

FIRST SELECTMAN COLUMN

04/13/23 ISSUE DATE

Last week's series of meetings regarding the Sherman School building repair project were quite productive and seemed to offer a more affordable path towards making the Sherman School whole again. The meetings were congenial – no surprise there for me – and it's obvious that all stakeholders want to get on the same page for a successful outcome. By my way of thinking, a successful outcome is creating a plan where the Sherman School has perfectly working infrastructure elements. A successful outcome is achieved by a successful referendum vote; a successful referendum vote is achieved when a majority of taxpayer/voters feel confident that the spending increase associated with this project is reasonable.

"Reasonable", of course, is subjective. I heard parents speak at the Board of Education meeting who have no concerns whatsoever over how much taxes increase in order to repair the school. On the flip side, I've had people tell me that they would not only vote NO on a substantial tax increase, but they would move out of Town if an increase did for some reason pass. So, "reasonable" is in the eye of the beholder. That's what makes these types of decisions challenging. Right now, despite reports and rumors that exist, we don't know the cost yet. One important item that came from last week is that there will be no June 5 building referendum. The Sherman School project referendum is now, as stated by the building committee, loosely slated for some time in September.

Other options, and at least one that doesn't not change the building's footprint, are being considered. That plan would not move the cafeteria to the multi-purpose room, nor would it eliminate 6,000 square feet of space (presently slated for a community center), and it would not propose other significant changes within the building. It would focus on bringing back the currently closed K-wing section and making that part of the school – which is in close proximity to bathrooms (a State recommendation) – classrooms again for grades K thru 1. We will await to see what the building committee in conjunction with the architectural services comes up with.

The building plan that I just referenced would probably not qualify for as great a State reimbursement as other plans that require more change to the building including reducing space. Yet, it would probably qualify for *some* state reimbursement, or at least that's the answer I received from the architect for that question last week. Since the Board of Education is now working under the forecast that the Sherman student populations will be *increasing* in the coming years, I think a plan *reducing* the school's square footage is going to be a hard sell to taxpayer/voters who are paying attention.

The Annual Budget Town Meeting has been warned for Saturday, April 22 at 10 am in Mallory Town Hall. This is an opportunity for taxpayers to learn about and comment on the budget that they will be voting on at the Budget Referendum to be held on April 29, from 8am to 8pm, in Charter Hall.

We are in the throes of some gorgeous spring weather this week and spring, I'm "reasonably" sure, has sprung. Spring's an indefatigable season no matter what hardness the winter may have left us with. Or as a favorite poet, Pablo Neruda, once wrote, "You can cut all the flowers but you cannot keep spring from coming."



DON LOWE

TOWN OF SHERMAN