

(To be voted by the Joint School Advisory Committee at its next scheduled meeting)

Joint School Advisory Committee Meeting

Minutes of the February 7, 2007 Meeting

A meeting of the Joint Advisory Committee was held on Wednesday, February 7, 2007 in the Portsmouth Middle School Library.

Attendance:

Present:

Chair: Joanne Grasso, Councilor

City Council Member: Ned Raynolds

School Board Members: Sheri Ham Garrity and Mitchell Shuldman

Planning Board: Anthony Coviello

Advisory Members: Rose Sulley and Eric Weinrieb

Ex-Officio: Robert Lister, John Stokel, Steve Bartlett and Helen Maldini

Call To Order:

Chair Grasso called the meeting of the Joint School Advisory Committee to order at 7:00 p.m.

Minutes Approved:

The Chair called for the approval of the January 24, 2007 minutes. Mr. Shuldman moved and Ms. Ham Garrity seconded, the minutes be approved. The motion was unanimously approved.

Public Commentary

Session:

Mr. David Forman, Portsmouth, spoke about following the City's Master Plan. He spoke about traffic at Jones Avenue and the access to the middle school and the loss of the open land if a school were built at the Jones Avenue site.

Ms. Alison Hamilton, Portsmouth, Portsmouth Middle School, spoke about the students being taught to be good citizens and to be respectful and that the Peirce land should not be taken by eminent domain.

Ms. Sue Christmas, Portsmouth Middle School, thanked the committee and the presenters for the information and figures at the meeting on January 24th. She hopes for a new middle school at the Jones Avenue site which would meet all the requirements and the renovations would not.

Ms. Sherry Weston, Portsmouth Middle School, born and raised in Portsmouth, stated she felt there were three important areas to choose the Jones Avenue site; save money, take land by eminent domain if no other choice, and most importantly the students. Having construction going on around the students would be disruptive. And having them in modules during the construction would be difficult.

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Ms. Pat Gormley, Portsmouth, spoke about the major change in the Jones Avenue area. She also felt building on the Jones Avenue site would mean losing something valuable - open space. She also did not think the demographics would change enough to need a larger school.

Ms. Nancy Pollock, Portsmouth, Portsmouth Middle School, spoke about her support for the Jones Avenue site allowing students to play sports where they attend school rather than having them bused. She also stated that the current middle school building is not child friendly and adding another story to the building would only make it more difficult to meet the educational needs of the students.

Ms. Brynn Foley and Ms. Eilee Foley, Portsmouth, Portsmouth Middle School students, spoke about the condition of the building including the climate of the school, summers too hot and winters too cold, falling ceiling tiles, no auditorium, problem with the water faucets, tripping on stairs that have ruts in them, and the bathrooms. They felt that building on Jones Avenue would be great to be near the high school, the students could remain at the Parrott Avenue site until the Jones Avenue site was completed, and that the Parrott Avenue building could be used for other purposes.

Ms. Sarah Hamill, Portsmouth, would love to see the Parrott Avenue renovated to keep the students in this location and this building. The Jones Avenue site is a prime piece of property that needs to be kept open. She voiced concern about disturbing the grounds if the new building were to be built at the Jones Avenue site.

Mr. Ralph DiBarnardo, Sr., Portsmouth, stated that he was at the presentation on January 24th at City Hall. He would not want to see Clough Drive used for modules if the Parrott Avenue site were renovated. He spoke of the expense of having a parking garage built under the Parrott Avenue proposed addition, athletes would have to be bused since there would be no playing fields, and the Peirce property would have to be taken.

Mr. Dick Seevy, Portsmouth, wants to know why there is a fence around the Jones Avenue site now if there is no problem with the land.

Mr. Steve Cirillo, Portsmouth Middle School, stated there are 300 members in the band and choir now which is up from 42 when he first came to the Portsmouth School Department. All the activities for band and choir must be held at the high school. Also, all the equipment must be carried up and down the stairs and transported to the events since they are not held at the present middle school site.

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Ms. Carol Chellman, Portsmouth, stated her desire to keep the school at the Parrott Avenue site because of its proximity to the community, allowing students to walk to so many things including the new Library. She would like to see the Jones Avenue site left as open land.

Mr. Dick Adams, Portsmouth, thanked the committee. He is involved land conservation. He feels the Jones Avenue site is priceless, once used, it can never be returned as green space.

Ms. Mary Pontrello, Portsmouth, feels there is more examination needed. She recalls an article written 15 years ago with concerns about not capping because there were toxic chemicals. Disturbing the ground at Jones Avenue could release these toxic chemicals.

Ms. Beth Crowell, Portsmouth, is concerned about the traffic on Jones Avenue if the site is built at the Jones Avenue site. She feels it is a safety issue with the traffic that already exists on that road and the addition of cars driving on Jones Avenue to drop students off. Would like to see another secondary entrance considered.

Mr. Jack Peduzzi, Portsmouth, always feels old buildings should be renovated. However, once he reviewed the reports, he feels Jones Avenue would be the better site for the students.

Mr. Patrick Ellis, Portsmouth, works for an Environmental Company. He is not concerned with the items brought to Jones Avenue from Pease. They are in double lined and there is a good sense of what is at the site. Feels that if the Peirce parcel is taken by eminent domain that others would not put their land in trust for fear of this happening. Also, since the previous committee has checked for other sites, that Jones Avenue is the right choice.

Ms. Leslie Stevens, Portsmouth, cannot see renovations being done at the Parrott Avenue site and is concerned with the lack of parking at the current site.

Ms. L. Rene Bergeron, Portsmouth, is concerned about preservation, disturbing the land, and hurting the wetlands. She feels that the students need to be creative to make the current site work. Stated that the Bergeron property was taken by eminent domain in order to build the fields at the high school and she would not want that to happen to the Peirce family.

Ms. Lisa Sweet, Portsmouth, stated that she is concerned that the Parrott Avenue has no room for expansion and that it does not meet the educational needs of the students. She also would like to see fields on site to avoid busing athletes.

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Mr. Harold Whitehouse, Portsmouth, handed out information on the landfill. He was on the council when Jones Avenue site closed. He is concerned about runoff and water penetrating the cap and leaking into Sagamore creek.

Ms. Kathy Pearce, Portsmouth, Portsmouth Middle School Librarian, stated that she received from someone a copy of the e-mail sent out by Nancy Novelline Clayburgh to ask people to come to the meeting to talk about building a new school at Jones Avenue. She looked at the report on the land at Jones Avenue being monitored. The data was not readable. She is concerned with what she read is at the site, things she could not even pronounce. She feels more study needs to be done. She did state that she is not in favor of taking the Peirce property to renovate and build at Parrott Avenue site.

Ms. Shaula Levenson, Portsmouth, stated that she would like to see the Parrott Avenue building remain as is, not renovated, that it is no longer suitable for a middle school and does not meet the educational needs of the students.

Ms. Jeannette MacDonald, Portsmouth, is concerned with the quality of the air at the present middle school and was concerned about bats in the present middle school.

Ms. Kathy Birse-Siegel, Portsmouth Middle School Teacher, is concerned with the safety of the students who are under her care. She is unable to supervise them correctly and is concerned with not being able to do this under the current conditions.

Mr. John Anderson, Portsmouth, stated that the Peirce property is already taken. He does not feel architect did a good job.

Mr. David Witham, Portsmouth, stated that Mr. Edward Murdough from the Department of Education did state that both plans are passable. He feels more thought needs to go into this decision.

Mr. Matthew Gronchi, Portsmouth, would like to see more work done to get the current Parrott Avenue space to work.

Mr. Gary Ephear, Portsmouth, would like the future of transportation to be taken into consideration.

Ms. Leslie McCarthy, Portsmouth, has a concern for the future of the students and the medical issues which could arise from disturbing the property at Jones Avenue site in order to build a school there.

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Questions and Discussion:

Ms. Grasso stated that 10 – 14 sites were reviewed by the committee before coming to the decision to think about these two sites.

Mr. Robert Sullivan, City Attorney, stated that the city owns Alumni Field. The Peirce property has restrictions on it that state it is to be used for recreational purposes and no other purpose. The city could pursue the property, possibly with money paid, which would be used for recreational purposes.

Ms. Sulley expressed her concern that the agenda listed the presentation by Rus Wilson, Athletic Director. She was unaware that she could add items onto the agenda without the approval of the committee.

Mr. Rus Wilson, Athletic Director, spoke about the fields and presented a handout of the current fields. He is concerned about losing fields during construction or renovation and expressed the need for additional fields.

Mr. Weinrieb agreed with Ms. Sulley's concern about speakers being invited. He also would like Mr. Wilson to look at Synthetic Fields while looking at adding and fixing up fields.

Mr. Stokel reminded the committee that another speaker came to speak to the committee and was not the original speaker requested.

Dr. Robert Lister, Superintendent of Schools, stated that the School Board is committed to a true middle school concept of grades 6, 7 and 8. The Portsmouth Middle School staff has been involved in the discussion of spacing based on the state standards and also visited other schools. Teachers are asked to do more, there are higher standards for teachers. Building an addition onto Parrott Avenue would overshadow the new library, no room for expansion, waivers would be needed to get a 43% reimbursement, and athletic fields would not be on site. The Jones Avenue site would meet the educational narrative, ability for expansion, classroom sizes would meet state educational standards, waivers would not be needed, additional fields in the city as well as on site, auditorium for use by the community as well as the school, could receive up to 43% reimbursement without the need for waivers. The price difference estimate; Jones Avenue \$39 million, Parrott Avenue \$48 million.

He is concerned with disrupting the students for 2 years at both the middle school students and the Little Harbour students.

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Dr. Lister would recommend a new school at Jones Avenue site. As a fact finding group the Joint School Advisory Committee should refer the results to the school board to work jointly with the city council.

Mr. Stokel expressed concern about the traffic at Parrott Avenue if this site were chosen with only 7 spaces allowed for 11 buses and the 50 – 70 parents picking up students each day.

Mr. Coviello asked about the amount spent by this committee and the previous committee.

Mr. Bartlett stated it was allowed up to \$25,000. Not all of that was used. Then Team Design was paid hourly to answer questions before being asked to continue by this committee.

Mr. Reynolds expressed his concern about the agenda and having Dr. Lister and Mr. Wilson speak with the clear intention of supporting the Jones Avenue site.

Ms. Sulley wondered what the use was of the auditorium at the high school.

Dr. Lister stated that it was not the use of the high school but the need of the students to remain in their school for performances.

Ms. Maldini stated that many high school students are in town each day as well as middle school students. Also at sporting events high school staff remain and watch the students. Having the fields on site would allow middle school staff to do the same. The high school students could work with middle school students bringing them together, and build a sense of community.

Mr. Weinrieb made a motion to recommend to the school board that both sites are viable based on the information gathered and to turn all reports over to them.

Mr. Coviello feels this is a cop out and that the committee should make a recommendation and does not support the motion. He felt the committee was formed and asked to make a decision.

Mr. Shuldman expressed his concern over the thinking that to be a community school it must be in the center of town. He feels that the decision to take the Peirce property by eminent domain is a City Council decision and that the City Council has not yet taken up that issue. He agrees with the motion.

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Mr. Weinrieb also felt that eminent domain is a main issue and that the City Council must make that decision.

Mr. Reynolds supports the motion. He felt there are too many unanswered questions and would like to see more work done to find other ways to renovate the Parrott Avenue site. He encouraged community members to continue to be involved in this plan and other issues in the city and to attend meetings of the boards.

Ms. Ham Garrity does not like either site at this time but sees no other sites available. This committee was asked to gather the information, collect the facts, which she said there is enough to move the process along. She supports the motion. She also invited the members of the community to come to the School Board and City Council meetings in the future and continue to be involved.

Ms. Grasso said that the City Council was not in favor of taking property by eminent domain and does not see them passing a vote to do so. She would like to see a new building for the middle school.

In order for the Joint Building Committee to pursue one site or the other further, it would have to be approved by the City Council with 6 members approving.

A letter from Mr. Ferrini was handed out to the committee members.

The vote was taken on the motion with 7 voting members in attendance. 5 voted in favor of sending this on to the school board with the information that both sites were viable. Mr. Coviello and Ms. Sulley voted against the motion.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:25.

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