

January 8, 2020

The Stonington Board of Selectmen held a special meeting on this date at the Stonington High School at 7:00 p.m. Present were First Selectman Danielle Chesebrough, Selectwoman June Strunk and Selectwoman Debbie Motycka Downie. Also, present were members of the public and press.

(1) Call to Order

Ms. Chesebrough called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

(2) Pledge of Allegiance

(3) Public Hearing

Ms. Chesebrough called the public hearing to order at 7:02 p.m.

Ms. Chesebrough gave an overview stating that the Board of Education handed West Broad Street School back to the Town on June 1, 2019. The previous Board of Selectmen revitalized the Stonington Facilities Committee in March of 2019. The Board of Selectmen discussed West Broad Street School at approximately eleven (11) different meetings and between the Day and Sun there were fifteen (15) articles on the topic. The Stonington Facilities Committee had twelve (12) meetings and four (4) open houses at the site.

The Stonington Facilities Committee reported back their recommendation that the Town lease the building to St. Michael School based on their research and community input.

Allowing St. Michael's to lease the building and take over inside maintenance and utilities will save the Town and estimated \$128,200.40 a year. The rent of \$300.00 per month plus yearly savings equates to just under \$11,000 a month. There is also the cost to consider that if St. Michael's closes a portion of the sixty-nine (69) Stonington based students could return to public school, which would also have a cost to tax payers.

Ms. Chesebrough concluded that there should also be consideration given to the future worth of the building. As property values increase in the area and further revitalization efforts are made consideration should be given to the investment value of holding onto the building.

Attorney Brian Estep gave an overview of the lease stating that it was a short-term three-year agreement with a two-year extension available. The agreement under Town Charter does not have to go to a Town meeting because the term of the lease is under five years. Under the terms, the rent is three hundred dollars per month and the building can be used only as elementary or middle school. The Tenant is responsible for all maintenance and repairs of standard items. The Town will make it ready to be used as school with agreed upon repairs. The capital repairs are the responsibility of the Town.

There is a clause in the agreement which states that the Town is not required to expend more than \$50,000 on capital repairs in any one fiscal year. It further states that in the event that the premises incurs a catastrophic capital impairment, requiring the Town to expend greater than \$50,000 to remedy, the tenant agrees to work in good faith with the with the Town to come up with a mutually agreed upon plan to address said repairs over time.

Father Perkins stated his gratitude to the Town for the opportunity. He stated that St. Michael has been in the village of Pawcatuck for over 150 years. He added that the lease will bring together two of the oldest education institutions in the Town with St. Michael School establishing in 1873 and West Broad Street School in 1900. St. Michael is hoping to increase their enrollment and has outgrown its current location. He added that having more than one option of education makes the Town attractive to families.

Ms. Doris Messina, Principal of St. Michael School, stated that they have recently changed their method of education back to the classical method with integrated classrooms which adds to the appeal of their school. She added that access to alternatives to public education is an attractive asset to any town. The lease would allow them the opportunity to teach classically in a classically designed building and to remain true to historic nature of the building.

Ms. Chesebrough noted that she had received letters from the following:

- The Economic Development Commission stated that they were not advocating for any specific future uses for West Broad Street School but advised that its future use benefit the town economically.
- Ms. Joanne Lindeborg and Ms. Laura Graham who were both in favor of the lease.

The following spoke in opposition:

- Jim Lathrop
- Bill Turner
- Kristine Halleck
- Rudy Pancaro
- Barbara (did not sign in)
- Linda Allen

The overall concern was that the Town had not done its due diligence in trying to market the property for sale; the rent to lease was too low and should be at market value; the cost of upkeep to the Town/taxpayers on the building is high; there is risk in becoming a landlord; difficulty finding information on repair work that has been completed; disappointment that more people were not in attendance at the public hearing in objection; Town is acting too quickly on the lease; building is part of Mechanic Street Historic District; there might be State and Federal Tax credits available to a developer; the school closed because it was unsafe for students; attended open house and had shown interest in purchasing the property but was not given opportunity; the Town's approach was not to try and find a buyer.

The following spoke in favor:

- Paul Sartor
- Jennifer Sanders
- Rachel Wolgemuth
- Jessica Morrissey
- Sandra Whewell
- Don Maranell
- Cal Buxton
- Sandy Grimes
- Nick Kepple

- Sue Jones
- Don Fiore

In summary, those in favor discussed that the lease would ensure the building is not left vacant; having access to another school option in a walkable location is more attractive to families wanting to move to the area; St. Michael has been part of the Pawcatuck community for years and are a good fit; the lease will reduce monthly overhead for both parties; the sixty-nine (69) Stonington students who attend St. Michael is at cost savings to the Town; closing the building and leaving it vacant will cause issues and lower property values; the property is zoned for school use or residential and would need a zone change to allow for commercial use.

Ms. Chesebrough asked if anyone else wished to speak for or against.

With there being no further public comments, Ms. Chesebrough adjourned the public hearing at 8:27 p.m.

(4) Discussion – Lease of West Broad Street School

Ms. Chesebrough thanked everyone for their participation in the public hearing and for sharing their views.

Ms. Chesebrough stated that with all the information that was shared she felt that the Board should table the item to allow an opportunity to reflect on the views that were shared at the meeting.

A motion was made by Ms. Downie, seconded by Ms. Strunk and voted to unanimously approve tabling the item until a future meeting.

In discussion, Ms. Downie noted that as a former member of the K-12 Building Committee, West Broad Street School was not closed due to the building being deemed unsafe for students. It was closed due to consolidation of buildings and declining enrollment.

With no further discussion, the motion carried.

The Board recessed at 8:30 p.m. The Board reconvened at 8:35 p.m.

(5) Comments from the Public

None

(6) Approval of the Minutes

A motion was made by Ms. Downie, seconded by Ms. Strunk and voted unanimously to approve the December 11, 2019 regular meeting minutes.

(7) Correspondence

Ms. Chesebrough took in correspondence from Mr. Eugene Pfeifer in the form of an application for the Waterfront Commission.

(8) Appointment/Reappointment/Resignation

Appointment – Climate Change Task Force

A motion was made by Ms. Downie, seconded by Ms. Strunk and voted unanimously to appoint Ms. Sharon Lynch to the Climate Change Task Force.

(9) Old Business

Discussion – Creation of and/or Revitalization of Boards/Commissions/Task Force

Public Communications Ad Hoc Committee

At the previous meeting, the Board voted to create a Public Communications Ad Hoc Committee and forwarded the item to the Town Attorney for further review.

Ms. Chesebrough stated that Pursuant to Charter Section 4-5(E), the Board of Selectmen hereby establish an Ad Hoc Committee to study and explore different communications mediums in order to provide accurate and unbiased information to and obtain information from the citizens of the Town of Stonington regarding Town issues. The makeup of said Committee shall consist of five (5) members and two (2) alternates chosen from residents of the Town. Said Committee shall continue until it has completed its assigned tasks or is dissolved by a further motion of the Board of Selectmen.

A motion was made by Ms. Downie, seconded by Ms. Strunk and voted unanimously to approve establishing a Public Communications Ad Hoc Committee.

Ms. Chesebrough reviewed the mission of the group stating that the Board of Selectmen hereby establish the following mission statements for the Public Communications Ad Hoc Committee:

1. Explore how the Town can better communicate with the public through the use of social media and the Town website;
2. Consider the establishment of a Town newsletter and podcast, including the costs involved;
3. Contact other municipalities for suggestions and recommendations as to best provide and obtain information from Town residents; and
4. Make recommendations to the Board of Selectmen consistent with their findings on or before August 30, 2020.

A motion was made by Ms. Downie, seconded by Ms. Strunk and voted unanimously to approve establishing the mission statement for the Public Communications Ad Hoc Committee.

Discussion – Creation of and/or Revitalization of Boards/Commissions/Task Force Charter Revision Commission

Ms. Chesebrough stated that after further review of the timeline that the previous Charter Revision Commission utilized to update the Charter that they needed about 15 months. Therefore, it would not be possible for the group to get the questions ready for the November 2020 ballot. The goal would be to have the information ready for the November 2021 ballot.

A motion was made by Ms. Downie, seconded by Ms. Strunk and voted unanimously to table the item until a future meeting.

(10) New Business

Request – Assign Map 176, Block 7, Lot 24 A, B, C, Street Number 3, 7, 9 Schoolhouse Road, Mystic, CT 06355

A motion was made by Ms. Downie, seconded by Ms. Strunk and voted unanimously to approve the request.

(11) Comments from the Public

None

(12) Comments from the Selectmen

- Ms. Downie gave an updated on the Mystic River Boathouse Park Implementation Committee stating that they are moving forward. Cost estimates and timelines should be available at their next

meeting. They are working with the First Selectman and Town staff in trying to get their grant prepared so that they will be ready to go if/when the Bond Commission opens. The Mystic Seaport also offered to assist with drafting the grant.

- Ms. Strunk attended the Commission on Aging and stated that they have eight active members but are a twelve-member commission. They are having a difficult time getting a quorum together. She added that they could be focal point for statistics on seniors in the community.
- Ms. Chesebrough stated that she will send a formal letter to the Mystic Seaport to ask for assistance with parking at the boathouse. She had a meeting with Safe Futures, a domestic violence prevention organization, who has received federal funding to hire a part time person regionally at different police departments including Stonington to oversee victim advocacy.

(13) Adjourn

There being no further business to come before this Board, the meeting adjourned at 8:53 p.m.



Stacey Haskell

Recording Secretary