

TO: Town Councilor Penny Jordan

From: Ellen Van Fleet

May 17, 2024

RE: Schools – a different path forward

Dear Penny,

Jeff and I have followed the school building project very closely. We watched the night of the vote and again this week paying particular attention to architect Lisa explain Plan B. Penny, I tried so hard to find something to like in Plan B but two items trouble me: 1) half of the cost is going to renovating old inferior buildings; 2) I believe I heard Lisa say that we could look at a new middle school in, was it, 10-15 years? Even twenty is way too soon after spending all this money.

Consider my, maybe crazy, ideas for doing a modified version of E.

Aim to reduce the cost of Plan E to 75 million dollars!!! Here are some ideas that are not in the usual game book for building schools, but please give them consideration.

1. Move the students out of the middle school.

Put 7 and 8 grades at Mahoney Middle school for the 2 (+) years.

Put 6th grade in one wing of the high school. (I understand enrollment is down considerably)

6th graders would get meals (in their rooms unless the h.s. can spare another space) that would be provided by the h.s. kitchen.

They would use Thomas Memorial Library

An adapted gym program could be held at the Community Center unless the h.s. gym could accommodate them

Their music programs could be held in the Council Chambers at Town Hall and/or in the meeting room in the basement. I have always hoped that the floors in the Spurwink schoolhouse could be sealed so the building could be used. If that were possible the band classes could be held there for sixth grade.

This could lead to some interesting programming between sixth graders and h.s. students.

2. Tear down the middle school and put the new middle school in that same location

This preserves those precious sports fields.

3. Make modifications to Plan E to arrive at a price tag close to \$ 75 million.

Lets get creative. I propose that we build the new middle school pretty much as proposed with these (and probably other) changes so that we can hit the cost target.

A. Do not outfit the 6th grade wing, and perhaps both floors in that wing. Leave that space wide open, but with heating and electricity and lighting. This leaves a large, super flexible space for creative teachers and students.

Have the sixth grade remain at the high school until the financial guru's find the money to complete that wing. (There is no added space cost to do this).

B. Can the new school be configured so that the old "larger" gymnasium could be incorporated into the new middle school? Perhaps have space in the plan to add a new gymnasium at a later date.

C. Outfit the new 7th & 8th grade classrooms so they have the connections for all the IT that a modern school requires, but leave half of them without the IT equipment. Teachers would work as a team to develop IT projects for two classrooms at a time, or even swap classrooms in order to share. Everyone has to make sacrifices in this plan

D. I think that the renovation projects at both the elementary and high school need to take a hit as well. Do what has to be done for safety and regulations but there must be niceties in there that can be done at a later date.

I leave it to the creative people in the schools and on the School Board as well as the architects to work together to streamline Plan E to get it to a cost that the community will accept. I think that the "hardships" proposed above will appeal to our New England frugal sensibilities so that it, plus the lower price will get this proposal approved.

I know this isn't standard procedure but in the spirit of our town leaders throughout history, I think something like this that puts our money into new construction, not band-aiding 60 year old buildings will also appeal to the public. In 1934 when the new high school was completed the students carried their own desks from their old school at the town hall to the 1934 building. We need to incorporate some of that spirit. I think the students should help on moving day – moving desks and equipment out of the current building to moving trucks and then on the other end into Mahoney. They can participate again when the move is made to the new, yes incomplete, but very serviceable new Middle School.

Thank you for seriously considering my proposal.

Ellen Van Fleet

