Tuesday, March 3, 2009

Newport School Committee
c/o Chairperson Jo Eva Gaines
437 Broadway
Newport, Rhode Island  023840-1767

Subject:   Elementary School Construction Recommendation

Enclosure: Senator Claiborne D. Pell Elementary School Construction Recommendation Presentation

Dear Mrs. Gaines:

The Ad Hoc School Building Committee is pleased to provide you with our recommendation concerning the construction of the Senator Claiborne D. Pell elementary school facility in the City of Newport.

The twenty-seven (27) member Ad Hoc School Building Committee conducted a formal vote on the recommended grade configuration option on Tuesday, February 24, 2009. This vote resulted in twenty (20) members favoring the PK-4 school construction, two (2) members favoring a PK-2 option, two (2) members undecided, two (2) members abstaining and one (1) member absent.

Our decision making process considered the ability to improve educational achievement, the cost effectiveness of the project and the ability to support future Aquidneck Island school district realignment as the primary discriminating factors for this project. This recommendation, if implemented, will provide the City of Newport the opportunity to significantly improve student academic achievement during the early elementary school years.

The committee discussed various school configurations and site options during our meetings; however our vote did not include the specification of school location. The committee is aware that the only site large enough to accommodate the PK-4 Senator Claiborne D. Pell Elementary School facility is the Dexter Street site.
In addition to the majority recommendation of the PK-4 elementary school configuration, the committee noted several additional concerns regarding this project that must be addressed during the next stage of the planning process, the most important of which include:

- The need to confirm financial assumptions including construction costs, allocation of revenue from sale of buildings, allocation of school department operating savings to the bond payment and the level of state school construction aid support.

- A process should be established to solicit additional public input regarding the options reviewed and the development of site and building specific details during the next phase of project planning.

- The degree of voter support for this education project given the current economic conditions and other City of Newport capital improvement projects remains uncertain.

- Plans are required to address site specific concerns including the ability to reroute Dexter Street to separate through traffic from parking, bus drop off and outdoor activity areas; develop a student housing plan for the construction period in the event that demolition of Sullivan School is required prior to construction; and determine the impact on busing for this site location.

The forthcoming recommendation report provides background information regarding the committee’s membership, goals, process, school configuration options, affordability considerations and additional concerns and recommendations developed by our group through our deliberative process.

Sincerely,

Patrick K. Kelley, Chairman
Ad Hoc School Building Committee

PK:mgr