

The Rationale for waiting until April Election – Selectmen’s Meeting 12/17/02

Additional time would allow taxpayers a better understanding of the RMHS project. Town Meeting or Elections should not occur until the following have been addressed:

1. A final study report and schematics must be presented to and discussed and voted on by the Building Committee to ensure the Flansburgh contract has been fulfilled. This should be done even before Selectmen and School Committee make decisions on Town Meeting and Election schedules. What assurance do we have that the plan that exists today will be the plan and report that comes before Town Meeting in January. No one has seen the details. The purpose of investing in the schematics was to ensure the public had a clear understanding of what we would be getting and for how much before going to the voters, including Town Meeting. Allegedly, according to the information sheet distributed by the Building Committee, the feasibility study was unable to provide enough detailed information for the project. Yet little more has been provided compared to the two previous RMHS studies.
2. A review needs to be conducted of the signed contract between the Building Committee and Flansburgh verifying dates and contents. According minutes, SBC Chair Russ Graham was given permission to sign the amended and approved contract (running from June 15, 2002 to June 15, 2003) at the August 7, 2002 SBC meeting. No one has seen the signed copy of the executed contract with Flansburgh. Any changes after August 7 were not done at a public meeting.
3. Voters must have a clearer knowledge of the Town’s Capital needs and the State’s fiscal crisis. The financial state of the Town needs more review for Town Meeting members and residents to fully understand the ramifications of their decisions to approve such costly and expansive school projects. It is foolhardy for the community to commit itself to funding projects with “shot in the dark” information.
4. SBA approval of this Option has to be determined and that will only happen in February 2003 (or later). The 11/14/02 Lynch letter from SBA states only that these options “might” be viable. It is possible that Reading may need to return to the drawing board after the SBA gives its determination in February.
5. The ramifications of SBA’s Advisory 5/31/02 “Deferred Construction “ reimbursement alternative must be known and discussed. The details, beyond what is provided by the schematics, need not be included in the application for June 2003 if construction is not to begin until 2004. At this point, the paramount concern of SBA is that the community provide an accurate cost estimate with which the Town and the architect are comfortable. Further design beyond the schematics is only required if necessary to achieve accurate cost estimates. Sid Bowen stated at the SBC 12/11/02 meeting that he is comfortable with these estimates. Conservation Final Approval (Order of Conditions) is not required for placement on the SBA reimbursement list June 1, 2003, only Preliminary Approval.
6. All timelines distributed at SBC meetings need to be explained and understood. All RMHS timelines listed by SBC Jeff Struble had Town Meeting scheduled for January 21, not January 13. Why are we now rushing the date originally picked for Town Meeting? Allegedly, an unknown, unseen contract is driving the January 13 Town Meeting date, yet no one has seen a copy of the executed contract with Flansburgh. The timeline submitted by Flansburgh 5/30/02 in their interview packet included submissions for SBA for Dec. 1, 2002, Mar. 1, 2003 and June 1, 2003, dates in line with the contract amended and approved by School Building Committee on August 7, 2002. Why the rush?

7. The public requires reasonable knowledge of the RMHS site conditions and plans. Borings are scheduled for December 19, 2002 and could easily affect the design and cost of plans.
8. Public and State expectations need to be clarified-- exactly what of the existing building is to be demolished. The draft of Superintendent's Long Range (facilities) Plan submitted to SBA Dec. 2 fails to mention complete demolition of the 1953 structure. Option 3 is described by SBA's Christine Lynch as demolition of "a wing," not the entire original 1953 school building. In his Long Range Plan, the Superintendent also references a "capacity expansion" upon completion of Option 3. In reality, the high school will be approximately 70,000 sq.ft. smaller. This Long Range Plan has not been discussed or voted on by the School Committee yet was submitted to SBA. Scheme 4 includes additional demolition.
9. The public needs to understand that the School Building Committee has not been directing the projects. The community's best interests have not been represented. (See dissenting letter 10/2/02 from SBC member Ray Porter sent to the SBC Chairman Russ Graham and copied to Selectmen)

Numerous examples exist in which architect direction has been determined not by directive of the School Building Committee but by communication with the Superintendent. The SBC did not direct the architect to develop Option 3, despite Superintendent explanation that it was being created by them "at no cost" to the Town. The expedited Town Meeting timeline was never discussed at a public meeting. The RMHS Existing Conditions Report released Oct. 8, 2002 has never been discussed at a School Building Committee meeting. All the communication for transfer of land has been among the Superintendent, SBA and the architect, not in the Building Committee. All SBC agendas from the architect went through the Superintendent, not the "independent" School Building Committee.