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[CE SBAC] The best choice on Thursday

1 message

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To: cesbac@capeelizabethschools.org

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Dear SBAC – I know this is a tough week as you get close to meeting your charge of advising the school board and town council on a single option for further development and potential November referendum. This is a difficult effort, and by now you're all aware whatever option you choose has its benefits, its downsides, its likely support, and its certain opposition.

I look at this from two perspectives: First, what is most likely to give the town the best chance of passing an eventual referendum; Second, what maximizes the benefits to the most people in town. Part of that benefit maximization goes beyond the SBAC, because it involves the town intentionally moving toward a fiscally sustainable path. But that's out of your strict purview other than to acknowledge it is a potential.

First off, Option C should be off the table -not only is it almost as expensive as new construction, it accomplishes fewer educational goals, requires up to 3 years of continuous disruption, and contains excessive risk in terms of scope change and cost overruns associated with the combination of renovation and addition. It takes the current Frankenschool and doubles down on the concept.

With that we have two real choices – Option B and Option E. Let's start with maximizing benefits. Option B benefits those who aren't interested in long term planning, as over the course of a generation it is the most expensive option. It meets the fewest educational needs, so it doesn't benefit the growing number of children in our town (because yes, demographics don't lie.)

Option E benefits anyone with a time horizon in our community longer than 10 years. It is less expensive over the long term. It benefits the students and teachers in our district – and let's not forget the school department is the town's largest employer. It provides the community with much-needed physical resources that it lacks today. And it benefits all those generations who come after us with a sustainable fiscal future.

Let's look at realistic support, and opposition. We know that a solid percentage of the town simply votes against the schools every year and are unlikely to support any school project. That group is in the range of 20-25% of typical voters. We also know that 38% of the town supported a rip the band-aid off approach last year. They are unlikely to support a kick-the-can approach of Option B. Going in, there is almost certainly a 55-60% opposition to having Option B on the ballot; that is an insurmountable number.

Option E may not yet have majority support, but it also doesn't have majority opposition. The

town council at any time could use its fiscal tools to reduce the tax impact to the 10% range; the fact that they are not doing so signals that the opposition to Option E is not just about tax impacts but includes other rationales. That said, the increased support for meeting the town's educational needs shows solid signs of growth over the last year.

With all this, there is only one scenario that both maximizes the benefits to the town and has the strongest chance of passing – Option E. Anything else is fiscally reckless, educationally doesn't meet the community needs, and stands to go down in almost certain defeat.

This doesn't mean E stands for Easy. It doesn't. The town council needs to take a serious look at items like your co-chair, Penny Jordan, has supplied for consideration for enhanced taxpayer assistance. The town needs to exercise its fiscal policy to adapt to the 21st century. These are things the SBAC isn't empowered to do, and even with a 45 minute meeting with the town's financial advisor would never have the ability to make meaningful inroads.

To go beyond just the numbers, I think you're finding many more people who are moving to understand how the needs of the town have been deferred for too long. The ongoing debacle over the revaluation is an example of this type of wakeup call. The information about how Cape has among the lowest tax rates in the area are better understood. Even those who only plan to live here 5-10 years are waking up to the fact that their property values are supported by strong public education; their children and sometimes grandchildren have or will benefit; and there is a desire to make the world a better place than they found it.

Some people will continue to wake up each morning and think "how can I make my personal life better at the expense of others?" Those aren't who you should be trying to reach. You should be reaching those who wake up and say "how can I make this world a better place for ALL of us."

Option E stands for Everyone. Come Thursday, choose to support Everyone.

With appreciation,
Kevin Justh

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