

Memorandum

June 10, 2024

To: Boards of Education, Finance & Selectmen and Permanent Building Committee

From: Bus Lot Working Group (see membership listed below)

Subject: Update on Working Group's Progress

Introduction

In January 2024, New Fairfield reached an impasse on the location for the school bus parking lot. In an effort to resolve issues pertaining to the Bus Lot location and also take a fresh look at previous work performed for sites analysis, plus evaluate new potential sites, the First Selectman and the Superintendent of Schools have put together a group of key advisors/stakeholders that has been meeting once a week and has performed a tremendous amount of work in a short period of time.

The Bus Lot Working Group consists of:

Melissa Lindsey, First Selectman

Dominic Cipollone, Board of Education Chair

Kenneth G. Craw, Ed.D., Superintendent

Don Kellogg, Permanent Building Committee Chair

Tony Iadarola, Town Engineer

Carrie DePuy, Director of Business & Operations

Evan White, Town Zoning Enforcement Officer

Phil Ross, Director of Buildings and Grounds

James D'Amico, High School Principal

Mark Ottusch, High School Athletic Director

Karen Gruetzner, Middle School Principal

Scott Pellman, Colliers International, Owner's Representative

Working Group Norms

This group has committed to each other and the community to work collectively and cooperatively, in the most expeditious manner possible, to find the best and most feasible location to build and operate a bus lot. This group understands that building trust between all involved, and with the community, is the highest priority at hand. An agreement, by all group members, to create a safe place to bring forward ideas, opinions, and concerns, openly and with NO judgment, is the core of the existence and working philosophy of this group. Everyone on the working group has equal power and has shown a tremendous respect for each other's opinion.

Overview of Process

This group started from the ground up to formally evaluate all previous work performed by the Permanent Building Committee (PBC) on possible sites, and to also brainstorm other possible sites to evaluate. A well-organized evaluation sheet, that had multiple evaluation criteria, was developed for previous and new sites. All sites were collectively graded by using a scoring system in a large matrix sheet, that was developed

collaboratively, in order to shortlist them and rank them from most favorable to least favorable. The group came up with four sites that would eventually go through a very defined and formal process of evaluation of existing concepts and/or development of possible new concepts for the build out of a bus lot. Below is an update on the group's progress and the recommended next steps:

Bus Parking Lot Criteria

All members of the group agreed that going forward they must erase any preconceived ideas that anyone had about different sites, and start this process at the beginning for all selected sites. The group proceeded by establishing a list of minimum requirements and amenities that the bus lot should have in order to function effectively and efficiently. This work was critical since some original requirements were enhanced and expanded, and this work also clarified some previous issues with the scope of this project. Fifteen criteria were identified and agreed upon for the initial evaluation phase. These criteria encompass the characteristics of the site, accessibility to necessary resources, detailed design criteria, and safety considerations such as traffic flow and sight lines.

Site Locations

The group identified nine potential sites within New Fairfield for the permanent bus lot. These include:

- Five options on the New Fairfield High School / Middle School Campus
- The Consolidated School Site
- The Dunham Drive parcel
- The Town Drop Off Center
- The Wooded Lot Behind Meeting House Hill School

While considering out-of-town locations, the group found no suitable properties nearby.

Scoring System

With the criteria and site locations identified, the group developed a detailed scoring matrix to evaluate each site using a numeric scoring system. This collaborative evaluation process resulted in initial scores for each location. The four highest-scoring sites were deemed worthy of further evaluation by an engineering firm in a phase two study.

Sites Selected for Further Study

The four sites identified for additional evaluation are, in alphabetical order:

- Consolidated School Site, 302 Ball Pond Rd.
- Drop Off Center (Leaf Composting Area), 33 Bigelow Rd.
- Parking Lot and Associated Recreation Areas, 54 Gillotti Rd.
- Wooded Lot Behind Meeting House Hill School, 302 Ball Pond Rd.

Next Steps

As previously referenced, there are now four locations that have the highest ranking out of all possibilities. The group agreed to have an independent engineering firm perform this work under the guidance and oversight of the entire working group. The group worked well together to develop a detailed scope of work to solicit an independent

engineer to develop new concepts, evaluate existing concepts, plus develop construction estimates for these sites. Although a formal RFP was developed, which could be used to publicly solicit a firm, the group, in consultation with the Town/District's Purchasing Agent, unanimously decided to work with an engineer that has a tremendous amount of experience in similar work and most importantly, who recently designed one the Largest School Bus Storage Lots and associated amenities in the entire region.

The working group is hoping to now hire this independent civil consulting engineer, (Benjamin V. Doto), who has not had any involvement with this project thus far, to provide a fresh look at the previous sites plus the newly selected sites and develop concepts and cost estimates to allow for further discussions with this group. The final step will consist of publically presenting his findings and his recommendations, along with the recommendations of the group, to the community in order to move forward on this critical project.

The cost for the professional services is \$41,600 and is detailed in the attached proposal. It is the recommendation of the working group that the expense be equally shared among the Board of Selectmen, the Board of Education, and the Permanent Building Committee. Cost-sharing would reflect a unified commitment to solving the problem.

Public Meeting:

A joint public meeting of the BOE, BOF, BOS and PBC will be scheduled for Thursday June 13, 2024 at 6:30 p.m. to provide an update, answer questions and secure approval for the necessary funding to conduct the engineering study. The study is expected to be completed over the summer, with the findings shared publicly thereafter.

Final Note:

The working group is optimistic that this process will yield, not only a collaborative solution to a highly challenging community problem, but will be a model for how a group of concerned individuals across the Town and Schools can work together toward a common goal.