



Strategic Facilities Committee Meeting #9
Teleconference 301-914-1341/ Board Room at Central Office
Garrett County Board of Education
40 S Second Street
Oakland, MD 21550

Minutes of July 29, 2019

Facilitator: David Lever

Committee Members Present: Jim Browning
Patrick Damon
Karen DeVore
Steven Kauffman
Tracie Miller
Kevin Null
Jennifer Paul
Carissa Rodeheaver
Nathan Sorber
Bill Swift
Richard Wesolowski
Duane Yoder

Dr. Lever called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m. The majority of the committee members joined the meeting in the Board Room while a few of the members joined via teleconference. Joel Gallihue, AICP, Consultant to the Facilitator for student enrollments, joined the meeting via conference phone.

I. Introductions

Dr. David Lever, Facilitator, welcomed the committee members and made certain that committee members had received the meeting documents.

II. Minutes

Jim Browning made a motion to approve the minutes from the June 18, 20, and July 10, 2019 SFC Meetings and Patrick Damon seconded the motion. The committee members unanimously approved the minutes.

III. Research Subcommittees: Reports

Dr. Lever reminded the committee to post their documents to the share drive. He requested the committees to email him with a status update if they haven't posted their documents yet. He reminded the members that the committee recommendation draft report is due to the Board on September 3, 2019. The final report will be presented to the Board at the November 12, 2019 Board Meeting.

The capital requests are due to the State October 4th and the final due date is November 27th. Anything that should be included in the capital requests must get to the Board before October 4th.

Dr. Lever summarized the conclusions reached in previous discussions of the committee. Combining the educational adequacy information developed in the June workshops with other data on the age of facilities, deferred maintenance, and classroom sizes leads to the conclusion that there is considerable inequity in the condition of the schools in the southern part of the county compared to those in the north.

IV. Planning Options

1. Review of Planning Goals

Dr. Lever reminded the committee of the goals and the results of the educational adequacy analysis conducted at the June 18 and 20 workshops. The first goal was to address the largest number of most critical facility deficiencies. Analysis revealed security and before-and-after school programs have the highest number of deficiencies as measured by total deficiency points; they occur in 10 out of 12 schools, and they accumulate the largest number of red deficiency points. Parking lots / bus loops and community space are deficient in four or more schools and accumulate a large number of red points. The policy implication is to target capital funds to security as the first priority, which may include relocating administrative areas in schools where they are remote from the entrance. Another policy implication is to address parking lots/bus loops as a critical safety item, and to expand before and after school and community space facilities.

The second goal is to improve the learning environment for the largest number of students. Analysis showed that Crellin Elementary and Swan Meadow Schools have the largest number of red deficiency points and have an exceptionally high level of deficiency points per student. They both serve small student populations. Southern Middle and Broad Ford Elementary Schools have a total of 1,097 students, which is 29% of the total GCPS enrollment, and they both have moderately high levels of deficiency points-per-student. Other schools have a higher deficiency point-per-student score, but far fewer students are affected. The policy implication is that targeting the critical deficiencies in a few schools would benefit a large number of students.

The third goal is to correct inequities in the quality of facilities. The analysis found that the total deficiencies vary greatly between the schools. Grantsville Elementary School has 2 deficiencies with total of 27 points, whereas Crellin Elementary has 17 deficiency items with a total of 227 points. The impact of deficiencies on students varies greatly between schools, e.g. Southern High School has .063 deficiency points per student and Swan Meadow School has 5.58 deficiency points per student. The burden of deferred maintenance varies greatly between schools, e.g. Accident Elementary totals \$212,000 in deferred maintenance while Southern Middle School totals \$2,935,000 (exclusive of the cost of renovation).

The analysis also showed that there is a great inequity between the northern and southern schools. The northern schools had a total of 231 red deficiency points, with 6.6 red points per 10,000 square feet and 15.3 red points per student. The southern schools had a total of 786 red deficiency points, with 20.1 red points per 10,000 square feet and 33.8 red points per student. Also, total deferred maintenance for northern schools was \$3,923,000, whereas southern schools total deferred maintenance was nearly 3x more, at \$10,686,000. Under building conditions, the average utilization on the northern schools was 55.1%, compared to 69.6% average on the southern end. At an average age of square footage of 36.0 years, the schools in the south are markedly older than those in the north, which have an average age of square footage of 27.6 years. The class size and teacher-to-student ratio was also higher on the southern end. To correct the inequities in the quality of the facilities, the policy implication would be to place the focus on greater spending for the southern end schools.

Dr. Lever asked the committee if they were happy with the current planning goals. One member expressed concern that the community impact was not included in the goals. The Committee addressed this, and determined that community impacts are included in the analysis of educational adequacy, and that a program to improve schools will implicitly benefit communities. Another member wanted to make certain classroom sizes were addressed. It was noted that classroom size is a factor included in the comparison of schools.

2. Review Background Information

Dr. Lever asked the committee if there was any additional background information to consider before the committee moved forward with their findings and recommendations.

3. Review planning options: eliminate, score, prioritize

Dr. Lever asked the committee to review preliminary planning options and requested the committee discuss each one to determine if any of the options could be removed. He presented a report covering a full range of preliminary planning options with the goals, pros, cons, and capital costs of each. The objective of this report was a) to ensure that no planning option was overlooked and b) to clarify the conceptual impact of each option. The preliminary planning options included three general groupings: options to be applied systemwide, options specifically for the schools in the north, and options specifically for schools in the south. The systemwide options included incremental distributed capital improvements at each school; targeted capital improvements, which consist of selective larger improvements; and major capital renovations, which are comprehensive renovations of selected facilities. Other systemwide planning options included Head Start at all elementary schools, systemwide redistricting, grade band reconfigurations affecting reassignment of 5th and 8th graders, K-8 or elementary/middle school, and elementary-to-middle and middle-to-high school options. Options for the south comprised consolidating elementary schools and adding elementary school additions. Options for the northern schools included six possible school consolidation plans.

A committee member suggested that the option for distributed capital improvements at each school be removed from the list as this appeared to be too costly, and the committee agreed, as this approach would have little effect on the facility educational deficiencies or the overall building deficiencies. Another committee member requested to remove the planning option of reassigning elementary grades to middle school facilities and middle school grades to high school facilities. Another option that was recommended for removal was the option for the K-8 or Elementary/Middle School grade band reconfigurations as this appears to be infeasible within the current building configurations.

Committee members also discussed the option of renovating Southern Middle School, but with consideration of moving Broad Ford Elementary into the new renovated school.

Dr. Lever stated that based on discussion with the principal, Southern High School could handle 8th grade students (grade band configuration), as there is a wing of classrooms that could house the 8th grade students separate from the other grades. Northern High School, however, does not appear to have this same building setup as their vacant classrooms are located in different parts of the school. A committee member expressed concerns regarding moving 8th grade up at Southern High School but not doing the same at the Northern High School. Those concerns were around schedules, planning guides, etc. that are currently uniform across the system for the middle school grades (6-8).

Committee members also discussed adding early childhood programs such as Head Start into each of the elementary schools. They stated they could add Head Start at each of the elementary schools, with the exception of Route 40 and Swan Meadow Schools. Also, there would be no changes at Friendsville Elementary and Grantsville Elementary as they already include Head Start programs. On the Southern end, Head Start would be an option if students were redistricted to northern schools, were moved up to higher grades, or additions were constructed to the buildings, otherwise there would not be enough room to hold the additional children. Dr. Lever suggested that if the committee decides on moving forward with recommendations for Head Start at the elementary schools, they should suggest 2 or 3 Head Start additions per year and not all at one time. A committee member noted that the community schools (e.g. Crellin) are the ones that need Head Start the most.

The committee discussed an option to consider: move 8th grade to high school, move 5th grade to middle school, add Pre-Kindergarten and Head Start at each of the elementary schools, and move central office to Dennett Road. With this option, possible renovations would need to occur at Northern High School and possibly the elementary schools for the Head Start program additions. As concerns regarding the move of 8th grade to the high school were discussed, Dr. Lever recommended a subject expert would have to be brought in to determine the feasibility.

The committee discussed school closures. While saving facility and possible staffing costs would be a consideration in making this decision, there would be many factors to be looked at before recommending this to the Board. Dr. Lever stated that COMAR (13a.02.09.) provides specific procedures and timeline that would need to be discussed in detail if the committee chose to recommend this. A committee member stated that perhaps they could remove school closures as an option in the interim, but only bring it back if necessary because of cost constraints.

Dr. Lever stated that the committee should consider the options in relationship with the goals, and how do we get information to tier the recommendations on the basis of their importance. If the committee has a sense of the top priorities in terms of what needs to be addressed the most, they could prioritize their ideas. Funding resources could be proposed to reach each of the tiers, including the avoided lease payments on the Board office, the savings from closing schools, and increases to the local property tax.

The committee discussed the educational inadequacies at Crellin Elementary and Swan Meadow Schools. Dr. Lever stated that the extensive deficiencies at these two schools contribute to the inequities in the southern schools. The committee needs to determine how to spend the money wisely, i.e. renovate or fix buildings with the most students. The committee also discussed that Swan Meadow did not currently offer all of the educational programs to their students and there are concerns about meeting State middle school requirements. The facility has the most red deficiency points. A committee member stated that if the committee's final recommendation were to close Swan Meadow School, that the school system could lose a majority of the (~50) students, as parents would choose to home school their students rather than allow them to be redistricted to another school.

The following general ideas, to be developed in more detail and brought back to the committee in order to be discussed, prioritized, and fully elaborated were discussed.

- Add Security Vestibules at 10 of the schools that don't have them. Proper security at schools is critical.
- Add early childcare programs such as Pre-K and Head Start at the elementary schools (to be completed incrementally).
- Redistricting should be explored as the least costly method to address overcrowding in the southern elementary schools, to be followed by modest grade band reconfiguration to take advantage of available space, and then by capital projects to increase capacity. There is available capacity at Southern High School that could help to solve the overcrowding issues in the southern elementary schools.
- Address disruptive behavior concerns with proper space enhancements

- Consider the Southern Middle School priorities in combination with Broad Ford Elementary School. This could be an expensive project, but the committee will consider a number of options to incorporate the elementary school as a separate program within a renovated and expanded middle school facility.
- The educational adequacy findings from the previous workshop call particular attention to the conditions at two schools, Crellin Elementary and Swan Meadow School.
- In addition, the open space classrooms at several schools should be addressed.

The committee may also consider moving the Board Office staff to the Dennett Road building, as this would reduce the operating budget by approximately \$500,000 per year, with the potential to leverage approximately \$10 million in capital debt. Dr. Lever stated that if the single high school committee still wants to propose this option, this could be completed through a 10 year plan if the subcommittee recommends this and the committee has a whole approves the recommendation to the Board.

IV. Discussion

Recognizing that improvements will be needed in many facility areas, the committee will develop tiers of projects that reflect its priorities, and will consider the financial resources needed to carry them out. Depending on the magnitude of the costs, closure of facilities could be considered among the possible sources to provide needed capital funding. The committee will develop and prioritize its detailed planning recommendations with a primary view to the educational and operational necessity for the improvements, and an understanding that a well-conceived plan will receive a level of financial support from the County government.

Dr. Lever will develop a draft capital plan for the consideration of the committee, based on the principles outlined above. This draft is underway and will be reviewed by the committee at a meeting later in August.

V. Adjournment

Patrick Damon made a motion to adjourn the meeting and Jennifer Paugh seconded the motion. The committee unanimously approved the adjournment of the meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 8:11 p.m.