

Town of Sherman  
Board of Selectman Special Meeting  
February 2, 2021 at 7 pm  
Via ZOOM Teleconferencing

Member's Present: First Selectman Don Lowe, Selectman Bob Ostrosky, and Selectman Kevin Keenan

Member's Absent: None

Audience & Invited: The board members of the Sherman School Board of Education and residents from the community.

Clerk: Margaret Beatty

Call to Order/ Pledge of Allegiance: First Selectman Don Lowe promptly called the meeting to order at 7 pm followed by the reciting of the Pledge of Allegiance.

The meeting was called to discuss the possible renovations needed at the Sherman School in order of priority. First Selectman Don Lowe addressed the public acknowledging the functional shortcomings at the school and engaging the BOE in discussion as to the necessity and validation of an itemized list of capital needs.

Chairman of the Board of Education Kasey Diotte spoke reiterating that the board unanimously voted to endorse a comprehensive capital project but are open to dialogue with the BOS to work on a plan to make the school functional. A long term plan would be most beneficial in addressing the needs of the school.

First Selectman Don Lowe opened up discussion to the Selectman as to their thought on approaching the subject.

Selectman Bob Ostrosky commented that short term capital asks should be discussed between the superintendent, facilities manager, and BOS and brought to a Town meeting and let the Town decide. He believed the list was well prioritized. He also commented that he was open to discussion on a renovation but overall did not feel that a large expenditure reflects the current climate of Covid and where the Town will be financially in the future.

Matt Vogt of the BOE shared his thoughts on moving forward with the schools capital projects. He felt the BOE could have done a better job articulating the needs of the school. He worries that a staggered approach to implementation of projects would lead to more and higher costs in the future to the Town. First Selectman Don Lowe asked for clarity to the reasoning for Mr. Vogt's statements. Mr. Vogt replied that the reasoning's came from discussion amongst the capital planning committee, maintenance, and the BOE.

First Selectman Don Lowe pointed out that all buildings require maintenance at some point in its lifetime. He also added that he wanted to know the exact needs of the school and not rely on general statements about potential expenditures.

Mr. Vogt clarified that once a building undergoes an initial renovation more problems may come to light changing the scope of the intended project. He deflected to the Friar Report and suggested having the BOE review the findings.

Selectman Bob Ostrosky interrupted and suggested that the BOS would like to see the BOE recommendation of the evaluation of the Friar Report and then plan accordingly.

Selectman Kevin Keenan commented that there are confirmed maintenance issues. He suggested segregating projects so that the work is done fluidly and without the need to readdress problems. He also mentioned bringing in a consultant to tackle the issues so the renovations are done appropriately and orderly without the need to re-due certain segments of the project multiple times. Lastly, he commented that the project has to be sold to the public, and without specifics, asking taxpayers to fund large expenditures there needs to be specific explanations provided to describe projects.

First Selectman Don Lowe suggested the conversation should focus more on a specific project. Prioritizing projects that are most necessary should be the topic at hand before we talk about short term or long term goals. He also added that the goal is to solve problems and that it is not necessary to be creative in our solution but proactive in our approach.

Tim Laughlin of the Board of Education stated that the board provided a list of projects in their presentation as well as available on the school website. He also added that the board has had many meeting with Joe Lombardozzi, maintenance specialist at the school, addressing the problems. Tim and Kasey acknowledged that the projects were based on the findings of the Friar Report.

Chairman of the Board of Education Kasey Diotte clarified that the school has not been neglecting their responsibilities to provide a safe school environment for our children. She added that maintenance issues that have crept up over time have been tended to from the general school operating budget but the larger scale projects the BOE was looking for compromise from the Town.

First Selectman Don Lowe concluded that the BOS and the BOE need to come up with a concrete list of specifics prioritized by need.

James Nunezig of the Board of education confirmed that the list of projects has been posted to the school website for 3 years. He also stated on the record that he doesn't want to see the school go through the same renovation complication as the fire house and that the board chose the direction they did to devise a capital plan to prevent any unnecessary hardships.

Public Comment: Stephanie Warren thanked the BOE for all their hard work for a thankless job. She understands that it is a difficult job to pull together a capital plan but it weary about state officials offering recommendations for projects. She wonders if thinking outside the box would be a better approach to provide what is needed to our students. She suggested hiring of teachers, recruiting, and providing the best programs for higher learning.

Margery Josephson of Church Road commented that the school was previously offered a grant from the state for a past expansion. She noted that the schools initial application for the grant was for a larger expansion then what was ultimately decide upon. The state decided that the size of the expansion was too large and unnecessary. She believes it will be difficult to convince the public to pay for a large expense, she believes there can be a more cost effective way to reach an agreement. She has yet to hear a logical explanation to the price tag given to the project.

Arthur Von Plachecki of 10 Sail Harbor Drive informed the listening public that a call went out 2 years ago from the BOE and superintendent to form a group to meet and discuss the initial evaluation of the maintenance requirements of the school. The goal of the group was to evaluate what was important moving forward in terms of maintenance. He added the goal has since been lost in translation. He commented we have shifted from a goal of teaching our children and that the BOE should go back to the initial work done by the committee created 2 years ago. He wants to know why the goals of the school have shifted dramatically.

Al Zeisler of 4 Rising Sun Trail referenced a list of emergency maintenance items that needed immediate attention in terms of fixing and whether those items have since been addressed. Tim Laughlin and Superintendent Jeff Melendez both replied that the issues were resolved.

Susan Zietler of 8 Curtis Drive began by referencing a comment by Arthur Von Plachecki as to why the school chose to go in the direction of a rebuild and not to consider the evaluation recommendations of the committee that was formed. Superintendent Jeff Melendez replied stating the board Mr. Plachecki referenced was called the Design and Innovation Committee. That committee was formed by extending an invitation to the community to volunteer ideas that were broad based dealing with the issues at the school as opposed to unilaterally having the BOE make the decisions. The committee was intended for resident, faculty, staff to provide their own input. Through the formation of the committee, the end result concluded in the recommendation to hire an architectural firm to create a plan and that plan was what the BOE unanimously voted to proceed with. Susan Zietler concluded that before the Town potentially moves to go down the direction of a large renovation that more thought is put into how the execution of learning is implemented moving forward.

The meeting was concluded with First Selectman Don Lowe extending another invitation to meet and discuss with the BOE. Kasey Diotte thanked the BOS for their time and concluded that the BOE will digest all the information presented and circle back to more dialogue with the BOS.

Selectman Bob Ostrosky moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:15 pm

Motioned by: Selectman Bob Ostrosky

Seconded by: Selectman Kevin Keenan

All in Favor: Unanimous

Notes respectfully submitted by Margaret Beatty Feb 11, 2021.