

**MENDHAM TOWNSHIP PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
BROOKSIDE, NEW JERSEY  
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL GYMNASIUM  
(MEETING IS BEING HELD VIRTUALLY,  
NO IN-PERSON ATTENDANCE WILL BE ALLOWED)  
REGULAR SESSION MEETING MINUTES  
TUESDAY, APRIL 6, 2021, 7:30 PM**

**I. Call to Order**

The meeting was called to order at 7:32 pm.

**II. Flag Salute** - Mrs. Holquist led the flag salute.

**III. Roll Call of the Board of Education**

Mrs. Gretchen Holquist	President	Present
Mr. Andrew Christmann	Vice President	Present
Mr. Peter Dumovic		Present
Dr. Rekha Mandel		Present
Mrs. Joan Mody		Present
Mr. Aadithya Thayyar		Present
Mr. Robert Wowk		Present

Also present: Dr. Salvatore Constantino, Superintendent  
Mrs. Donna Mosner, School Business Administrator  
General Public – 11 approximately

**IV. Sunshine Law**

The New Jersey Open Public Meetings Law was enacted to ensure the right of the public to have advance notice of and to attend the meetings of public bodies at which any business affecting their interests is discussed or acted upon. In accordance with the provisions of this act, Mendham Township Board of Education has caused notice of this meeting to be published by having the date, time, and place thereof posted in the Mendham Township Board of Education Office, sent to the Clerk of Mendham Township, and the Observer Tribune and the Daily Record. This is an official meeting.

**V. Board President's Report** – over the last year we have been looking at the state of our facilities and the need/required to care for each building. We currently have 2 bonds that are coming due and this is what has driven this discussion and these actions. The process would be to discuss these options and projects for a potential referendum to submit to the DOE for review and approval so that it can be voted on to become a separate referendum vote. The 2 outstanding district bonds are also coming due so this was a perfect time to discuss the possibility of a referendum.

**VI. Superintendent Report – Referendum Discussion**

**Why a Building Referendum?**

We have effectively completed previous capital improvement projects to address our facility needs. It is critically important to maintain a continuous program of constant upkeep so that our district does not end up facing dire needs in future years. Small-scale facility improvements have been completed with fiscal responsibility on an annual basis through our operating budget. But large scale capital improvement projects require a higher level of care and financial support from our community through a referendum.

The Administration and District Maintenance Staff have been actively monitoring the status of our schools through our review of the Long Range Facility Plan and in consultation with our Architects and Engineers. The conclusion is that there is an increasing number of facility concerns that need to be expediently addressed. The Mendham Township Board of Education is unable to include these necessary projects in our annual budget without significantly decreasing the well-being of our students. In addition, the Department of Education has determined that our projects qualify for approximately 40% funding of the total project cost.

With expiring debt and a need for action to maintain the health of our facilities and with a look to the future, the time for action is now.

### **Referendum Process:**

The bond referendum grew out of the District Strategic Plan, which involved staff, administrators, parents, and community members. They identified district strengths and challenges, developed a vision for the future, and set district goals and objectives.

Once the Strategic Plan was adopted, a complete facilities assessment was conducted by Parette Somjein Associates and a comprehensive report was delivered to the Board of Education in October of 2019. This assessment determined the condition of the facilities and also spoke to how well they support District programming.

The Board of Education appointed a diverse Facilities Advisory Committee that conducted a comprehensive review of our facilities and the needs identified in both the facilities report and the community survey conducted in January of 2021. The committee developed a full list of proposed projects in several areas to support pressing needs and educational priorities.

A detailed review of the proposed project list was conducted by PSA and the School Administration to determine the project draft we are reviewing tonight. The draft was compiled with the District's goals and visions for the future in mind, along with the clear guidance around the potential spending limits for such a referendum project.

### **What if the project fails?**

The District will need to continue to expend expensive resources on repairs to both school buildings that will only "band-aid" the problem and structures will continue to deteriorate. The facilities will fail to provide students with the personalized learning experiences that students need and residents recognize as vital to maintain and potentially expand upon what we offer. Students will not have the proper health, wellness, and instructional facilities needed to foster learning and be less prepared moving to our high schools, that continue to raise standards and prepare students for future opportunities.

## **Impact on the Local Tax Levy**

Because the School District has existing debt that will be fully paid off during the 2022-2023 school year, this new project would have a net decrease in the current tax rate utilized for debt service.

In the current 2020-21 fiscal year, a homeowner in the Township with an average assessment of \$905,519, pays about \$565 for debt service. Based on the amortization of the new bonds, this would drop to about \$438 – a decrease of about \$127 per year.

In the current 2020-21 fiscal year, about \$0.062 of the total tax rate is utilized to pay the debt. With the proposed project, this would drop to about \$0.047, or a decrease of about \$0.015. For every \$100,000 of assessed value in the Township, this decrease is about \$15.50 per year, so a home assessed at \$500,000 would see an annual decrease of about \$77.50, and a home assessed at \$1,000,000 would have a decrease of \$155.

### **Next Steps:**

- Board Discussion/Questions
- Architect to File Project Applications with NJDOE
- Approve Financial Advisor and Bond Counsel for Referendum Planning
- Determine Referendum Date, Question, and Amount
- Various Public Forums to Inform Public on Project Details and Tax Impact

## **VII. Discussion**

R. Wowk – what savings can emerge from doing this from our budget

Dr. Constantino – I am not comfortable responding to that, I would have to ask the PSA firm to come up with a list of items for that.

G. Holquist – our due diligence to replace a roof or repair the driveways

Dr. Constantino – I would assume that there may be some in certain areas but I will have a discussion with the architects.

P. Dumovic – I am completely supportive to hold a referendum that supports things to maintain our school district and its preeminent state. I am supportive of incurring long-term debt to address pressing needs and also our key priorities. I understand the initial starting point was a possible \$40Million school construction referendum. The School Administration together with the Ad Hoc Referendum Committee has paired that number down to around \$19.9Million. This is the first time I have seen a listing of potential projects for a total of \$19.9Million. Going forward, all of us as Board members ideally should arrive at a place where we are on the same page regarding the need for the various projects listed for a possible referendum later this year; i.e., how these projects will help our school district long-term. Can you provide information about what other school districts are doing. We should also be thinking long-term and not just short or medium term, given that the bonds would be paid off over a 20-year period. And In that regard – in the science and technology bucket - I do not see anything regarding what technology we may need to ensure our students can effectively collaborate remotely in our increasingly connected digital world. Furthermore, while future-ready academic spaces and innovation labs are terrific, as are flexible outdoor education areas, I do not see any projects in the area of sports and I believe that is also very important. As a school district, we want to continue to be proud of our outdoor athletic facilities and sports fields.

A. Christmann – a couple of good points raised – we have utilized the town's input for those that decided to respond, we also took the town hall and committee input, certain things have been crossed off the list that I would have loved to see happen but to have the right measure. There was hardcore pushing for outside space – including athletics for both the schools and the town. Should the drainage at the middle school be a huge expense at the middle school? Everyone will have a difference of which projects would be more important to them.

Dr. Constantino – one of the initial conversations we had with the group was that 23 M with debt relief over a 20-year bond would have been a flat project. There are also other internal projects that we would do along with the fields but we wanted to be fiscally responsible. We took a look at what we are doing now and the details and further criteria that are the next step in the thought process that will take place after the DOE approves the project providing the designs and details.

Mrs. Mody – is there a way we can start to see the vision and the next stages

Dr. Constantino – that is a great point and we can do that and there will be updates during this process along the way

Mrs. Mody – I just want to thank Gretchen, Aadi, and Andy for all of the work they have put into this.

Dr. Constantino – in practice the debt becomes the responsibility of the new incorporated district. It will combine collective and distribute the percentages across the new combined district.

R. Wowk – does the funding need to be spent in a specific timeframe.

Dr. Constantino – good question – the project would be staged – the funding would also get staged – worry about the economics if you might over-inflate your project – we need to craft it so that we can present this to work in our favor.

P. Dumovic - can you talk about the timeline for a possible school construction referendum in a little more detail – when will we find out which projects may qualify for State funding and what amount of State funding we may be able to receive? We obviously need enough time to get this information out to the public. Interaction with the community and gaining public support is key to voters approving a possible school construction ballot question in December. Do we have enough time to get this done?

Dr. Constantino – glad you brought this up – I think we have an appropriate amount of time to sell a December referendum. What activities do we want to engage in to be very effective from September to December? The return to school will be a great starting point and I think we are on a good timeline.

#### **VIII. Verbal Communications from the Public – None.**

#### **XI. Adjournment**

Moved by Mr. Thayyar second by Mr. Wowk to adjourn the meeting. The meeting was adjourned at 9:10 pm.

Respectfully submitted,



Donna Mosner  
School Business Administrator/Board Secretary