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[CE SBAC] Comments to 3/27 SBAC meeting

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To: cesbac@capeelizabethschools.org

Hello-

I was unable to attend the School Board Advisory Committee meeting on March 27 as I was out of town for a family emergency. However, I have been reviewing the online recording of the meeting and I have some concerns I wanted to share with the SBAC.

First, the quality of the audio in the video is nearly impossible to hear even with the volume turned up all the way- hopefully that can be fixed in future recordings.

Second, I continue to be concerned about the community member interruptions at these meetings. Specifically, at about the 12 minute, well after the public comment period has closed, Councilor Jordan identifies a man who has his hand raised as "Phil" and allows him to speak. "Phil" does not introduce himself, nor state his address, and proceeds to speak for around 10 minutes and the committee members engage with him as if he's a member of the committee in open dialogue.

It is hard to hear everything he has to say, but from what I could hear he (1) objects to the town spending more money to evaluate and solve the school infrastructure problems; (2) wants the SBAC to rely on the expertise of community members, presumably like himself, to create a plan that he finds palatable; and (3) advocates for hiring a different kind of expert. Again, excuse me if I am getting this wrong, the audio is incredibly challenging. After "Phil" speaks, another man in an orange coat begins speaking, on the apparent invitation of Councilor Jordan, and he also is not required to state his name or address (or at least I cannot hear this information in the audio if it is provided) and appears to generally agree with "Phil".

The SBAC committee charge places a strong emphasis on a credible process to build a new plan to go forward and, at the current stage, to hire an owner's rep to help guide and advise the committee. When the SBAC allows non-members to speak freely as though they are committee members outside of the public comment period it has the following effect:

1. Wastes valuable SBAC time. Public comment is typically limited to three minutes per person and "Phil" took over 10, and along with the man in the orange jacket, it took a total of 15 minutes of SBAC time.
2. Causes delay. The committee charge is to hire an expert to help review and create a go-forward plan. It is clear from watching the meeting, that the above-referenced comments causes a delay in determining if those ideas should be entertained and the RFP process re-done. From the discussion in the meeting, this interruption could have even derailed the entire RFP process causing significant delay.
3. Undermines Credibility. The meeting agenda makes it clear the goal is take finalizing steps in the RFP process to hire an owner's rep. However, these two gentlemen who spoke are requesting that their purported expertise should supersede the SBAC plan for a hired expert.

Allowing community members to play “expert” and derail meetings opens the committee up to criticism of impartiality and flawed procedures. The harm is not imagined, but real. For example, at around the 36 minute mark of the 3/27 meeting, Councilor Jordon states “my question to this whole team is, if you listen to the expertise from the community, to say, that maybe we are ahead of the curve and we have the opportunity to start all of this, I think, all of us, to do this as right as we can.....So if we have expertise in our community, and we have an opportunity to talk to people who have been through this process, we take that as part of our education in this point in time, and lets talk to these people and see how they can evaluate this process.” (Please excuse if this isn’t verbatim as the audio is challenging).

In other words, the SBAC is openly suggesting that the opinions and advice of the unidentified self-proclaimed experts from the community should stand in the place of the owner’s rep who the committee was set to vet and hire through its public and transparent process. The work of the SBAC and its charge to retain an owner’s rep is actively questioned yet the committee’s charge identifies an owner’s rep as the expert that will help guide the SBAC, not unidentified committee members who I suspect have their own agenda. Why take such pains to evaluate an RFP if anyone can stand up in the room and be allowed to substitute in their judgment?

I strongly urge the SBAC to stop this practice of allowing the community members to interject outside of the standard process. I am still relatively new to town, but watching this meeting it feels that there is a small and active group of folks in town who feel entitled, without regard to rules, process or credibility of the process, to cause delay, derail the committee’s work, and substitute their own opinions and judgment for that of the committee. Why do they feel that way? It appears because they will be given the platform to continue to express their opinions outside of the normal process and with undue influence. If people like have opinions they want to share, they can do so during public comment or, as I am, by writing down my thoughts for your consideration.

I strongly urge the SBAC again to stop allowing non-committee members the opportunity to disrupt and derail the proceedings.

Thanks for your consideration,

Elizabeth

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