

DRAFT North Greenbush Common School District Community Advisory Committee – November 20, 2019

The North Greenbush CSD Community Advisory Committee, the group convened to advise the Board of Trustees as it develops a capital project proposal, held its fourth meeting on November 20.

Community Member Feedback

- Committee members were asked for feedback on the project to date. Several members noted how not everyone in the community may know about the project (particularly those without children).
- The committee discussed communication strategies, including doing a press release to local newspapers (including the Advertiser) and TV when the board authorizes the referendum (in January) as well as an informational meeting at an offsite location that will accommodate more people. The Town Hall Annex, Michaels and LaSalle were mentioned as possibilities. It was also suggested that the district send home a special mailer about the meeting and perhaps ask residents to RSVP?
 - Note: The school district sent a letter to all residents in mid-August (and an updated letter to residents on November 21).
- Is second grade definitely coming back in-house? If so, the district needs to discuss more than the facility side of this change, but also the academic side, including staffing needs.
 - Note: Yes, the district is planning for this. Superintendent Hamill said that the district needs to share its academic story and results more.
- If North Greenbush pulls back sending out second grade students to other schools, how will this affect other districts? Will they increase their tuition as a result?
 - Note: Other school districts are also dealing with enrollment and capacity challenges. North Greenbush and its partner school districts negotiate 3 to 4-year contracts (for tuition charges) rather than year-to-year agreements. Contract increases have been consistent in recent years, averaging around 2 percent increases.

Need to Revise Timeline

- Originally, we hoped for a November or December referendum for residents to approve the proposed land purchase from LaSalle, build additional classroom and office space, and renovate the Little Red School House.
- We need to revise our timeline due to additional geotechnical, environmental and archeological testing and reports required by the age of the Little Red building. For each one of these surveys, the district was required to do a request for proposals (RFP), which takes additional time. We also had to provide formal notice to 14 different entities, including the Department of Environmental Conservation, State Education Department, Rensselaer County, Town of North Greenbush, LaSalle and Hudson Valley Community College (so that they were aware of this project). This information was sent out to all parties on November 5. They have 30 days to respond and provide comment. The school district and architect had already reached out to a number of these entities to discuss our formal plans. We also continue to meet regularly with the town and county to discuss assessments and planning. The district

also discussed the proposed South Drive entrance with HVCC and met with the Army Corps of Engineers. Once this comment period ends in early December, the Board of Trustees will be positioned to authorize a public vote (likely in February or early March vote).

- The Board of Trustees, at its November 13 meeting, approved a letter to residents to keep them updated on the project and the change in the timeline. Committee members suggested that the district bold the line about preserving the district for the future. The letter was already copied, but this will be considered as additional materials are prepared. Committee members also said to remind residents about the cost savings of ending the lease across the street and moving offices back onsite. The Board also extended its contract with Phinney Design to continue working on schematic work for the project. This will help the district stay on its original timeline (of a project September 2021 opening of the new addition) if residents approve the project.
- Superintendent Hamill shared drafts of two new timelines, depending on when the Board of Trustees is able to finalize the project and authorize a public vote.
- During the pre-referendum planning work, the district learned that the Little Red School House is not the only schoolhouse still in use in New York State. However, it is the oldest one remaining in use in Rensselaer County.

Covering Costs – Land Purchase/Capital Project

- At our initial meeting in August, the school district shared information on financing the building project – that the district could pay for this by setting aside money from the additional property taxes (the Board is committed to not increasing the tax rate). A spreadsheet detailing additional property taxes from new housing developments and debt service fund was distributed to committee members. It is estimated that the new developments will bring in an estimated \$17.7 million in additional assessments. This is a conservative estimate of the approved residential housing.
- If the project is approved by residents, the Board of Trustees will need to set up a debt service fund (which is an accounting mechanism). The school district has worked with financial advisors, who do not see a problem with funding this project.
- A committee member asked if this spreadsheet accounted for the cost of maintaining the new building.
 - Note: No, operational costs are part of the annual budget (voted on by residents). The school district is planning for these additional operational costs and will redeploy savings from ending its office lease towards these costs.

Summary and Homework Assignment

- Community members were asked to reflect and to come prepared to discuss at the next meeting in January (to be scheduled) any additional feedback, including ideas for communicating the project to the public.