School Board Committee: Capital Facilities

Date: January 4, 2012

Committee members present: Jack Dunn, Chair, Bill Glahn, Clint Cogswell, Nick Metalious

Other board member/s present: Jennifer Patterson

Administration: Chris Rath, Matt Cashman

Others: Michael Castagna

Agenda: Update for reuse of district buildings

The meeting began at 5:30 p.m.

Mr. Dunn opened the meeting and turned it over to Mr. Cashman, who gave a brief history of Task Force I, Task Force II, and Task Force III. Mr. Cashman introduced Michael Castagna from Castagna Consulting Group, who was hired to help the district find the best alternative uses for the vacant buildings.

Mr. Castagna stated that he and his staff had met with members of the public in early 2011 to get input on what residents would like to see happen with the vacant buildings (Dame, Dewey, Eastman, Rumford and Walker Schools). He then presented his recommendations to the committee.

He indicated that a developer could renovate Dewey School into nine high-end condos, but neighborhood residents would prefer that the Central Office administration stay in the neighborhood.

Two different developers are interested in turning Eastman School into housing for elderly people or those with mental disabilities. The basic design Mr. Castagna presented to the committee showed 50 units, an enclosed courtyard and a two-story addition to the building. The 1960s addition would be removed, and the entrance to the parking lots would be moved from Shawmut Street to Winthrop Street. The Marine Reserves of NH also have expressed an interest in turning Eastman School into offices for their operations. About 50 people would work at the site daily, and a classroom-based training program would meet there once per month. Mr. Castagna will meet with Reserve officials this week to obtain more specific information.

At the September forum, Rumford School residents expressed a preference for a mix of housing, and a daycare or community center; and to keep the outdoor play area. Mr. Castagna proposed working with a developer to use a tax credit program for 18 or 19 units of workforce housing while retaining the building’s current library as a daycare or
community center. The current design of the parking lots may allow extra spaces for neighborhood residents to use during snow emergencies that close city streets.

Walker School was probably the most versatile site and building. Mr. Castagna presented a plan that would turn part of the building and an addition into about 30 independent senior housing units. Another part would be turned into about 10 housing units for students from the Kimball-Jenkins School of Art, which could move operations to a new stand-alone building on the corner of the lot. The School would also operate an art gallery in what is now the Walker school auditorium.

No plans were presented about possible future reuse for Dame School because the district is still negotiating with city officials about the building’s use as a City community center for the Heights neighborhood.

Those are some of the possible plans residents will see drawn up at community meetings in the next two weeks. At some of the previous meetings, residents emphasized that they do not want the buildings to sit vacant for a long period of time. Mr. Castagna said he has already found developers interested in purchasing all the buildings, but hasn’t completed his final report yet.

The following are the upcoming community sessions: 1/12/12 – Eastman (cancelled due to weather, rescheduled for 1/24/12); 1/17/12-Rumford; 1/18/12-Walker and 1/19/12 – Dewey.

Mr. Castagna informed the committee that the buildings are worth between $3 and $6 per square foot. All of the proposals would return at least a portion of the buildings – Dewey, Eastman, Rumford and Walker – to the tax rolls, and private developers have expressed interest in taking over the projects.

Mr. Castagna’s final report will be ready for the board in February, after he has presented his recommendations to the community and incorporated residents’ feedback.

The committee adjourned at 6:03 p.m. (motioned by Mr. Dunn, seconded by Clint Cogswell)

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Jack Dunn, Chair

Matt Cashman, Recorder