space. We are moving the six modular classrooms into the new building. Joe stated it was a tough message to sell due to gaining one net classroom for \$8.5 million. Tina- we are not gaining just one classroom. We are gaining safety by putting outdoor classes back inside and spaces that encourage learning.

Mary Ella Jones – What are the annual modular costs? What lease cost are we reducing. John –our current payment is \$22,000 per year but we will have no payments at the time when the bond starts due to time frame.

Joe Cimino – Have you done a spreadsheet about town indebtedness for the town of Poland moving forward. John – we have not looked at the town debt loads of any towns as we cannot foresee what the towns are going to do moving forward. Tina – we look at what our kids and all three towns have for needs in the schooling system educationally. We need to show the communities what the educational system needs and it is up to the towns to determine needs. We will always work hard with whatever we have to educate

Joe Cimino – I’m on the economic development committee. It is tough to bring business to Poland given the proposed tax increase. It’s a tough sell for businesses. – Tina – we agree. This is tough but we need to be thinking about how we educate. We understand that times are tough. We are looking at this as a selling point to those as a reason to why people should move here to have the best for their children.

Unidentified Q – What projections have you made to ensure this addition is enough. Tina – we’ve contracted a twenty-year enrollment study for our areas and this building is based on a projected steady population. We believe this space is going to meet our needs.

Unidentified Q – Is there a plan B? – Tina – we keep our modulares and conduct business as usual. We understand the cost but the need for education will not change. A significant cost is based on main entry and safety factors and if we are going to do this we are going to do it right. We could save money by changing the plans but it would not be the safest and best option. If we get a no vote we’ll dig deeper.

Follow-up – Why aren’t we going to add a second story? Allen – we looked at going up but it caused a larger number of variables that we’re not safe and it didn’t make sense. The wall structure and current building would not hold it. If we chose to build up you cannot have students inside Would have to send kids offsite and that’s not an option at this time. Building out would saves money and time.

Unidentified Q- This building was built before 911. That was a scary day. This building was never set up to be completely secure. Putting a central area of entry is essential. Tina – we agree. We need to think about our kids being safer.

Unidentified Q – if you have one entry does that mean everyone exits the same way? Shawn – we have not formalized the flow patterns at this time. In an emergency, no as there are other planned routes of egress.

Unidentified Q- Are we gaining classes and spaces? Allen – Yes, some of the old classes are smaller than today's needs. Today's needs are increasing from 500 sq. foot, to 800+. We are following state allowed spaces but focusing on our needs.

Unidentified Q – How did we come to 20 yr. vs. 15 yr. Tina. Traditionally our bonds are 20 years and that's the base line we stuck with. We didn't vary from that model as we thought that was the most affordable payment plan.

Steve Robinson – What was the factored interest rate in your financial projections? John - 2.5% - Steve – Why the higher cost than the original estimates of 4.5 million. Tina – We never had a proposal at \$4 million, those were rumors in the early stages of our process.

Dave Gilpatrick – Can we utilize outside signs at the schools to inform public of these meetings? Tina – It's always a challenge to reach everyone in our areas and yes, we could do better and we are trying. We're mailing, emailing, using social media, signage, etc.

Esther Gilpatrick – Kids should not have to be in those portables and the hallways need lockers that do not cause crowding.

Carl Beckett – I am part of the Friends of RSU 16 – we met here and met while students were present. It was horrendous to watch kids move through this facility. It was not smooth, safe, or organized, the weather is a factor and the ramps to the modulares were unsafe due to ice and snow. There are constant cold drafts into classes, hallways, because exterior doors are open because everyone is always in and out. Students have fallen, teachers have fallen, and it is a poor situation. I would encourage everyone to come and watch this place before you vote and see what we are trying to solve.

Julie Rioux - Are there bathrooms in the modular? Tina – no they have to come inside and the doors are open with no security. There is no plumbing to the modulares.

Norm Beauparlant – You should consider changing the title of the administrative cost title to better explain it. Allen – inside administration cost – is \$500K in movable equipment and includes advertising and legal costs for bidding.

Aaron Ouellette – Has there been any discussion about reducing cost? Before it gets shot down and possibly get more people out to here? Tina – our hope was to get more here as it was but it is tough to make people to come. Follow up – how much time will all the classroom spaces be used per day? Shawn – 85% of the day. Tina – we also have a flex space.

Jody Barber– John mentioned that out of district placement students could come back...how many kids will be brought back? – Tina – you never know completely because of IEPs (Individual Educational Plans) but by adding the space allows us the opportunity to have them return to district and reduce paying out of district expense. Even if we bring back one student, it could be \$50k, but if you don't have the space there is never the choice. Follow up - How many empty spaces are in the HS? Tina – Zero – we've maxed ourselves out. Follow up – When this was first proposed it was \$4.5 million, the latest flier states \$8.2 million, and today's presentation states \$8.5 million. When does it stop increasing and why is it going up? Tina - The central entryway is the driving force behind the cost. Alan - The difference between the \$8.2 to \$8.5 is the site work due to the recent soils analysis. There is a lot of fill and leveling. It is not suitable for building and material will have to be removed and replaced with more suitable material for construction. We need to correct that. The \$8.5 is a solid number at this time.

Joe Parent – Will there be any additional ground space buildout. Will it be built safer for drop offs and driving around the property? Allen – at this time no because we are basing the buildout on the same existing population. Creating additional impervious surface would be problematic with permitting from DEP as we have maxed out the site.

Unidentified Q – We believe in education but with the current economic situation it is a tough sell. We need to complete and nurture this so we can compete with other charter schools. We have a great reputation in the state. If the teachers and staff think we need it we need to trust them and believe in them. I do not want to pay more but we need to think of vitality of the areas and this could actually benefit our taxes by people wanting to move to our areas! Tina – Thank you, our achievement scores are growing and its impressive to see. You cannot walk in without feeling pride. Other districts are asking us for visits to learn what we are doing. The staff is top notch and people check the schools before the move into a community. They want to go to a school that will be better for them. Looking at surrounding schools, we are at the top in all of the indicators.

Aaron – Has the consolidation ever been discussed to be dissolved? Tina – No. In fact the State is still encouraging further consolidation. We have been named a model of success for the savings of moneys while increasing results. Our budgeting models have worked and our communities have benefited by it.

Walter Gallagher – If the RSU dissolved who would be responsible for debt? Tina – not sure that the RSU can be dissolved but towns can pull out. If a town pulls out you have to pay to send kids somewhere. The RSU is its own entity. The towns would have to find places for their kids on the same state funds. I have not heard any interest from any board member to dissolve. Follow up – As for the funding of the taxes, why are we not doing the funding based on population? Tina - Because this is additional local it's based on 90% assessment and 10% enrollments which is the shared agreement that was created when we consolidated. The committee at the time chose to match the state's recommend percentage sharing. If we changed the model, Poland would actually pay more. Poland currently pays the least amount. A committee of nine could be created and change it however currently the board choose to not open this. Mary Martin – We did talk about it this past year. We looked at the reorganization plans. The Board stated that we felt it was still fair and when we looked at it when we started the RSU and where we were at today, we were in the same place. The towns can get votes and reopen it on their owns but the elected board felt it was fair and not much had changed. Tina – we have followed the directions that were given. Walter – that's not true. It is based on mil rates, it's not fair. It's not objective. Where's the relief for Poland? Tina – because you pay the most of the budget you've saved the most over the years of consolidation. We get the money based on the states saying if you can pay more for education you do. The poor cannot be punished and fair is determined differently. Follow-up – Can we have a DOE workshop for the towns? We do an open presentation to the school board and people are welcome to come but people do not do so. We cover all of these items. It's on our agendas.

Carl Beckett - I was on the RSU consolidation committee and there's a sunset clause. Every two years it can be brought up. You can come and bring it up again for the board decide. We chose at that time to not lock it in. Tina – Poland wanted it looked at and we did. The board choose not to change it.

James Porter – Fair is interpretive. John Hawley can tell you from his years as town manager how the mil rate works.

Steve Robinson – The savings are not accurate based on the FOA (Freedom of Access requests) for all towns since 2004. It is inappropriate to suggest that there have been savings to the towns and taxpayers. The taxation has gone up every year. It is a fact. Tina – the budget was \$22 million before

consolidation, then down to \$17 million causing the savings statement. If you would like to show me why there was no savings, you are welcome to. I'm willing to sit down with anyone.

Tina – The State says what the bottom line of what we can spend is to meet our needs and to receive State funds. We spend more because we need more and we locally vote to spend more. Schools decide how that money is distributed. We present openly to the public.

James Porter – Poland will be seeing an 8% increase in taxes just due to this building. Tina – we are presenting what we believe we need and the public will have to decide.

Unidentified Q – What did you say no to with the buildout? Explain what you cut. Tina – Staff wanted weight room, book closets, it came down to basic space at a minimum and planning for long term. We added a pitched roof and a fire hydrant per town requirements. Shawn – we really looked at current needs only. We tried to be conservative while maximizing our needs. This plan is what our kids need. This is the community I grew up in. This is a plan that is a challenge. I worry about the current efficiency, and security. The portables are bandages. They are not addressing the larger pieces that put our kids in the best situation. I encourage you to come out and see what is really going on.

Steve Bolduc – We looked at air conditioning and revoked it. Tina – yes that was an expense we could not justify.

Melanie Harvey – What about the flow of traffic, did the fire department have any requirements? – Tina – There was never a concern about the flow of traffic. The Sherriff's Department was very happy about proposed central entry. Allen – they asked about the security system tie ins and marking of window and doors etc.

Unidentified Q – The plan shows for future stairs and an elevator for a 2nd floor addition? Allan - Those were just plans and ideas that show future needs. If there was potential for a second floor, the first floor would have to have support built in at the time of construction to plan for the future.

Unidentified Q – We lived in Lewiston and looked for three years for a school system. This place is what we wanted. We need to support our schools and teachers and continue its success.

Tina thanked people for coming and the meeting closed a 9:10 PM