

Working together is success.

— Henry Ford



Where Do We GO From Here?

Community Facilitation for the Town of Auburn and Auburn Village School

June 28, 2017



Promoting Excellence in the Public Sector

Purpose of the Session

The Town of Auburn and the Auburn Village School invited Primex³ to assist in facilitation of dialogue regarding the future of the building used by AVS. Over the last two years the School Board has placed a bond article on the warrant each year to renovate and construct a new school which has been narrowly defeated. This facilitation is an effort to bring the community together to gauge what the next step or steps should be for AVS. This session took place June 28, 2017 from 4:00 -7:00 pm.

Who is Primex³

Founded in 1979, the New Hampshire Public Risk Management Exchange (Primex³) is a public entity risk pool organized and operating as a trust on behalf of member municipalities, schools, counties and other governmental entities. Primex³ is your premier risk management partner by delivering superior coverage programs, trainings and services that create extraordinary value for our members.

The exercise was facilitated by:

Rick Alpers, Risk Management Consultant, Primex³

Shelley Walts, Member Services Consultant, Primex³

Sally Tanner, Member Services Consultant, Primex³

Setting the Stage

The evening began with introductions, review of agenda and ground rules. Ground rules are used to establish clear expectations from the very beginning.

Ground Rules

- #1 Listen to all
- #2 Be respectful and courteous to all
- #3 There is no wrong answer
- #4 One person at a time has the floor to speak

Participants

Members of the community, boards, departments and elected officials were invited to participate to insure a solid cross section of the community is represented. Participants were further divided into three smaller groups for small group discussion. The following are the three small groups and their members:

Group A

Keith Leclair, School Board
Lori Collins, AVS Principal
Ray Pelton, Police Lieutenant
Jim Tillery, Town and School District Moderator and Planning Board
Dorothy Carpenter, Trustees of the Trust Fund
Kathy Growney, Library Director
James Headd, Selectmen Chair
Karen Lessard, School Business Administrator
Mary Beth Lufkin, Budget Committee
Peter Miles, Budget Committee Chair
Jeanni Worster, Library Trustee
Kathleen Sylvia, Town Clerk
Bill Herman, Town Administrator
Alan Cote, Resident and Former Planning Board member

Group B

Allan Villeneuve, School Board
Janice Baker, School Board
Marge Polak, Assistant Superintendent of Schools
Michael Rolfe, Planning Board
Dan Carpenter, Budget Committee and Highway Safety Committee
Nancy Mayland, Library Trustee
Rick Eaton, Selectman
Carrie Rouleau-Cote, Building Inspector
Jeff Porter, Conservation Commission & Planning Board
Adele Frisella, Finance Director
Eileen McDonald, Resident and AVS Teacher

Group C

Samantha Belcourt, School board

Maureen Murgo, School Board

Scott Dube, Maintenance Director

Don Dollard, Cemetery Trustee

Mike DiPietro, Zoning Board of Adjustment & Highway Safety Committee

Dale Phillips, Selectman

Kathleen Porter, Assistant Town & School Moderator

Joseph Forest, Library Trustee

Phil Littlefield, Superintendent of Schools

Jess Edwards, State Representative & Planning Board

Edward Picard, Police Chief

Walter Milne, Town Treasurer

Presentation

School Board Chair, Keith Leclair, provided a brief power point presentation of the current building, student population and timeline.

First question for the small groups is to have each member of the group share why they thought the previous two bond votes have failed. This is an effort to get the community's true feelings out on the table which will then allow the group to move forward as a whole.

Why have the past two votes failed?

Participants shared their reasons in the small group setting. Once the group had completed sharing a group spokesperson was chosen to share their small groups thoughts to the entire group. The following are each groups thoughts and answers to the first question:

Group A

- Communication
 - ✓ While the School Board did a good job holding informational meetings, the community did not attend
- Cost / Length of Bond
 - ✓ Young families already stretched financially
 - ✓ Retirees on fixed income
 - ✓ Taxes

- Retirees concern of tax impact
- Scope of project

Group B

- Cost
- Necessity - felt a compelling story needed to be told
- Town vs. School competition for tax dollars
- Some citizens wanted "New-only" building
- Lack of State aid
- There was social media misinformation
- Lack of communication or getting it out to citizens
- Needed more detailed information on cost
- Confusion over tax impact
- New construction vs. renovation
- 30-year bond - time frame issue?
- Accountability for maintenance of bigger building
- Whole renovation done at once or in phases
- The Building Steering Committee make-up
- Needed more discussion of all options

Group C

- Low voter turnout-apathy
- Not enough involvement from community
- Committee was comprised of School Board not community volunteers
- Tax impact
- Too huge a price tag
- Affordability
- Lack of State building aid
- Detail cost from year 1 to year 2
- Outdoor facilities
- Alternatives / options not provided
- Communication on style / look of building

- Needs vs. wants
- Information
- Too much – too fast
- Not well informed on 2nd year tax impact

The second question of the evening was to determine where the project goes from here. The attendees remained in their small groups for further discussion.

Where do we go from here?

There was vast consensus in the room that something needs to be done with the Auburn Village School. The question / questions then presented to the small groups were:

Where do we go from here and how do we achieve a successful outcome?

A spokesperson to reported their findings to the whole group.

The following are the small groups answers and thoughts to the above questions:

Group A

- Reduce size of project
- Phase the project
- Highlight the Capital Improvement Program (CIP) for Town and School projects
- Communication
 - ✓ Research what other districts have done to achieve successful passage
 - ✓ Committee to be represented with cross section of community
 - ✓ Speak with community groups to get information out
 - ✓ Re-examine length of bond

Group B

- Phase project- 1/3 every 5 years with 10 year bonds
- #1 School Board goal – to have all students in one building
- More combined CIP meetings to plan money / timeline for spending
- New lower number - becomes more palatable
- Call Representatives - request State building aid
- Size of committee
- Community involvement continuing after tonight
- Renovating vs. new

- New architect / firm to quote new numbers - value engineering
- Hire expert to oversee project - person who has shepherded other communities
- Marketing plan
- School vs. Town needs - investing in long term community needs

Group C

- Community based / cross section building committee
- Coordinate town and school to present a unified effort
- Phase in the project
- Vet out alternatives and show options – new vs. renovate
- Verify facts such as student enrollment numbers
- Prioritize needs vs. wants
- Cap total spent at \$13-15 million budget

Review Findings and Next Steps

After reporting back to the entire group, the small groups took a break while the facilitators looked for commonality within the findings. The following was put forth as action items to move forward with on the building project.

- 1 It is recommend that the School Board consider forming a well-rounded building committee to help review the current project plans to give further advice on where changes could be made to help the project succeed. This committee would help direct the marketing plan to ensure that ALL citizens of the town fully understand the scope and need of the project. By no means does this committee have the charge to scrap the current building plans and start over with a fresh slate. The purpose of this committee is to work with the School Board and SAU staff to review the current plans and make any recommendations needed. Once plans are finalized the committee will begin drafting a marketing plan.
- 2 It is encouraged that the School Board consider phasing of the project in to 2-3 parts. This will ease some pressure on the tax rate and budgets. If the project can be broken into smaller phases it is still recommended that the bond schedules remain aggressive.
- 3 Promote that while the Town and the School District have their own Capital Improvements Plans, the plans should come together each year in order to reflect the totality of capital needs that require taxpayer funding. The group felt that the Town and School District should meet two to three times a year to educate both sides on what they have in the pipeline for capital projects. This will ensure better communication between the town and school. This will also assist the town and school in not competing against each other in March, when they both have a large capital project on their warrants. Additionally, the two plans should come together each year to represent all capital needs and their relative priorities.

Conclusion

It was a pleasure working with the Auburn community and assisting with this very important discussion. It spoke volumes that every person invited to the facilitation in fact attended. What you have now is real momentum in the community. Keeping this involvement and momentum going forward will be integral to the successful passage of the next school building project.

Respectfully submitted,

Rick Alpers

Sally Tanner

Shelley Walts

Center for
Public Sector
A d v a n c e m e n t



Bow Brook PLace
46 Donovan Street
Concord, NH 03301

603-225-2841
800-698-2364

www.nhprimex.org

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