

Regional School District 12
District Meeting – Public Hearing Minutes
Shepaug Valley School
October 5, 2015

The District Meeting - Public Hearing was called to order at 7:01 p.m., on Monday, October 5, 2015, by Chairman James Hirschfield. Present were: Anthony Amato, Valerie Andersen, Gregory Cava, Rebecca Devine, Michelle Gorra, Emily Hibbard, Jennifer Pote, Michael Sinatra, and Peter Tagley. Patricia Cosentino, Ed.D., Superintendent, Robert Giesen, Director of Finance and Operations, were also present. Alan Brown was absent.

Also present were: Barry Bernabe, Phoenix Advisors; Charlie Boos, Architect, Kaestle Boos; Gary Brochu, Board Attorney, Shipman & Goodwin; Douglas Gillette, Bond Counsel, Day Pitney LLC.

ELECTION OF DISTRICT MEETING MODERATOR

MOTION: made by Tony Bedini, and seconded, to appoint Ann Baldwin as District Meeting Moderator.

VOTE: unanimous.

Ann Baldwin read the warning below.

WARNING
DISTRICT MEETING - PUBLIC HEARING
Regional School District Number 12
Towns of Bridgewater, Roxbury and Washington
October 5, 2015

The electors and citizens qualified to vote in town meetings of the Towns of Bridgewater, Roxbury and Washington are hereby warned that a public meeting of Regional School District Number 12 will be held at Shepaug Valley School, 159 South Street in Washington, Connecticut on Monday, October 5, 2015 at 7:00 p.m. for the purpose of conducting a public hearing on the following recommendations by the Board of Education:

1. That \$39,491,387 be appropriated for costs related to design, construction, furnishing, equipping and financing of (a) Agriscience STEM Academy facilities to be located on the Shepaug Valley Campus at 159 South Street in the Town of Washington, contemplated to include, but not limited to, construction of four buildings: a classrooms and administrative offices building, an equine facility, a large and small animal facility, and an equipment garage; renovation of existing shop space at Shepaug Valley School to accommodate the program, renovation of chemistry/laboratories (CLABS) in the existing science wing at the Shepaug Valley School, site work and improvements, and other related work and improvements (estimated cost of \$37,998,367), and (b) renovation of the existing science wing at the Shepaug Valley School located on the Shepaug Valley Campus at 159 South Street in the Town of Washington, contemplated to provide, but not limited to, chemistry/laboratories (CLABS), one teacher's preparation area/workroom, and a chemical storage area; various items to meet safety code requirements; new equipment including lab equipment, sinks, hoods, lab stations and ADA compliant lab/work stations; technology updates; new flooring, windows, doors, lighting, and

HVAC equipment to comply with ventilation standards; and other related work and improvements, and, to the extent of available funds, such other improvements to the existing Shepaug Valley School facilities as are determined by the Board of Education or any building committee delegated such responsibility by the Board of Education (estimated cost of \$1,493,020). The Board of Education, or any building committee or committees delegated all or any portion of such responsibility by the Board of Education, shall be authorized to determine the scope and particulars of each project, and may reduce or modify the scope of each project as desirable, and the entire appropriation may be spent on the projects as so reduced or modified. The District anticipates receiving grants from the State Department of Education for an estimated approximately 70.2% of the aggregate cost of the projects, for a resulting estimated aggregate net cost of the projects to the District of \$11,751,921.

2. That \$39,491,387 bonds and temporary notes of the District be authorized to finance the appropriation. The amount of the bonds or notes authorized shall be reduced by the amount of grants, if any, received by the District for the projects, and not separately appropriated to pay project costs.

3. That the Chairman and the Treasurer, or such officer or body delegated such authority by the Board of Education, be authorized to require the District and its member towns to comply with applicable federal income tax requirements for tax-exempt bonds, and to make representations and enter into written agreements for the benefit of holders of the bonds or notes to provide secondary market disclosure information.

4. That the Board of Education be authorized to approve the entering into of contracts for the projects, and the Board of Education, or such officer or body to whom the Board delegates such authority, be authorized to approve the expenditure of said appropriation and such other matters as it deems desirable or necessary to complete the projects.

5. That the appropriation and bond and temporary note authorization be submitted to referendum vote of the electors and citizens qualified to vote in the member towns of the District.

Dated at Washington Depot, Connecticut this 29th day of September, 2015.

James Hirschfield, Chairman
Board of Education
Regional School District Number 12

PRESENTATION OF THE FINAL CONCEPTUAL DESIGN AND COST ESTIMATE FOR THE SHEPAUG VALLEY REGIONAL AGRISCIENCE STEM ACADEMY; SCIENCE LABS RENOVATIONS AT SHEPAUG VALLEY SCHOOL; FINANCIAL IMPACT

Chairman Hirschfield introduced the Board of Education members, finance director for Region 12, bond counsel, board attorney, architect, and superintendent of schools. Dr. Cosentino began the presentation expressing gratitude for those attending and lauded the excitement about the project. She talked about how the Agriscience program will ensure a solid robust high school for the children and their children and

revitalize the communities and children of Bridgewater, Roxbury and Washington. Dr. Cosentino outlined the sequence of events for the evening as follows: Overview of the facilities and campus; AgSTEM financials; a question and answer period; the Board of Education meeting in which a referendum would be scheduled.

Dr. Cosentino spoke about the administrators and their experience with an Agriscience program. Dr. Cosentino spoke about the excellent results of the 11th grade SBAC testing that was given in the spring. She spoke highly of the administrators, the teachers and the students and their involvement in the outstanding outcomes of the testing for the Region. Dr. Cosentino spoke about how students attending Shepaug Valley School go on to attend highly competitive colleges and are prepared to go out into the world.

James Hirschfield spoke about the journey to this point (i.e., declining enrollment, quality of education, Nonnewaug turns away 50-60 students a year). Mr. Hirschfield shared that the Board of Region 12 believes Shepaug Valley School is an excellent school and they are committed in keeping it open. Mr. Hirschfield spoke about the support of the state legislature in passing into law the funding of appropriation for the agriscience program. The minimum appropriation is 80% reimbursement of new construction and approximately 20% reimbursement for the existing science labs. Governor Malloy signed the funding appropriation into law. The next step is for the voters of Region 12 to approve the funding for our share of the cost in the same manner as the budget is passed each year; total majority. Mr. Hirschfield spoke about the referendum approval required before November 15 or the funds are lost without another opportunity to obtain them. With a sense of urgency and an opportunity knocking, Mr. Hirschfield implored the communities on behalf of the Board of Education, for the Region 12 students present and future, to vote yes in November.

A seven minute video on Agriscience in Connecticut was shown.

Kim Gallo spoke about the questions that the communities are asking such as why we should do this. What is the value to our current students? What is the value to our community? Why Agriscience, Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM)? Mrs. Gallo spoke about the careers in the agriscience fields. Dr. Cosentino spoke about the courses and the advantages for students with 200 more students attending Shepaug. Mrs. Gallo spoke about the early UCONN courses that students will have on their high school transcript. Mrs. Gallo gave details about the selection process.

Michelle Gorra spoke about the benefits to the community. The program will keep the families in the communities and attract new families. Mrs. Gorra spoke about the adult continuing education courses that will be offered. Communities will get exposure as those from outside the Region come to participate in events.

Gregory Cava spoke about the facilities and the sports fields. As he pointed to the renderings, he spoke about the buildings and fields. New construction of the agriscience center, an equine center, large and small animals building, sheds, paddock. Mr. Cava spoke about the site improvements such as parking and drop off areas, sales area, roads and pathways, removal of tennis courts and new tennis courts built, second soccer field, reposition baseball fields, and that the science labs will be gutted and redone.

Anthony Amato spoke about the towns that will be served by Region 14 and Region 12. Mr. Amato spoke about how the program is paid for (i.e. sending town, state grant). Mr. Amato spoke about who attends to the animals and plants during off hours. Mr. Amato spoke about the financials including the state reimbursement rate of 80% for the construction and a portion of the science wing, and the rest reimbursed

at the standard 20% rate which overall is equivalent to reimbursement of 70%. Total project is \$39.5M. The expected local share \$11.75M. This share will be held on a 20-year bond. Labs will be covered with a six-year loan. Mr. Amato looked at the numbers with inflation and without. Mr. Amato spoke about the value in savings by having the labs done with the agriscience construction (1-2M) but if the referendum fails, the labs will cost 4-5M.

James Hirschfield spoke about the referendum question.

QUESTIONS AND/OR STATEMENTS CONCERNING THE ABOVE ITEMS ENTERTAINED.

Mr. Hirschfield then turned the meeting over to Ann Baldwin, Moderator, who gave instructions for questions and comments. Questions and comments were given by the public.

John Buonaiuto, Washington – asked questions about the interest not included in the net costs; how are cost overruns going to be handled; cost analysis and the cost per pupil.

Ellen Tracy, Washington – asked questions about teachers' certification to teach AP courses.

Virginia Terrick Whittall, Washington – commented on the equine program.

Barbara Henry, Roxbury – First Selectman. Expressed appreciation to the board and superintendent for all the work they have done in bringing the program forward. Mrs. Henry expressed that the Board of Selectmen fully support the proposal and that it is a viable option for the Region. She urged residents to vote on November 10.

Gary Lord, Roxbury – Finance Board Chair. Spoke about the advantage of substantial funding by the state. A great opportunity and allows affordability,

Al Wolfe, Bridgewater – asked questions about project costs; believed they are high. Spoke about taxes going up.

Joel Langhorne, Roxbury – asked questions about the number of Region 12 eighth graders turned away from Nonnewaug, how much will the budget go up to heat and maintain the buildings, what is the demand for this type of program?

Ed Wainwright, Bridgewater – spoke about the number of students that the proposed catchment area sends to Nonnewaug in Grades 9-12, the six-year history of eighth graders applying and that the proposed number of students applying shows a shortfall which will be a shortfall in revenue.

Peter Mariano, Roxbury – spoke in favor of the program. Asked if the construction and the curriculum will include renewable resources.

Jessica Granger, Danbury – spoke highly of the proposal for agriscience program. Daughter enrolled in Booth Free School (paying tuition) because she heard about the AgSTEM program. She shared that she is a Nonnewaug graduate and is looking to move into Region 12.

Ken Shultz, Washington – WPS PTO president and father of two girls. Enthusiastic about the program. He is impressed by Shepaug and believes the Region needs to look to the future.

Michael Gorra – Washington – spoke about impact that an increased enrollment will have on course choices for students and that the program will provide an enriched experience for children. The program will pay for itself. Only regret that his children will not have the opportunity to participate.

Curtis Read, Bridgewater – First Selectman. Spoke about the concerns among the citizens, agreed that Agriscience is a good way to learn. Spoke about the benefits and that they are greater than the risks. Felt it will draw families into the communities, help towns be vibrant and stabilize home values.

Ann Burton, Washington – asked about the selection process and the Shepaug students who want to participate. Hopes the program will increase math scores.

Debbie Forese, Washington – Spoke about concerns in students' education with out-of-town kids. Also concerned with the November 15 state deadline for the referendum.

Sydney Orble, Roxbury – A 2004 Shepaug graduate, spoke about earning a degree in Engineering and would have benefited with a AgSTEM program. She is excited for her children to have this opportunity.

Paula Conway, Roxbury – Mother of three children and spoke about the hope that families will have with this program in keeping Shepaug viable for their kids.

Holly Flor, Roxbury – asked about the cost of the science labs, the equine program and how long the Region is locked in to the program.

Dave Werkhoven, Washington – Thanked the Board for their work. A former Region 12 science teacher spoke about the need for the science labs renovations and the need for the program.

Susan Kenny Nicholas, New Preston – A 1975 Shepaug graduate, son graduated from Shepaug. Spoke about needing the program to keep Shepaug revitalized.

Mark Lyon, Washington – First Selectman. Spoke about the positive impact the Agriscience program will have on our Region and a great opportunity.

Linda Ebbett, Bridgewater – Class of 1974. Spoke about the importance of home values and asked questions on scenarios on ratios for revenue and additional costs.

John Buonaiuto, Washington – Spoke about the debt the state is in. Spoke about the new building for the Agriscience being a fundamental change to the charter and should require a majority vote in each town.

Ed Wainwright, Bridgewater – Spoke about more children from out of the region become more than those in the region, that it is a fundamental change and those students don't have representation from the Board.

Judy Gorra, Washington – Thanked the Board for their plan. Educating and representing our children is most important.

Tim Laughlin, Washington – Bought a house two years ago with wife and feels this is the best hope for school and community. Commended the Board for looking toward the future and the bigger picture. He encouraged fellow residents to vote yes.

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Chairman Hirschfield thanked the audience and the special guests for attending. In conclusion, he offered three points to take away from the proposed program.

1. Region 12 students will get more from this program than anyone else.
2. Our communities in the Region will be enriched by a vibrant high school.
3. The program is self-funding and pays for the needed science labs.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 9:56 p.m.