

Concord School District Board of Education
Board Work Session
September 14, 2016

Board members present: Rusty Cofrin, Clint Cogswell, *President*, Tom Croteau, Barb Higgins, Alana Kimball, Jennifer Patterson, Maureen Redmond-Scura, Jim Richards

Absent: Nathan Fennessy

Administration: *Superintendent* Terri L. Forsten, *Business Administrator* Jack Dunn, *Director of Facilities and Planning* Matt Cashman

Board President Clint Cogswell called the meeting to order at 5:33 p.m., noting that the Board Work Session was convened to discuss the required, emergency conversion to natural gas for four District schools based on Concord Steam's announced plans to cease production in May 2017.

Mr. Cogswell noted that this was a complex issue and that the Board welcomed public input. The Board will meet on September 19 to finalize its decision about how to move forward, which will consist of an abbreviated presentation, time for questions, and a vote on the Superintendent's recommendation.

Superintendent Forsten presented several slides outlining the history of the issue from May 2016 to present. A conversion study was completed by Rist-Frost Shumway Engineering on August 22, which included the project description, economic analysis, and a suggested project schedule. She noted that it is critical for the Board to move quickly with a conversion plan to avoid discontinuation of heating services for the 2017 fall heating season. Business Administrator Jack Dunn and Attorney John Teague have attended meetings of the Public Utilities Commission on four occasions in August and September to discuss the urgency of this issue. Superintendent Forsten reviewed highlights of the Capital Facilities and Finance Committees meeting, and noted that Abbot-Downing School, Christa McAuliffe School, Rundlett Middle School, and Concord High School are impacted by this transition, with CHS being the largest facility by far. Several alternate plans for CHS impact the cost range. She reviewed the aggressive project schedule, which will take place between September 2016 and October 2017. She clarified some of the most immediate steps based on questions she has received from several Board members, including ordering long-lead-time equipment, installation of gas lines at CHS, and putting schematics in place. Approximately 75% of this project will be completed by subcontractors via competitive bids overseen by Matt Cashman and a Construction Manager. Superintendent Forsten presented some advice from a constructional professional noting the urgency of this project in order to ensure heat remains in the impacted schools during the transition away from Concord Steam.

Superintendent Forsten reviewed a number of steps needed to contain the unexpected cost of this project, including working to avoid the requirement of a temporary hot water source, relocation of underground utilities, and bid timing.

Tom Croteau noted that some of the urgency of this issue is that the district will be in competition with many other buildings/organizations in our region in need of similar resources around the same time.

Maureen Redmond-Scura noted the need to handle underground utility matters before the ground freezes.

Clint Cogswell asked about the bonding of this project, and if it would be possible to have some schedules before the vote on September 19. Mr. Dunn clarified that the vote will be whether or not to go forward with the project as a whole and that some numbers will be presented at the September 19 meeting.

Jim Richards pointed out that the district will need to make a decision very quickly on “the \$8-million-dollar project” in order to keep boilers and heating in the schools. He also pointed out that going to bid for so many subcontractors will take a great deal of time and that the district will likely need to use rental boilers at a high cost. He asked Matt Cashman for clarification about the need for design at CHS. Mr. Cashman clarified that the plan is to have schematic design complete by mid-November.

Jennifer Patterson asked for clarification about the need for a construction manager (CM), particularly for the CHS project. Mr. Cashman explained that a CM’s expertise and input during the early stages of a project like this will result in a cohesive project plan and team, which will then allow the district to identify issues as early as possible.

Mr. Croteau asked why the district is working with RFS and Harvey Construction. Mr. Cashman referred back to 2009 when the district conducted an extensive search for architects for the new elementary schools, which led to a small list of firms; RFS was on the HFMMH team and the district was able to see the horsepower they have as a company. He noted that the district had a chance to work with them even before a shovel was in the ground, which built a great deal of confidence in their abilities. Harvey Construction was brought in once the district received construction bids; the district then did extensive research before choosing to work with them. Mr. Croteau noted that this experience has saved the district a great deal of time in an emergency situation like this one.

Mr. Richards asked if the administration is confident these groups can complete the project on time and in the price range quoted. Mr. Cashman responded that the administration and construction firms will do everything possible to ensure timelines and budgets are maintained, with a goal of “ahead of schedule and under budget.”

Ms. Redmond-Scura pointed out that in a “normal” situation, 100% of this project would be put out to bid, but given its unusual and emergent nature, the fact that the district will bid as much of the project as it is, is impressive in terms of cost savings and timing.

Mr. Richards asked if there are emergency funds that can be obtained from the state to help finance the project. Mr. Dunn answered that the NH DOE has said there is some money, but several other school districts are in the pipeline with emergency facility

needs. He also noted that the state is negotiating with the PUC to bring in temporary boilers to bridge the gap with affected customers. The administration is waiting for a determination from the State Fire Marshal for emergency designation.

Alana Kimball noted that the price of steam was going to jump anyway, so this could end up being a savings in the long run.

Mr. Dunn added that if the sale to Liberty Utilities does not happen, the price of steam would rise significantly, with volatile monthly changes.

Ms. Patterson asked about the wording of the motion on September 19. She noted that the motion will encompass all the information discussed at this meeting and should clearly explain the immediacy of the situation and the need to move forward with this project.

Mr. Cashman explained that the district will explore various avenues with the schools to ensure there is no lapse in hot water and to complete whatever work can be done as early as possible. Mr. Dunn noted that Liberty Utilities likely does not have the capacity to provide heat this winter, just hot water.

Mr. Cogswell noted that when the decision was made five years ago to go with steam in two of the new elementary schools, it was the prudent choice at the time, as Concord Steam had been planning an expansion at that time. There were also tax incentives and a community effort for Concord Steam to expand.

Mr. Croteau asked if consideration had been given for potential staff/student disruption at the schools during the project. Mr. Cashman clarified that most of the work that needs to be done will take place in the mechanical rooms, away from teaching spaces. Considerations will need to be given for parking, etc. with an influx of construction workers, but as the work is concentrated over the summer and in mechanical areas, there should not be significant disruption.

Mr. Richards noted that because this is such a complex undertaking, an attempt to put out a 2-week bid rather than 8-week bid, in an effort to maintain the usual bid schedule, could be perceived as frivolous or provoke an irresponsible offer.

Mr. Cogswell thanked the administrative committee for its dedication and sense of urgency with this project. Mr. Richards noted that the September 19 meeting will be open to the public and will include time for questions both from the Board and the public.

Superintendent Forsten noted that the goal of the September 19 vote would be to authorize purchasing services outside of the normal bidding procedure as this is an emergency, and to authorize the administration to continue working to begin all pre-construction activities, cost saving measures and processes involved to maintain the proposed project schedule.

The meeting adjourned at 6:24 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Tom Croteau, *Secretary*