

These minutes were approved by the Torrington Board of Education on September 21, 2020.



## Torrington Public Schools

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### **Torrington Board of Education Public Forum Tuesday, September 1, 2020, 6:00 P.M. Torrington High School**

#### **Minutes**

1. Call to order: 6:09 P.M.
2. Roll Call: Ms. Cappabianca, Mr. Kissko, Mr. Corey, Mr. Maniccia, Ms. Todor, Ms. Richardson, Mr. Eucalitto, Mr. Lubomski, Ms. Ferguson, Mr. Arum, Ms. Herold, Mr. Longobucco, Ms. Ledversis and the Kaestle Boos Associates.
3. Ms. Cappabianca reviewed the 2 year process including community and staff collaboration into how the building committee was formed, which resulted in the Torrington Middle School/Torrington High School construction project. She also presented the architectural input and evaluations completed by Kaestle Boos Associates.
4. Kaestle Boos discussed their involvement, findings and priorities which resulted from this 2 year process. At the end of their feasibility study, they determined a new building is the most fiscally responsible solution. They shared a visual of the proposed plan. For any State Construction Grant Project, the State asks districts to look at an 8 year projected enrollment. The State allows the district to use the highest projected enrollment. The State then decides what the reimbursable size is. They calculate the possible square footage for the new building. If this passes referendum, then there will be at least a year of architectural design planning. The high school and middle school would have separate café areas and gyms. The high school, middle school and central office have their own designated entries. The middle school will have 3 levels, and high school will have 4 levels. The district filed our grant with the State in June 2020. November 3<sup>rd</sup> is the referendum. If the referendum passes, the district determines an architect and solicits a project manager in December 2020, selects a construction manager in January 2021, construction would occur from 2021 to December 2024. Kaestle Boos completed an evaluative walk through and consultants and engineers assessed the conditions of the current Torrington High School. They reviewed the list of recommendations for repairing the current high school. To solely focus on the extensive repairs was not fiscally responsible, because the State does not reimburse maintenance project unless its code items. Therefore, very few of the repairs needed would be reimbursable by the State.

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Construction of a new building would allow for the highest reimbursement amount from the State.

**The following questions were e-mailed to [buildingproject@torrington.org](mailto:buildingproject@torrington.org):**

- 1) How many staff will be needed to support the new building? More or the same?  
The current 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade staff would move with the students. Staffing always depends on student enrollment and the courses being offered at the time, but the majority will be covered with the current staff.
- 2) How does the new school compare with the current school for utilities? Is it more energy efficient? Will costs increase due to size?  
The new construction will provide an energy efficient, cost savings system. Energy systems built in 1960 were very different than what is available today. Specific details on amounts will be shared at a later meeting.
- 3) It's proposed the mill rate will increase 5 points and be estimated at \$250 on average per household to build a new school. But what about car taxes? If the mill rate increases then will car taxes increase too, or is that capped?  
The car taxes right now are capped. The 5 points down the road, includes all the bonding projects for the town not just the high school project.
- 4) Why are the repairs so costly? What needs to be updated? Answered in the presentation.
- 5) Please let the public know about the current bonds we are paying and when they will be repaid. If payment of other bonds is ending this would make the school more doable.  
This will be posted on the website.
- 6) Where is 6<sup>th</sup> grade going?  
It is planned that 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup> grade would be at the middle school.
- 7) How are they going to make sure to keep the middle school kids safe/away from the older high school kids?  
They would be totally separated, but share the same campus. Similar to other districts around us: Region 10, Litchfield, etc.
- 8) Are they sharing the same gym & café?  
Middle School and High School have their own designated gym.  
The cafeteria is also separated: the middle school on one side and the high school on the other side. Seating is totally separated. The food service lines are totally separated.
- 9) Are guidance and administrative offices shared for both school?  
No.
- 10) Can't they share theaters to save money and utilize one area for much needed classrooms?  
There is a properly sized theater, positioned between high school and middle school.
- 11) Why can't soccer field be in one area (not have two) and for baseball why two fields and a softball field, why can't they share one field (or keep one baseball and one softball field?) How could you have dirt in a soccer field?  
The plans include a full size high school soccer field, because we have JV and Varsity boys and girls playing. Then, we have the middle school on the upper field. The scheduling would not work with one soccer field. Softball and baseball need very different fields, so they can't share. This is done very frequently in other districts.
- 12) What are the plans for the athletic field during the construction period?

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Alternatives will be established for use of community fields during construction. Mr. Longobucco and Mr. Arum have already talked to the city about sharing some fields.

13) What happens if we do not meet the projected 1,500 student enrollment projection in the next 8 years?

The State will audit the project and look at enrollment. They may ask for some funding back if you do not meet the enrollment. However, we have never had an issue in the past. Ms. Cappabianca was confident with the numbers the State has established for this project.

14) After relocating the Central Offices to new building, what happens to Migeon Ave.?

The building would be turned back over to the city.

15) Is there no option to delay or do nothing?

The needs of this facility have to be addressed as soon as possible. Action needs to take place to rectify these situations.

16) I am under the impression that there have been multiple renovations in the years? How have we been able to do this without a tax increase?

No projects are completed without a tax increase unless there is funds in the capital reserve fund. Other projects have been done through the capital as needed. One project was an ADA project which the State reimbursed at about 70%. The Board of Education strives to be fiscally responsible. The majority of the projects needing to be completed are not reimbursable.

17) What do we pay for at East School?

The tenant that is at East school pays for all of the utilities. The district is not paying anything to run that building. In addition, we are receiving discounted tuition for our students to attend programs at that site.

18) The average annual tax increase for the Torrington family?

Average Annual Cost of the Proposed Project

Market Value	\$100,000	\$125,000	\$150,000	\$175,000	\$200,000
Assessed Value	\$70,000	\$87,500	\$105,000	\$122,500	\$140,000
New THS	\$143.00	\$178.70	\$214.50	\$250.20	\$285.90

19) Is there a positive correlation between building a new high school and home values?

Mr. Longobucco responded: Construction of schools revitalizes the community. Some statistics show for every \$1 spent on education, \$25 is returned to the home value.

20) Why no pool?

Through the process of interviewing the staff members and students, KBA developed space needs for instruction and programs that meet the State target for reimbursement, so the building was not over the reimbursable size. It was a challenge to provide all of the spaces to get to the target size, but they were able to do that without a pool included. The pool would not receive any reimbursement from the State. There were space challenges to fitting a pool in that space. Ms. Cappabianca stated a pool would not be profitable as people think it would be, because of the extra costs to maintain it.

21) What about the Covid related issues and security?

For security, we are required to look at the School Safety Infrastructure Council requirements and recommendations. Right now, with the existing building, classrooms are very limited regarding distancing of students. If we were in the new building, there

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would be more flexibility to distance students. The new school would have better HVAC system for ventilation, heating and cooling.

22) Should this fail at referendum what will be the next step?

The Board will have to go back and meet with the Board of Finance about addressing capital improvements.

23) In the \$112M scenario to repair the building, if that is spread out over a larger period of time, would it be reasonable to expect that the figure would be greater?

The cost would accrue over time and there would be an escalation in costs.

24) Crime prevention through environmental designs?

Yes. This is included in the design planning.

25) If the project is approved, does the chosen architect choose the plan that this firm came up with?

No, they would just keep with the budget for this phase of the project, but another architectural firm could be chosen. It goes out to bid.

26) Where is the budget coming from to fulfill the needs of the new school?

Already answered.

27) Is there a contingency built in?

Since this is a conceptual design estimate, it is important to plan for the unknown. The construction manager will manage the budget. The district wouldn't enter into any contract until it could be certain that the State has approved the money for reimbursement.

There is a website where you contact us with additional questions and it has all the information that Kaestle Boos has given us. There is a virtual tour.

THSbuildingproject.org. and you can e-mail any questions to [buildingproject@torrington.org](mailto:buildingproject@torrington.org)

5. Adjournment: Mr. Kissko made a motion to adjourn, second by Mr. Eucalitto. All in favor. Meeting adjourned at 7:32 P.M.