

MINUTES
SPECIAL MEETING/WORKSHOP
DOVER CITY COUNCIL/DOVER SCHOOL BOARD
MCCONNELL CENTER LIBRARY
THURSDAY
APRIL 25, 2002
6:30 PM

WORKSHOP

City Council Members Present: Councilor Whitmore, Christenbury, Hindle, Hofemann, Mayor Nossiff, and Councilor Quigley.

School Board Members Present: Nick Skaltsis, Chairperson, Marjorie Fisher, Doris Grady, Heather Orion Hindle, and Thomas Alie.

Also present were: Armand LaSelva, Superintendent; Joseph Cooper, Business Administrator; Paul Beecher, City Manager; Steve Stancel, Planning Director; Paul Chalue, Facilities & Grounds Superintendent; Michael Joyal, City Manager; Gary Bannon, Recreation Director; Mary Ellen Sheffield, HUB; Anthony McManus, Planning Board; Peter Biegel, Landscape Architect; Steve Silver & Michael Lassel, Lassel Architects PA; Nick Henderson and Hiroko Sato, Fosters.

DISCUSSION RE:

1. MCCONNELL CENTER – EARLY LEARNING CENTER

The Mayor opened the meeting at 6:32 pm and introduced Steve Stancel to give a brief history of the process followed in the development of the Old Middle School Feasibility Study. Stancel identified the objective of this workshop as to bring the City Council and School Board up to speed on the history of the project with the goal to leave with a general consensus on how to proceed.

Stancel provided an overview of the existing facility and an outline of the protective covenants existing from the original landowner's donation. He then explained that a review of the city's needs had highlighted space deficiencies for the Welfare Department, School Department, Police Department, Planning Department, Business Assistance Program, Recreation Department, and public meeting spaces in general. All of these were considered as potential uses for McConnell building with the goal being to meet as many of the community needs as possible in the most cost-effective manner. With that in mind, many scenarios were reviewed while looking at the project as a comprehensive, community integration with waterfront development, downtown revitalization, and the maximization of school space.

Lassel outlined the process the architect had followed in developing the feasibility study for presentation at this workshop. He then presented and reviewed boards showing his conceptual drawings, floor-by-floor, and identified the major site work that would be involved. After his review, he asked Biegel to address landscaping and site issues they had found outside of the building.

LaSelva explained the vision of the Early Learning Center Concept that would include Head Start, Pre-School, and Kindergarten for the city. By bringing all resources for early literacy and early intervention programs together, at-risk children will need less intervention in the future. Consolidating Speech, Special Education, and Kindergarten specialists together will help us to better diagnose and prescribe instruction at the earliest possible level. LaSelva also

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recommended a holistic approach with an area for therapy and clinical services. Experts agree, the time to start medical and dental hygiene are at the earliest possible levels. Outside agencies would be brought in to run these programs.

LaSelva also added that the conference spaces in the SAU area would be available for other community use. He explained he would like to have the large School Board Conference Room wired for broadcast on the community channel and expected the area to be used as a shared resource.

He continued to explain that the linkage from HUB to DALC in the McConnell Center would provide the community with a whole “wrap-around” approach. Another positive outcome was that it would be a place located in the middle of the city for the community to engage all of its younger children, all day long. He ended by saying he hoped the City Council and School Board would proceed toward approving the concept so that we may make positive gains in the engagement and education of our children.

The Mayor asked the presenters to maintain the momentum of the meeting by moving item IV of the agenda, building walkthrough, to the end of the presentation.

Lassel provided a handout showing an estimated base cost of approximately \$5.5 million in the conceptual budget. The mayor asked if there would be a way to phase the project. Lassel provided one scenario he felt would work well, a “top down” approach: Mechanical Upgrades and Elevators first, then SAU Offices, Sprinkler Systems, Kindergarten, Head Start, and SPED. Proceeding from the top of the building down would keep dirt and interruption to a minimum. Grading and site work should be done early on. The Recreation Department work could be done at any time because the spaces are basically in a separate area of the building. Each program could be phased over a one-year period.

LaSelva estimated 62% of the building would be used for school related programs with 20% devoted to Head Start. Early conversations with Head Start indicate they would like to bring the money to cover their restoration (over \$700K and a portion of the site work) up front in lieu of rental fees. Then they would enter a long-term agreement and provide some kind of assessment for heat, lights, maintenance, etc.

The estimated \$775K for the new Kindergarten spaces will qualify for a 30% reimbursement from the Department of Education (subject to a waiver for the kindergarten classrooms previously build at GES & HSS) leaving approximately \$543K for local funds. The Department of Education will also reimburse 40% for the construction of SAU offices, estimated at a cost of \$900K, which reduces to approximately \$540K of local money. (Record note: these estimates do not include figures for site work.)

The City Manager asked Lassel if he would put together a six-year plan that would allow the city to plug the costs into the CIP Planning Process. Lassel indicated he would need to get engineers in to pin down hard figures; he would also need some specific direction from each program; and he would need more time for his estimator.

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Whitmore asked if construction administration, design, and hazardous material removal costs had been included in the conceptual budget. Lassel indicated they had not. LaSelva advised that DesMarais Environmental had already done an study and estimated the cost to clean hazardous materials from the building would be \$186,535. Whitmore noted the record should reflect this would bring the cost of the project closer to \$7 Million and Lassel agreed.

Grady noted the School Department had previously found the building to be unfit for Middle School use due to excessive moisture, mold and mildew and wondered what made it suitable for education now? LaSelva cited DesMarais' study found no mold or mildew issues with the building. Lassel added there would be increased ventilation in the building that would eliminate the moisture concerns.

A discussion was held concerning the "domino effect" of spaces in the city if existing offices were moved from city spaces to the new facility and what other uses there may be for the vacated areas. It was noted that the entire recreation department would be relocated and the spaces at Butterfield Gym were being considered for an Art Center. It was also noted that DALC would retain its current spaces on Atkinson Street.

The final discussion centered on a general consensus for the future of the project.

Beecher asked to see the project laid out as a 6-year plan including monies expected to be received from State Aid, DALC, HUB, Head Start, or any other sources, wrapped all together.

Christenbury said he would like to see the School Department to come back to the City Council with a phase-in plan, schedule, and costs.

Whitmore agreed she would like a clear map of the project and a full and clear understanding of the plan. She indicated she would be happy to give the School Board direction to move forward but, first she needed to see the numbers and phasing. The Mayor agreed.

Hindle stated that time is of the essence to include the project in the formulation of the next CIP. Quigley stated he agreed that the School Board should move forward with the concept.

The Mayor stated the City Council consensus was to move forward. The meeting was adjourned to a walkthrough of the facility at 7:50 p.m.

Kathy Baker
Administrative Assistant, Dover School Department