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## [CE SBAC] Reminder of SBAC Charge; request to rely on experts

1 message

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To: cesbac@capeelizabethschools.org

Wed, Mar 13, 2024 at 11:21 AM

Hello -

As you continue to narrow in on a proposal for the School Board and Town Council to consider, please turn your focus on relying on people for their areas of training, education and expertise.

The Committee's Charge:

"**The Committee shall work with professionals** to assess the previous school building referendum proposal and to advise the School Board and the Town Council on a Building Plan and funding to address our school building needs. The work should develop the project concept sufficiently to propose the general project(s) solution and estimate the cost for referendum purposes." (bold added).

Many discussions of the SBAC members lately appear to be solely intended to serve the purpose of supplanting a personal belief or opinion for the expert input and advice provided to the SBAC. For example:

1) **NESDEC** - the School Board has retained and pays for the services of NESDEC (<https://www.nesdec.org/about/aboutindex.aspx>). They have served school districts since 1946 and work with 300 school districts to predict enrollment projections. Instead of relying on NESDEC for this work and the true expertise they bring, as the School District does year in and out, the SBAC committee has apparently endorsed the private research and undermining of this information by SBAC committee member(s). When NESDEC responded to this private research, they provided a coherent and informed statement about why they do not update enrollment numbers. This is not a conspiracy to trick the SBAC or the School District - this is their expert opinion based on a system they have developed that hundreds of districts have relied on for nearly 80 years. Please listen to the experts and stop wasting SBAC time trying to undermine and replace this information with idle speculation.

2) **Architects** - Cape Elizabeth is now on its second round of architects. By all accounts they appear to be fantastic and experts in their field, so much so that the State of Maine (DOE) is relying on their partnership to shape their building policies. If your architects say that the enrollment projects will/won't change the sizing of the project based on their expertise - please just listen to the experts our time has retained and paid to assist the SBAC. If the architect team provides data about costs of plans over time - trust that they are acting in good faith and using industry standard approaches. If the architect team has drawn right-size plans for our district, why dig into the MDOE guidance to try and decrease the credibility of the design? It is part of your charge to **work with** these professionals, not undermine and challenge them in their areas of expertise.

3) **Financing** - Instead of having one SBAC member serve as the proxy "expert" for financing by preparing and presenting financial information please rely on the town's bond advisers. Stating that "bond counsel" is expensive and therefore not worth it when the SBAC is considering one of the biggest single investments in school infrastructure in the State of Maine just feels dismissive and not thorough. Removing any reference to long-term costs of various options, because of a misunderstanding among SBAC members about how to evaluate long term costs in a municipal borrowing context, does a disservice to the SBAC, School Board, Town Council, and the community in their efforts to make informed decisions. Our efforts as a community, and by the SBAC should not be to fight the needs of this project, but to pour our energy into how we can figure out how Cape Elizabeth residents can afford it - including how to meaningfully help folks who will struggle with the tax increase. I hope future communications and estimates will prioritize information from our trusted municipal finance experts.

I am not an expert in municipal finance, I do not have a doctorate or expertise in educating children or evaluating

enrollment projections, I am not a professional construction consultant, and I am not an architect well versed in building public schools. However, I do know the value of hiring and relying on the experts in their fields to inform an outcome. Of course no one does or should check their own life experience at the door. If you are inclined to challenge an expert based on your own opinion, ask questions and listen so you can make an informed decision, but please stop arguing against them at every turn. It is embarrassing as a resident and it undermines the credibility of the SBAC work to ignore experts at every turn.

Thank you,  
Elizabeth Biermann  
19 Trundy Road

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