

Community Conversation Executive Summary

On January 30, the district hosted a community conversation that brought together more than 200 people, including parents, district residents, students and teachers. Following a brief presentation by Superintendent Corr, participants engaged in small group discussions led by Capital Region BOCES communications specialists. District administrators and Board of Education members spent time listening to the conversations that took place in classrooms to gain insight into participants' concerns regarding the capital project.

The following questions were discussed by small groups over a 90-minute period:

- What is your understanding of why moving the sixth grade to the junior high school was the district's preferred option for addressing the growth in enrollment?
- What is your understanding of the rationale for modernizing the educational program, specifically in terms of expanding STEM learning opportunities?
 - Do you think the community understands the connection between the creation of space/renovation of its school buildings and the district's ability to deliver these programs/opportunities to students?
- How big a factor do you think the cost of the project was for those who did not support the December proposal?
 - What components of the project do you value most?
- Do you think the community understands that, in order to resume multiple polling locations, district voters must approve a referendum to establish personal voter registration for school elections?
 - Do you think the community would support a referendum to establish personal voter registration for school elections?

The full report provides full facilitator notes from each of the 16 break-out groups. Rooms are labeled 1-16 to provide anonymity to individual attendees. Below is a summary of some of the key themes that consistently resulted from the discussions:

6th grade:

- Moving the sixth grade to the junior high school is a cost effective way to deal with the enrollment issue facing the district
- There is still some concern about making sure the 6-8 model is not a "one size fits all" for students
- Moving the sixth grade was not a contentious point in the capital project vote
- Concerns were expressed about how the sixth grade students would be integrated into the junior high

Cost:

- \$196.4 million was too big of a scope and cost for the taxpayer; it needs to be reduced
- People would like to see an itemized list of project costs (what are we getting for our money?)

- What is the projected return on investment for individual pieces of the project?
- Individual elements of the project may not have been understood and need better explanation moving forward
- District needs to better communicate what components of the project are essential to addressing immediate needs versus long-term needs

Project components valued most by participants:

- Moving the sixth grade to the junior high school, creating a fifth hall
- Enhancing security at front entrances of all buildings
- New classrooms at the elementary level to accommodate enrollment increases

Communication:

- Communication about the project reached parents better than district residents as a whole
- Better inclusion for all residents in the process is necessary
- The community didn't understand the immediate problems facing the district

STEM:

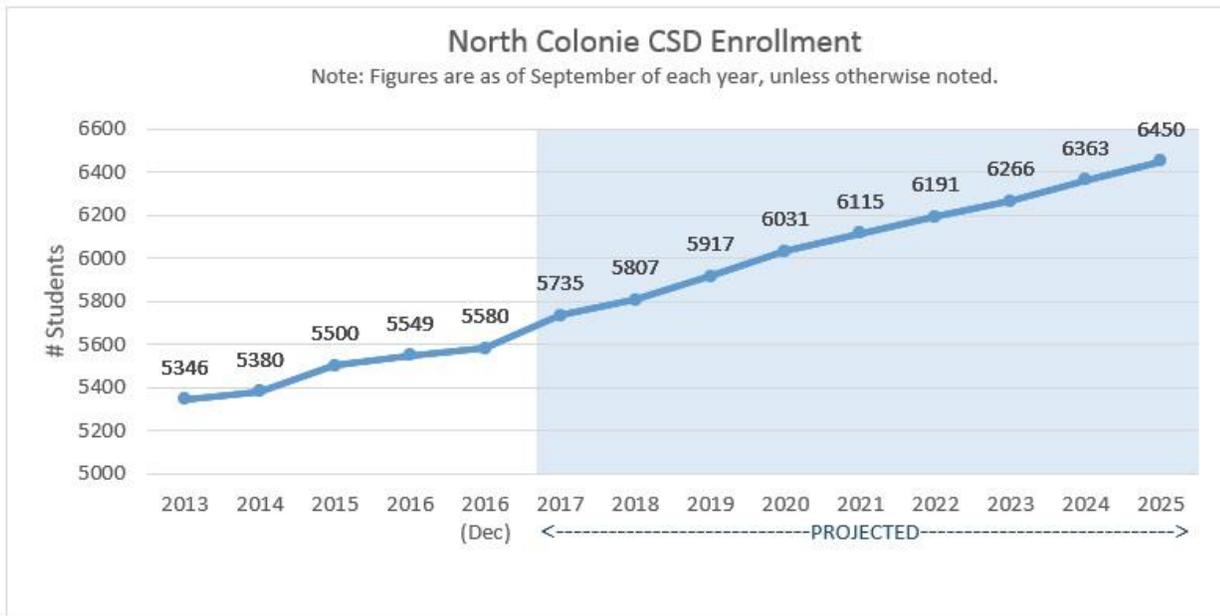
- Participants value STEM education in North Colonie schools, but lack an understanding of the district's vision for STEM and how it will impact students
- Does the district's vision address the middle skills gap?
- Why can't this type of education be provided in current spaces in school buildings?

Personal Registration:

- Mixed opinions about whether the district should keep the single polling place for future votes, or hold a referendum to reinstate multiple polling sites
- Some participants voiced no issue with Goodrich as the single polling place
- Some had no issue with a single polling place, but would like other school buildings to be considered as a location
- Some preferred having the option to vote in multiple polling places
- * Overall consensus: a referendum regarding this decision should be tabled until at least May or even after the budget vote; holding another referendum prior to May would be confusing to the general public



Discussion Topic 1: Enrollment



District considerations for moving the sixth grade to the junior high school

- Aligns North Colonie with the middle school concept utilized by all 11 other Suburban Council school districts
- Minimal re-districting and maintains neighborhood school concept
- Generates additional classrooms to accommodate growth in enrollment and reduces existing high class sizes at both the elementary and middle school level
- Exposes sixth grade students to a range of classroom and extracurricular opportunities not available at the elementary level

District officials considered other options to address the enrollment increase, but determined they would not be effective for the following reasons:

1. Re-opening Maplewood

- Estimated to cost \$9.6 million, yielding 7 classrooms
- Would require re-districting students back into a Maplewood zone

2. Classroom additions to ALL elementary buildings:

- Latham Ridge: excavation costs and difficult build
- Loudonville: land-locked and difficult build
- Southgate and Blue Creek Elementary Schools already require additions to accommodate district special education programs housed in those buildings
- Forts Ferry and Boght Hills Elementary Schools were the only viable options for classroom additions, but they would not yield enough classroom space
- Would require re-districting to equalize class sizes across the district

3. Building a new elementary school:

- Inequity among the seven elementary schools
- Re-districting
- Project would cost \$30 million at a less aidable ratio

4. Re-opening Goodrich

- Would cost \$8-10 million to bring it up to code
- Yields minimal space
- Would require re-districting
- Would require finding another facility for administrative offices

Discussion Question

What is your understanding of why moving the sixth grade to the junior high school was the district's preferred option for addressing the growth in enrollment?

Discussion Topic 2: STEM Opportunities

Recent research has recommended that every effort should be made to start STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) education as soon as children enter elementary school. Studies have identified the elementary years as the period when students form their interests in STEM identities and careers.

Early exposure may motivate students to enroll in more advanced science, math, and computer courses when they are available in middle and high school.

At the elementary level, the district offers a coding club that is routinely at capacity at multiple elementary schools.

The original capital project proposal included plans to create STEM labs at the elementary schools that would:

- Provide opportunities for engineering, coding and robotics learning
- Provide more opportunities for hands-on learning
- Allow students to learn collaboratively with a focus on challenging science, technology and mathematics projects

The original proposal also called for labs and instruction spaces at the middle and high school that would:

- Provide more opportunities for pathways at the high school level, including skilled trades, engineering, robotics, and computing. These pathways will give high school students college credit and opportunities for certifications prior to leaving high school.
- Provide a student-centric instructional setting where students engage in questioning, collaborative problem solving, and hands on activities
- Allow students to apply the rigor of science, technology, engineering and mathematics to address real life issues

Discussion Question

What is your understanding of the rationale for modernizing the educational program, specifically in terms of expanding STEM learning opportunities?

- **Do you think the community understands the connection between the creation of space/renovation of its school buildings and the district's ability to deliver these programs/opportunities to students?**

Discussion Topic 3: Project Cost

- Out of all Suburban Council school districts, North Colonie's tax rate on true value currently ranks second lowest out of the 12 schools in the Suburban Council.

Total projected cost of December 2016 referendum: \$196.4 million

Cost Breakdown:

- Middle School: \$63.5 million
 - Shaker High School: \$76.2 million
 - Elementary Schools: \$42.8 million
 - Site Work: \$12.4 million
 - Transportation: \$1.5 million
- Total: \$196.4 million**

Major project components included:

- Moving the 6th grade to new Shaker Middle School, creating a fifth hall
- Enhanced security measures at the front entrances of every building
- Expanded media center with attached idea labs at all elementary schools
- New classrooms at Boght Hills to allow for an additional class section for each grade level, reducing class sizes districtwide
- Expansion of Shaker High School auditorium
- Expanded parking and construction of dedicated bus and parent drop-off loops at Shaker Middle and High Schools
- Addition of synthetic surfaces for Walker Field and Lower Maloy Field for multipurpose use

Discussion Questions

How big a factor do you think the cost of the project was for those who did not support the December proposal?

- **What components of the project do you value most?**

Discussion Topic 4: Personal Registration

Up until the May 2016 annual budget vote, North Colonie residents had the option of voting at eight different polling locations.

In October 2016, the district was advised by legal counsel that, per education law, it was improper to have multiple polling locations without personal registration in place.

Therefore, since the district does not currently use personal registration, it held its December 2016 capital project vote at the Goodrich Building. The district selected Goodrich as its polling location, as opposed to other building options for the following reasons:

- Parking is more plentiful and closer to the building than any other building
- Handicap accessibility
- More available space and privacy for registration, voting booths, etc.
- No interruption to the instructional day for students
- Better security for students by keeping voters out of other buildings

In order to adopt a personal registration system, a separate referendum will have to be held asking voters if they would like to adopt a personal registration system. This process would include arranging a separate vote held at one location in March.

If the vote approves a personal registration system, the district would need to:

- Contract with an outside vendor to establish registration for individual zones
- Assign and notify district residents of a specific voting zone prior to the next vote

Discussion Question

Do you think the community understands that, in order to resume multiple polling locations, district voters must approve a referendum to establish personal voter registration for school elections?

- **Do you think the community would support a referendum to establish personal voter registration for school elections?**

Group Discussion Notes – Room 1

DISCUSSION TOPIC 1: ENROLLMENT

- Elementary schools are already feeling the enrollment squeeze; space has already been lost to create more classrooms (e.g., tech lab). It wasn't explained well that the enrollment increase is already a problem.
- One person in the room disputed the accuracy of enrollment projections going out so many years.
- A few participants said they felt that building a new elementary school should be explored further.
 - *Why not build a new school in the area of new development? Can you tax those homeowners more to pay for the cost of the school?*
- Most people in the group were either highly supportive or not opposed to moving to a MS (6-8) model.
 - Our 6th-graders are ready to move to a middle school. Teachers are good and will be ready to manage the transition. Several commented on the hall system working well
 - Better than redistricting, which would be very disruptive to kids and families. (Quite a few people agreed on this front.)
 - One person said moving 6th-graders to a middle school was the only area where he had concerns, but he still voted yes.
- Another noted "We're one of the top 4 districts in the region with among the lowest tax rates. Of course more people want to move here."
- Some felt the enrollment problem wasn't explained very well.
 - The district needs to do a better job explaining things like "idea labs," "innovation spaces" and "maker spaces." Why do we need them? How do they impact space needs?
 - One teacher in our room explained this to the group from an instructional standpoint in very simple but compelling terms.
 - Videos might have helped to show or explain some of these concepts better.
 - *What is the cost of hiring additional teachers, buying more buses, etc. to deal with enrollment increase?*

DISCUSSION TOPIC 2: STEM OPPORTUNITIES

- A few people had questions about STEM in general: *What is it? What does it look like (compared to what we have now)? Why do we need it at the elementary school?*
 - It's a mistake to assume all residents know what STEM is or why it's important. One resident said older people in his neighborhood had "no idea" what this was.
 - Suggestion to invite seniors and residents without kids currently attending NC schools to visit the schools and learn more. Show them what STEM is and why it matters.
 - Capital Area Technology and Inquiry in Education could be a resource.
- The general consensus in the discussion group was that STEM is important. Over the course of the discussion, consensus grew the district should consider more of a STEAM focus by including the arts. This would be more inclusive and address some concerns about too much focus on technology at the expense of the softer skills/people skills/the arts in general.

- One person noted the increasing numbers of students in poverty or with special needs. “We need to offer them options too, and not overwhelm them with math and science they can’t do.” Another asked about the needs of kids in special education or Alt Ed:
 - *What are we doing to better serve the needs of special ed/alt. ed. kids in this project?*
- Another said she worries about the introverts in group learning projects.
- The floor plans didn’t make clear what was extra space and what was STEM. (Again, confusion about “maker space,” “collaboration space,” etc.)
- Several people raised the issue of “needs vs. wants.”
 - “Do I support more STEM? Sure, but not if it’s \$90 million in this project.”
- A few noted they felt NC already does a great job with STEM but needs to stay current.
 - *Is the need to spend more on STEM tied to the enrollment increase or the desire to build maker spaces/innovation centers/idea labs?*
- Other questions:
 - *Can we accommodate more school-community partnerships in our planning going forward?* (Example given was evening computer classes for senior citizens.)
 - *Have we looked at more partnerships with area businesses in New York’s Tech Valley?*

DISCUSSION TOPIC 3: PROJECT COST

- Communication was too inwardly focused (i.e., staff and parents). Not enough flow of information to the wider community (i.e., seniors and non-parents) from the very beginning of the process. This led to “information overload” and “sticker shock” in December. “Taxpayers want consistent, transparent information.”
 - Staff members in the group said they felt well-informed and noted there were many presentations to parents/PTO meetings.
 - One staff member also noted there were floor plans and information about the project on display in each school – but others noted if you weren’t a parent or staff member and didn’t have a reason to be in the school you wouldn’t see these or generally feel informed.
 - One non-parent in the group said she was invited to be part of the early planning process and felt well informed.
- The deadline to secure the 69% incentive aid was a significant topic of conversation:
 - “The project was fast-tracked around trying to get incentive aid.” “It felt like the district was twisting my arm to vote yes because of the deadline on incentive aid.”
 - *Why did the district wait so long after the Maplewood annexation to begin planning a capital project?*
 - Others said it would be a shame/travesty to miss out on the incentive aid.
 - *Is it already too late to get the incentive aid? Can the district promise it if they go out with another vote in May?*
- Several people noted they wanted a more detailed analysis of the cost of different options within the project.

- *Who makes the decision to decide what is the best option moving forward?*
- Turf fields and auditorium:
 - One person said the turf fields were a point of contention among many seniors who were noting the district didn't ask for just one field, but two. The auditorium was also a point of contention. "People were saying it was too extravagant."
 - Another person noted the district justified the rationale behind the two fields, but the community either didn't hear it or didn't buy it.
- Discussion around the need for more financial clarity:
 - Some complained the cost of various components of the project weren't clearly defined.
 - It was hard to compute what the project would cost individual taxpayers. A basic chart was needed to calculate the estimated tax impact.
 - *Can the district offer an online tax calculator to plug in their home's assessment, etc. and predict tax impact over # number of years?*
 - Suggestion to provide detail but still boil the tax impact down: e.g., \$21 dollars a month for X number of years for the average homeowner.
 - Website should have had more information about the project, especially costs.
 - *Is the tax base increasing?*
- A few said the bond publication was too technical with too much jargon, especially for seniors.
 - Some weren't even sure they received a newsletter from the district or, if they did, they overlooked it.
- Some noted the organized and anonymous opposition effort fueled mistrust and promoted "alternative facts."
- From the list provided, each member was asked to circle the three components they valued most. The total vote count for this group came out as follows:
 - Moving 6th-grade to MS, creating a 5th hall – 11 votes
 - Enhancing security at front entrances – 9 votes
 - Expanding media centers with idea labs at all elem. schools – 1 vote
 - New classrooms at Boght Hills – 10 votes
 - Expansion of HS auditorium – 0 votes
 - Expanded parking and construction of bus/drop off loops – 3 votes
 - Synthetic surfaces for two fields – 1 vote

DISCUSSION TOPIC 4: PERSONAL VOTER REGISTRATION

- General discussion that the community as a whole was poorly educated on the reason and timing behind switching to one voting location. Better communication is needed to all voters.
- One person noted "the late notice and only one voting location was the reason I voted no."
- Series of questions:
 - *Is there even time to conduct the personal registration before the next vote?*
 - *Will that just cause more challenges/hard feelings if it's a rushed process?*
 - *When did the school attorney decide we've been doing it wrong for so long?*

- *Will the law firm be held accountable for not catching the error before this?*
 - *Could we move the single vote location to the high school? Other locations?*
- The group consensus was that IF the district is planning to put a revised capital project on the May ballot, it would be better to announce ASAP that the district will add a proposition (in May) on personal voter registration -- but stick with one location for the May vote. If approved, that gives the district until the following May to implement.
 - Avoids concerns people voiced that the district would be rushing another vote and confusing people further when they go to vote in May. Concerns about not enough time to do well and communicate it well.

Group Discussion Notes – Room 2

DISCUSSION TOPIC 1: ENROLLMENT

Consensus: It made sense to us.

I learned a lot because I served on the district planning committee and on the town planning board. When the town considers a new development, I ask the planning board if the school can handle it.

The 6-8 configuration was the way it was when I attended school. It worked before; do it again.

We are one of the few districts in the region with 6th grade not in the junior high. Our elementary schools lack quiet space (space for special education students to withdraw).

I didn't know a lot at the start. The more I saw, the more I supported the plan. We have rundown facilities. I originally like the K-6. As I dug into the alignment, I came to like moving 6th to the junior high. K-6 is too broad a range and 6th graders don't want to be there.

Building a new school would not be equitable. Some kids would have state of the art and others wouldn't.

I project enrollment. We have unanticipated growth in the north, with 80 percent of that growth in elementary schools. Given the options, the only solution is to move 6th to the junior high.

I live in Loudonville and see older families with no children moving out and young families moving in. Where is the district going to put these kids? I participated in committees and felt better with changing the alignment. The committees were parent- and community-driven. They saw wisdom in integrating 6th grade into the hall system.

I understood the plan because I serve on two PTAs and we had several presentations made to us. I attended this middle school with a 6-8 model.

I read the material and was aware of the rationale. I support the move.

The plan was developmentally appropriate. It opened up space at the elementary schools. The whole thing made sense.

I'm new to the district. I came from a 6-8 model in Albany City Schools. 6th graders are ready to go. It makes sense.

DISCUSSION TOPIC 2: STEM OPPORTUNITIES

Consensus: We get the need, but the elderly do not.

I understand because I'm a district employee. My 88-year-old mother probably doesn't understand. She has a senior perspective.

Younger generations understand, but even I struggle. Google Classrooms blow my mind. Understand bringing up our standards. We need to focus on this in the classroom.

My husband and I are engineers; we know why. My 84-year-old mom doesn't get it. There is a generational understanding of why this is important. This needs a higher level of communication to demonstrate the need for technology.

While voting I witnessed a conversation between building project opponents. People over a certain age don't get it. Technology is the language of younger people today. We have to come to grips with that and incorporate it into the capital project.

If you're not keeping up with the times, you're behind. If the first time a student sees technology is college, it's too late. Our students are not getting the educational opportunities they need to be successful.

I look at what the kids have and say, "If only I had their opportunities." But then I look around at other schools and realize how far behind we are. Older people don't understand. This is about kids and their needs.

Mom of child with dyslexia. I'm angry that the district doesn't provide for my daughter. Had to send her to a private school. Technology doesn't meet my child's needs. Twenty percent of students have dyslexia. I talked to teachers, principals and the superintendent. No one cares. I am angry and I voted no.

I have a six-year-old special education child. I am pleased with the resources; I am thrilled to pieces. The older generation isn't understanding the importance of technology. My son uses and needs technology to learn. We were told he would never do math or read and now he does. Having technology resources available represents commitment.

We need this. This is the way the world is moving. It is imperative that students have these resources. We have a generation gap. The cost outweighs the need.

As a teacher, I watched the evolution of technology over the last 25 years. I see the district working hard to provide us with technology. People need to know it's a tool. It can't be a crutch. We need to meet the students' needs. We need to make education relevant—kids need to function in the real world. I'm not unhappy, we have an orchestra room sized for 17 kids and we now have 117. But we make do. I am thankful we have strong parent support. As a music teacher, I want to include the arts as well, not just STEM. I see our kids leave each day excited and free that they have their phones back. In school, they are in a technology desert.

DISCUSSION TOPIC 3: PROJECT COST

Consensus: It was the money and the tax increase. Top three components were middle school addition, enhanced security, and parking and traffic changes. Least important (but not worth discarding) were the turf fields.

Cost is the number one reason the capital project was defeated. They also believe that kids won't benefit.

Seniors on fixed income think the burden is falling on them. They didn't understand the athletic fields. They think they are frivolous.

I support the plan, but my husband does not. He said, "We don't know how many years the project will be bonded or the total cost to individual taxpayers over time. It's too much money. You're asking too much."

At PTA, the conversations were that it was too much at one time. We would be better off with constant votes for little things (like Shenendehowa?). It would be better broken down.

The mailing was way too dense. It was too much, too overwhelming. Communications need to be broken down.

I attended coffee with the superintendent. It turned into a heated discussion. People there never read the mailing because lots of their questions were answered in the mailing. The project and the finances need to be put in perspective. There is a five-year lag before taxpayers see the increases and they will happen in steps (This is what he said; I didn't question him) We're soon going to retire debt to help offset the increase. The district has been responsible; we never meet our tax cap.

This is a once-in-30-year project. We need to do it right. We need to think about the future. My kids will graduate and not benefit. This is about the next generation.

This is a big bond. We need to get it done now to take advantage of financing.

The 30 percent bonus on state aid is going to expire. Taking advantage would save the district \$50 million. We haven't done any work in 20 years.

I don't understand. We have all of this new construction. Why aren't the taxes from development covering our increases?

We need an online tax estimator like I've seen in other districts. Residents can calculate what the project will cost them personally.

We still have people who think they pay high taxes compared to other districts.

We need to do a better job explaining that North Colonie CSD is an excellent value. But that value is starting to slip because we aren't keeping up with things.

DISCUSSION TOPIC 4: PERSONAL VOTER REGISTRATION

Consensus: Yes, it was a big deal, but it's not worth a vote until May.

A lot of people complained about the polling places.

People asked, "We did it this way before, why change?"

People didn't want to deal with parking and other hassles.

It's not worth changing again.

Voter fatigue is a problem. Don't bother trying another vote.

The community doesn't understand why we changed.

There are some who believe it was designed to control the vote.

People aren't aware of the legal issues and why we chose Goodrich.

District handled voting at Goodrich well. The anticipated problems never materialized. I got in and out easily.

You send stuff home, but you can't make people read it.

With a small child, I was grateful it was in one spot. I felt it was safer. He was less familiar and less likely to run off as he might in his own school.

Goodrich is not centrally located.

The district needs to communicate that we heard your concerns and now we're moving ahead.

Don't hold a separate vote. This should be a referendum in May with the budget vote.

Group Discussion Notes – Room 3

DISCUSSION TOPIC 1: ENROLLMENT

- Concerns regarding the appropriateness of 6th graders with older students in terms of social-emotional development, influence of older kids w/freer language and more adult topics, bullying component
- Maturity level of kids today is greater, so this isn't as big a problem
- Not sure I see this as a big issue. Can happen in any school in any grade, regardless of which grades are grouped together
- Those concerns may be real, but we should balance them against new academic opportunities available for 6th graders if they are in a middle school
- Does an elementary school even meet the academic needs of a 6th grader
- Many teachers support the idea of aligning the jr. high to be a middle school like other neighboring districts
- Would be tremendous to have teachers meeting more regularly about a cohort of students
- Hall system allows creation of smaller "communities" w/in the school
- Even if separated, kids still may be impacted by cliques
- 8th grade opens up for kids if they have more opportunities in the courses they can take as 6th graders
- District didn't communicate clearly about the social and academic options for 6th graders, if there are advantages to moving them to a middle school
- If curricular advantages are there, it's district's responsibility to address any social-emotional concerns; maybe add social work supports, etc.
- District needs to explain the hall structure to those who aren't parents & already familiar with it
- If we don't go with moving 6th graders, it means widespread redistricting for all elementary kids, that's an issue
- Could be opportunities for older kids to mentor 6th graders
- It's not about class sizes or classroom space, why not hire subject specialists to focus on academics, have 2 teachers per class instead of spending the money on classrooms
- Kids stuck with the same hall/cohort for three years means stuck under same microscope; too much is decided academically for kids in 6th grade (tracking)
- Hall system works well here, shrinks kids' world a bit
- QUESTION: Are there possibilities for self-containment of 6th graders at middle school?
- QUESTION: Do students take the PISA test at North Colonie?
- QUESTION: What are the potential academic advantages for 6th graders if moved to a middle school?

DISCUSSION TOPIC 2: STEM OPPORTUNITIES

- Community lacks understanding about STEM (except maybe some parents) or how the buildings make a difference w/ability to work in teams, open spaces, hands-on opportunities. District didn't explain this well
- There is a missing piece w/these proposals – art. Why aren't we talking about STEAM? I don't even think parents really understand the benefits
- Community wasn't given an understanding of this except superficial

- Look at leading companies and the kinds of spaces they are changing to. We lack appropriate facilities in science classrooms but make do right now. Would be easier with better adapted facilities
- We should follow a learning curve of what's working, set up "labs" in local businesses and companies rather than trying to recreate what already exists elsewhere w/in NC schools. Use the resources of local businesses so kids get exposure and businesses can train future employees
- Get entrepreneurs involved and take the onus off the classroom
- We should focus STEM opportunities on kids interested, not on all kids. Great for some, but not for everyone
- Really this is an issue of infrastructure, we haven't modernized our schools for decades. You wouldn't see that in business; they wouldn't expect to attract the best employees w/ outdated facilities
- District didn't explain how these proposals would make students ready for tomorrow
- Everyone is ignoring the middle skills gap – not sure any of this would help open pathways for skilled trades, where the need really is, and not just high level entrepreneurs
- We should help students identify their best pathway, not all are college bound or high tech. What about what's suitable for so many – skilled technicians... plumbers etc.
- Don't need to build this infrastructure here within the schools when it exists already (local business partnerships, other programs)
- QUESTION: Is the district looking at partnerships, internships with local businesses and companies?
- QUESTION: Would there be an emphasis in this programming on skilled trades, because that's what business leaders are looking for?

DISCUSSION TOPIC 3: PROJECT COST

- There was an 11th-hour movement to scare residents about the tax increase so they came out in large numbers
- District and community need to understand that our money doesn't buy what it once did
- Many people don't like the pace of development in the community. Taxpayers are caught between the town and the district
- Town planners and school district need to talk, work together.
- People need to understand that it's turnover in existing homes (to families with kids) rather than new development driving enrollment increases
- We aren't listening to senior citizens who don't have money for a big increase in taxes
- Homeowners versus renters ... renters with kids don't pay taxes
- Such a big amount. Where are the quotes coming from? What is it buying? District never explained where the total came from (no breakdown or explanation of how costs add up)
- Regardless of its merit, the project was a scapegoat for things going on at the state level (bid rigging)
- It's just a lot of money, with no explanation of where it's going
- Project of this magnitude should be broken up into successive referenda or separate propositions on one ballot – essential items separate from wish list of what we'd like to do
- Grouping it into one big chunk puts onus on taxpayer to agree to "all or nothing" and if you can't support all, you're accused of refusing to support children
- \$196 million chokes a horse. Bigger than people have ever seen here. Unrealistic to dump this on voters when they aren't even used to capital projects

- Sticker shock at everything that needed to be addressed because the district never brought any of the needs up before, as they were all apparently piling up. They didn't all suddenly come at once, where were the warnings to the community that needs were emerging?
- Great that the district has been frugal, but look where it got us.
- Too many moving parts in this proposal that you can't focus well on any one part to get an understanding
- Largest funding going to high school, but for what? All of the talk was about elementary schools and middle school. No explanation, no transparency
- Don't understand the sudden rush to get the aid from the Maplewood last minute when the aid has been available for years.
- Communications from the district were not effective with the voting populations. Most people in the district are not in the "circle" paying attention. The district had info to explain but didn't do it well.
- People are hurting financially. Wages are not keeping up, so this \$ figure just doesn't work for many people.
- Nobody understands these big numbers and what they mean or how it all added up.
- There is an American value of investing in education. We haven't put money into these buildings. When is a good time? Is there ever one?
- South Colonie looks to do things that are revenue-neutral (renting space from a local church for a program... church paid to make it classroom compliant??). NC should look at options like this.
- More regular bond issues stabilize the tax rates and avoid big increases. Why haven't we done this?
- As a homeowner, I have an investment and I want to keep the value up. Can't have property values decline, and property values are always connected to the quality of the schools.
- Property values are also connected to the low taxes we pay—that's why people want to live here. We can't lose that either.
- QUESTION: If there was a time limit on the extra Maplewood aid, why did the district wait until the last minute to try to use it?
- QUESTION: What is the breakdown of revenue sources for the proposal? Why wasn't that shared?
- QUESTION: Can a project of this magnitude (scope) be broken up into several parts so residents can say yes to parts and no to other parts?
- QUESTION: How does this all add up to \$196 million? (What is the breakdown of the parts of the project?)

DISCUSSION TOPIC 4: PERSONAL VOTER REGISTRATION

- Definitely no understanding in the community that returning to multiple polling locations will require voter registration (Note: This was a unanimously held opinion.)
- Perception is greater than reality – confusion leads to skepticism and that's what happened.
- I do support this so we can return to multiple polling locations because more places to vote means a more democratic election
- I don't think the switch to a single polling location had any effect on the outcome
- Worry that requiring registration would actually be an obstacle that would reduce voter turnout
- Imagine the frustration of people who show up to vote not knowing they needed to register. They wouldn't be able to vote at all in that election. (Not solved by simply sending them to correct location). This would be worse.
- I had no issues voting at Goodrich. In and out in no time

- I never understood why we secure our buildings every day, but then when there is a vote, anyone can come in and out of our school buildings (without those same security procedures). It doesn't seem safe.
- What about the cost of holding this extra referendum? What about the cost of holding multiple polling locations?
- This shouldn't be a special vote.
- I don't see how this can all happen before a May vote.

Group Discussion Notes – Room 4

DISCUSSION TOPIC 1: ENROLLMENT

It seems like the simplest solution to move the 6th grade. Pretty typical to have a middle school and it's a natural transition. District did this in the past and it's needed now. I'm a student and it wouldn't be a big shift for me to go a different school. There are different opportunities for 6th graders if they go here, an added benefit.

I understand it's mostly a space issue and that we would use the elementary schools to bring other things to K-5. Also we have full-day kindergarten now, [which uses space].

I have 3rd grader at Loudonville and there's no space to build there. By 6th grade, kids have maturity to go to middle school. Benefits to access to facilities is huge. A lot of other districts do it successfully. Kids are more mature and savvy today with online access. I question that we heard about 500 kids moving into the district the paperwork said twice as many? Now that we are halfway through the time period, what have we realized? We have kindergarten registration data as well.

I was the last year of students here to go to middle school and we just did it. Not as concerned about kids riding buses together – they are mature enough. Switching elementary kids to totally different elementary schools would have parents up in arms. Opportunities here at junior high.

Kids are mature and 6th graders can handle themselves on the bus.

If you move them to middle school, you only have to modify one building and not add on to all the other schools. Better cost-wise.

Not an issue; we are the only district that doesn't have a middle school.

If you re-do one elementary school, people will be upset about inequity.

I am a retired district transportation person and we transported the younger kids separately from the high school kids, picking up HS first, then 6,7,8 and then younger kids; parents may want to look at that.

(Student) I went to Boght Hills and there's too many people there. Moving to middle school is a way better idea.

DISCUSSION TOPIC 2: STEM OPPORTUNITIES

Student: I'm in DDE class in 8th grade after completing 7th grade tech class, first step to engineering course. My brother is at Boght Hills and not getting enough exposure now even though he's interested in it. People understand the need to be modernized at elementary schools.

Any STEM education our kids get is a plus and a must. Honestly, I didn't know about this part being in the proposed project. Flier didn't explain this.

I didn't know either. How much does it cost for teachers for STEM, or for their training? Or do you replace them?

My sister works at Boght Hills and training is in place for teachers.

STEM is an absolute requirement for children of all ages. They share Chromebooks. Plans for STEM labs at elementary and junior high are awesome, but the project budget is just for structure and housing and not to

fund technology and backup to implement STEM. Another referendum for that? What's the cost? Would it be better to bundle the cost now and get state aid?

It's like buying a house and now you have to buy furniture.

Critical: when I and my children were in school, America was in the top three in world in math and science. Now, depending on which article you read, we're 41st in math and 28th in science. How do you go from top three to that level? I'm not convinced that more space is the answer. We did it in much smaller classrooms, kids went home after school and studied there.

I agree. The bond is strictly for expanding the space and that's what the state will reimburse for the district.

We need STEM, but do we need extra space for STEM?

If we are creating these extra STEM spaces, aren't we also making room for the additional students?

No room to build at Loudonville, but would create spaces for idea labs. Also we have a significant increase in autistic and special needs students entering our district, and I wonder are we truly meeting the needs of ALL of the students? This is not being addressed.

Parents must advocate for their kids. My daughter was enriched and my son had special needs and I was in that school building (Southgate) every day to make sure they both got what they needed. I also worked with other kids to help them understand their lessons. Make sure ALL kids get the opportunity for a STEM program. Teachers should look at it as an equality thing: the child you don't pay attention to might be your next engineer. The kid you denied today could be the Einstein of tomorrow. STEM is for all. The gifted can do it, and the ones who struggle need motivation.

Equality is important. Don't channel kids early.

Money is wasted if you spend it (only) on special groups. STEM is for every child.

Enrichment programs today are very selective and limited.

Young children are very curious and love to learn. Those with behavior issues could also benefit. An idea lab could address a wide range of needs.

If you increase STEM, would other courses be sacrificed? How do you fit into existing schedule?

Only 24 slots in the DDE (pre-engineering) program out of 500 students is not enough and is a problem. Everyone should have access to STEM.

Why limited? Space and computers at junior high and at high school compartmentalized.

Reorganize the space at the high school.

I've seen education change as I'm a parent of a 24-year-old and a 14-year-old. With STEM, Google classroom, things are becoming more project-based and collaborative. It's more cooperative.

Special ed can be another opportunity for STEM learning.

Student says other students genuinely enjoy STEM class and want to take it.

STEM will prepare students for the real world, how to work on projects. Our schools are well maintained but they are old. They were designed many years ago.

DISCUSSION TOPIC 3: PROJECT COST

Group participants were asked to look at the project components and pick three that matter most to them and one that matters least.

Bullet one – moving 6th grade mattered most to the most people (12 had it as a top three).

Bullet two – enhanced security: 8 ranked as a top three

Bullets three, four and six: 4 ranked as a top three

Bullet five – expansion of auditorium: 2 ranked as top three and 3 said it was their ‘number 4’ priority

Last bullet – turf: Mattered least to nearly all of the group, with no one having it as a top 3 and 8 marking it as matters least

Comments:

High school has many entry points and the main office is upstairs.

Boght Hills is last green space in the area and lots of development is going on around it, like Oreshan’s Farm will become all houses. The school really needs the added classrooms.

Will the added classrooms at Boght be enough to address all of the development?

If the auditorium needs expansion, I’d vote for it.

So many kids – 80 - in chorus, and National Honor Society had so many kids on stage last year, Mr. Corr almost fell off the edge.

College center, new HS wing and turf fields are not in the info we received.

Communication is a major problem. I’m a dentist across from Loudonville School and I and many of my patients did not receive the project newsletter mailing, or the postcard about tonight. My patients question the cost of the project, too.

What is the cost of the turf field? It shouldn’t make you vote no if everything else makes sense. Need more communication about cost, why needed and savings on maintenance, benefits. It’s a 10-year project, and by then everyone will have turf fields.

People who objected had a big price tag thrown at them and thought it was fancy bells and whistles. New field could have many uses and is not unnecessary. Explain it better. The project was shoved into a short time span to get state aid.

If something is part of the project can it be scrapped later? For example, if they find out turf is not good?

Some voted for the project because of the turf field.

You have to think long term on the project, beyond when your children are in school. Turf field can host events and students wouldn't have to practice in the mud.

Timing was tough.

Confusion about turf fields. I play on field hockey and thought the price tag was bigger. People need to understand what's going on.

Turf field should be viewed as a classroom space, an education piece.

DISCUSSION TOPIC 4: PERSONAL VOTER REGISTRATION

Overall, the group supported having a referendum to establish multiple polling places and felt others would, too.

A number of group members mentioned they did not know an exit survey was available and would have participated in it. They said it was not obvious, they were directed out the door out of the school after voting, and although one member called the next day to request an exit survey to complete, she was told she could not do that.

No one spoke of or seemed to know of the time frame for having the referendum. They did find some humor in having to go to Goodrich to vote on it.

Idea: Can you hold votes in non-school, regular voting/poll places (fire houses, churches)?

If it's (multiple polling places) been illegal, who enforces this law?

I didn't like having to go to Goodrich.

I was surprised and it was nice to see people showed up at Goodrich to vote, and I'm not opposed to it as a location as long as people are voting.

It was the perfect storm on project vote night, with the weather, location, the new guidelines for one polling location; it created a lot of talk [out there] about conspiracy theory.

The vote set-up increased mistrust.

It's ironic that it was the biggest turnout.

A registration process might get more people onto the district's mailing lists.

Do the [mailing list] books need to be cleaned out? People who moved or who died are still getting mailings from the district.

Additional comments from the group

Board member Mary Nardolillo talked to them about security concerns re having the public inside schools to vote.

A PE teacher talked about the turf fields.

Idea from group members to better inform people: put info into tax bills, use Town of Colonie data and address: to resident of

Individuals have to take responsibility for being informed.

Info was in the TU and media.

A lot of people voted no based on what they heard from their neighbors.

Get the local businesses, like Stewarts, car wash, Hannaford, to encourage people to vote yes for the project.

Make the exit poll obvious.

4041 people out of 26,000 voted, 15% is that good or bad? Regular budget vote draws only 2500.

Group Discussion Notes – Room 5

DISCUSSION TOPIC 1: ENROLLMENT

- I think the biggest objection to this was the price tag – I don't think anybody even talked about the enrollment.
- Looks like we've had increased enrollment and will in the future.
- I didn't have a particular problem with it (enrollment).
- These are projections – they're not real. They're just somebody's guess.
- We never got to see the report where these projections came from. I looked all over the website and could find nothing. If enrollment is an issue, why can't we see the information for ourselves? If it's based on three studies, show them to us.
- I found them on NorthColonieLegacyPlan.com. They've got everything on there – everything the school district didn't want to give you.
- Besides new kids, houses are also selling here. On my street alone, three houses where older people lived and sold to new families. Now there are three kids on my street!
- That same thing happened on my street.
- There are too many apartments being built, that's what's causing this growth. They are popping up every place. Somebody has to look into this and stop it.
- Does the town ever talk to the school district before approving a building project? Don't you think they should? Wouldn't it be nice for the schools to know that these are being approved?
- If you do this now, and I'm in favor of it, will be you be back in 10 years to do it again? This building has to stop. The town has to stop it.
- There's a sweet spot for prices - \$200,000 to \$275,000. When a house goes up (for sale) in that range, it sells within a week. We are getting kids through new construction and through existing home sales.
- Do we have any data about middle schools? What has happened when other school districts did this? Did their test scores go up? Or go down?
- I think this stuff has to be presented in a way to let us evaluate the alternatives. You have several options on this sheet. I don't see them put side by side. How is moving kids here (to the JHS) better than any of these options (reopening Maplewood, adding classrooms, building a new school, reopening Goodrich)? Is it cheaper to move them here? You were looking at \$63 million to bring them here? What would that money have all gone for? How much would all of the options been?
- You didn't communicate the dire needs to the residents. You have to make it simpler for people.
- There are like 1,000 pages on the website but I didn't see any useful information at all!

DISCUSSION TOPIC 2: STEM OPPORTUNITIES

- Nobody's against this. Why just ask if we support education?
- I'm a data, outcomes kind of guy. What student outcomes would you expect to improve by doing this? By adding more STEM? Will our test scores be higher? I thought they were already the highest in the area? What has happened at other schools? We are similar to like 50 school districts in the state. What happened when they made an investment in STEM like this?
- You spent hours talking about employers and what they wanted in the last century and in this century. I don't care about that. What should I expect to happen to my kid's scores and education when you do this?

- We tend to be in the top 5 for science anyways. Will this make us #1?
- I would have liked to have seen more communication about this and how will it affect the Middle School and High School. What will it do at the elementary schools?
- Right now, we have just one lab space for each subject. One earth science lab. One chemistry lab. One biology lab. It gets crowded in the classrooms right now. It would be nice to have the lab in the back or connected to the classroom so the teacher could actually demonstrate this as he teaches it. The feedback is better when you have the labs right there and can do that.
- This would have gotten more girls into STEM earlier because of the work planned at the elementary schools in the idea labs. Girls are not going into these fields, like engineering.
- Is this why the costs were so high? To add all this STEM stuff?

DISCUSSION TOPIC 3: PROJECT COST

*I asked the group to rank the top three items that mattered most to them and the one that mattered least. Not everybody followed those directions precisely.
The results of that survey are below:*

Topic	Matters Most	Matters Least
Moving the 6th grade to new Shaker Middle School, creating a fifth hall	8	0
Enhanced security measures at the front entrances of every building	4	0
Expanded media center with attached idea labs at all elementary schools	4	0
New classrooms at Boght Hills to allow for an additional class section for each grade level, reducing class sizes districtwide	5	1
Expansion of Shaker High School auditorium	1	0
Expanded parking and construction of dedicated bus and parent drop-off loops at Shaker Middle and High Schools	0	4
Addition of synthetic surfaces for Walker Field and Lower Maloy Field for multipurpose use	2	1

Comments continued

- For eight years, they've know about this (aid expansion expiring in June 2018). That's what upset me the most – they are coming to us at the last minute and now look what happened? We're probably not going to get that extra aid and it's the school district's fault! Why did they wait eight years before proposing this project? They knew the deadline was coming.

- We were never given a cost for anything. There was no punch list. The prices should have been there so that we could compare costs and at least know where all this money was going (*this person also said he had not seen the district's newsletter about the referendum*).
- How can I compare these (major project components) because I don't have any price tags. I have nothing to compare them to. That's not fair.
- How come science upgrades aren't on this list? You just asked us about that (STEM) but it's not even on this list of major project components? That's nuts.
- What does "site work" mean? \$12 million for site work?
- If you've already decided you're doing this, why are you asking us? (*It was clarified that the figures on the paper reflect the December referendum, not another proposal*)
- I saw that you were going to come back to us for Phase 2, like in 2020 or something. So you want this much money now and you're promising to come back to us for more? What do you think we're made of?
- I heard a lot of people say this was bigger than anybody else ever did. I don't think we need that distinction in North Colonie. Why can't we find a way to do this in smaller chunks? Look at what happened to Albany when they wanted to be the biggest project.
- You should have been doing improvements right along, like every five years or something. Why did you let the need build up so much that now you need so much?
- If we don't get the extra aid, what was that, like \$30 million? Does that mean you've got to cut this project by \$30 million or we just pay for \$30 million more ourselves?
- I guess you have bonds that are retiring in the next few years. Is the \$252 (projected increase) net, after those bonds are gone? Did you factor that into this project to cut the tax effect?

DISCUSSION TOPIC 4: PERSONAL VOTER REGISTRATION

- Most people thought you wanted to change it to just put one over on us. Why shove us all into one location?
- I think it avoids confusion and we should keep the one location. If you try to change it now, people are going to get really confused.
- I don't think it would be worth the money, now, to try to go back to multiple locations.
- The timing for changing this was really bad.
- I got right in and out with no problems.
- I had to circle a couple of times before I found a space.
- Why couldn't we vote at a school, where there's more parking?
- Connors really made a big deal about this. I don't think that helped this at all and probably helped defeat it.
- Are you saying this vote and the budget vote will be on the same day? That's really a roll of the dice because a lot more people voted on this. They could defeat the budget if they're still angry about this proposal.
- I voted by absentee ballot because I was out of town. Try it. It's easy and I didn't have to worry about parking. You just have to get the application and they send you the ballot. Maybe I'll tell them I'll be out of town from now on.
- The timing was like 9 to 9. The budget vote is 12 to 9. You should begin voting at 6 or 7 in the morning to give people more of a chance to vote.

- Yeah, you should vote earlier. Every other school district votes earlier than we do. Especially if you want to shove us into one location – expand the hours to make the parking easier.
- Most people I know think you're just going to keep voting on this to wear people down (until it gets approved).
- So we were voting illegally before?

Group Discussion Notes – Room 6

DISCUSSION TOPIC 1: ENROLLMENT

- Most people in the group were either highly supportive or not-opposed to moving the sixth grade to the junior high school.
 - A few group members commented that having a middle school model would align us with the rest of the districts in the area
- A district teacher noted that class sizes are already on the high end and will only continue to climb if nothing is done. The teacher felt moving the sixth grade to the junior high school would free up more space at the elementary level.
 - Moving the sixth grade would offer those students more opportunities that aren't offered at the elementary level
 - A student in the group commented that moving the sixth grade with older students will help make the transition to the high school easier.
- A community member wanted to know what average class sizes are/should be.
- One person questioned the accuracy of the enrollment projections, wondering what the district would do if the enrollment plateaued.
- A good portion of the group felt the district did not do a good job communicating to the public on the educational opportunities sixth grade students will get by moving to the junior high school. Some also raised questions about how the money was going to be spent.
 - "\$63M is a big investment for this part of the project. What is it going to mean besides more classroom space? What will kids get? There was never enough information on this."
 - "I don't feel like I have enough information to contribute to the discussion. The district says they have an enrollment problem, so the solution is to do this (move sixth grade to junior high school). Well they're not telling me details on how the money that this will cost is going to be spent and they're not telling me what the kids will be getting out of this move. The communication is lacking."
 - I want to know the costs associated with this part of the project, beyond the lump sum. Tough to give an honest opinion without a breakdown."

DISCUSSION TOPIC 2: STEM OPPORTUNITIES

- The majority of the group felt STEM education is important, especially laying the foundation early at the elementary level, but nearly all felt that they – nor the community – knew enough about how the district wanted to implement it into the educational program, or what the district's vision was.
 - "How much will this cost? We weren't given enough information to make an informed decision."
- Many felt the community didn't understand the connection between STEM education and space needed to supply that education.
 - "You can't just say you need something without explaining why you need it. If I'm a community member or taxpayer and I don't have a student in the district, I'd be asking why you can't use existing classrooms to teach STEM?"
 - "All we heard about was 'idea labs', but what are idea labs? What will they be used for and *why are they necessary?*"

- The district started the evening talking about an enrollment problem. That’s the problem we’re facing. Now we’re talking about spaces and idea labs – how exactly is that helping us address the problem?
- We need to know more about the cost of this part of the project. We need the “why” and we need the “how much”.
- One student, who is a member of the Robotics Club and started the Lego League was in favor of expanding STEM opportunities.
- A few group members felt the district should be making this a STEAM program, not STEM – as to not shortchange the arts portion of a student’s education.
- One teacher noted that the way kids are learning has changed, stressing that students today are digital natives and the district has a responsibility to try and accommodate that.

DISCUSSION TOPIC 3: PROJECT COST

- Everybody in the group agreed that the price tag was likely the biggest factor as to why the proposal was defeated.
 - “\$200 million shocked a lot of people. No way around it. Even as a supporter of the district, it shocked me.”
- While most agreed cost was the biggest factor, nearly the entire group felt the communication was not directed at the right audience.
 - “The communication was filled with numbers and language that didn’t make sense. There were different phases and whatnot, not to mention they weren’t sure that \$194 million was going to be enough. Transparency is important. The process was transparent enough. It’s great to see what you want to do, but you need to tell people why you want to do it.”
 - “It was sticker shock. The district needs to show its community what the basic cost is to keep the place operating. But the problem with transparency is, when you attempt to suppress the vote that can also turn people.”
 - “The cost is staggering to me. I sit here wondering, what am I getting for my investment? All I read are general statements. I want specifics and details. What will this mean to me?”
 - Some in the group felt they didn’t know enough about the specifics of where the money was going.
 - “They never provided details on where the money was going beyond the building. How much will specific elements of the project cost?”
 - “It felt like the district put a wish list together. I attended the early meetings. I came to one meeting and the developers said it was going to cost \$100 million. The next meeting we were told it was going to cost \$194 million. Not once were we told why it jumped by so much. It made me question the integrity of the project. This seemed like a money grab.”
 - “All of the costs associated with this were not brought out to the public in a transparent way. There will be additional costs with these projects. You’re going to need equipment, teachers. District didn’t explain the bigger picture to me.”

- “There’s this pressure that the district is feeling to do something. I don’t think the community feels the same pressure. If you rush this again, it might go down again (the project). Then what?”
 - “I have to believe we can do something for less than \$194 million and still be a desirable place to live.”
- Some in the group felt that while the price tag was high, it was worth it for the future of the district.
 - “We haven’t made significant upgrades in decades. The district has done a great job in maintaining its buildings given circumstances (highlighted financial crash of 2008). It’s time to upgrade.”
- From the list provided, each member was asked to circle the components of the project they valued most. The vote count for this group came out as follows:
 - Moving 6th-grade to MS, creating a 5th hall – 10 votes
 - Enhancing security at front entrances – 3 votes
 - Expanding media centers with idea labs at all elem. schools – 3 votes
 - New classrooms at Boght Hills – 10 votes
 - Expansion of HS auditorium – 5 votes
 - Expanded parking and construction of bus/drop off loops – 2 votes
 - Synthetic surfaces for two fields – 1 vote

DISCUSSION TOPIC 4: PERSONAL VOTER REGISTRATION

- The entire group felt this topic wasn’t communicated well-enough to the community.
- Most in the group felt their experience voting at the Goodrich Building was good, noting it didn’t take much time.
- On the topic of whether the community would support a referendum for personal registration, most felt it wouldn’t be an issue if the district didn’t have personal registration.
 - “I think it’s a non-issue.”
 - “It doesn’t matter to me. Tell me where I need to be and I’ll be there.” A few people in the group echoed this sentiment.
 - “I think people would support it. Personal registration makes sense. You did it this way for 43 years, now all of a sudden the rule changes. It felt like voter oppression. I think the shock of the date of the original vote was worse for people.”

A few in the group wondered if the district should look at a different voting location that has better parking, like the high school or junior high school.

Group Discussion Notes – Room 7

DISCUSSION TOPIC 1: ENROLLMENT

One parent, citing data from Internet about North Colonie population, stated that there has not been much change in enrollment from 1994 to present; the difference being about 220 students. Also, mentioning the growth in homes built from 2010 to the present is 0.3 percent. Questioned the validity of the district's enrollment projections, saying it's cyclical.

Educators in the room countered that there are already large class sizes at Blue Creek, Boght Hills, with some elementary class sizes approaching 30+ students. They cited enrollment from the last two years and that demographic studies show continued steady growth over the next 9-10 years.

Parent stated that many in her neighborhood choose to send their kids to private schools (St. Pius, CBA) and she wondered [question]: "How many students will end up going to the [North Colonie] schools versus private schools?"

Another parent wanted to know how best to address the question: "Why are new facilities needed?"

Educators answered: to meet the needs of all students, especially those with special needs; and to address safety issues. They said the difference is population changes, housing growth and increasing needs of students over the past 20 years.

A resident and former school board member noted that in 1980s and 90s, moving all 6th grades to the junior high school was discussed as a way to address growth at that time and providing space in elementary schools.

A community member and retired teacher aide mentioned that many in the community don't realize the impact of the recent expansion to full-day kindergarten – how all the elementary schools lost space due that.

Parents, educators and students generally agreed that moving the sixth grade to the junior high school would offer those students more learning and extracurricular opportunities than they currently have, (e.g., better science, incl. labs and foreign language instruction).

One parent asked if enrollment projections are correct, how does that translate to smaller class sizes (under 25 students) and increased opportunities for students? What is the cap for class sizes now, and how will the district ensure the class-size caps are maintained in the future?

Another parent said that with more students coming, no change to the structure of any of the buildings would result in problems. Spoke about not only adding space, but being able to maximize that space for safety and for program growth.

Teacher stated that with the curriculum push down with new standards (what previously was considered grade 9 level work being pushed down to grades 5-6) grade 6 students would benefit greatly by middle school structure where educators focus on specialty subject areas (science teacher, math teacher, ELA teacher) rather than elementary teachers who cover all subject areas.

Most, if not all, in the group supported moving grade 6 to the junior high school. No one expressed strong objection to it.

DISCUSSION TOPIC 2: STEM OPPORTUNITIES

Students in the discussion group spoke about the advantage of science labs for learning (one student in regular science, said he has only had three labs so far this year, but the other student in Earth Science, an advanced course, participates in a “ton” of labs). They both felt it was important for access to technology to increase.

Educators said that the building project included spaces in elementary schools exclusively for hands-on science learning and makerspace rooms, as well as storage for materials and equipment.

One educator said that currently she doesn’t have enough desks in her room to accommodate the number of students participating in her after-school coding club.

Another educator said her daughter’s school (Blue Creek) held a lottery for its new 3-D printing club (after school) because of the level of interest. Her son is in Robotics Club at school, but her daughter is in a Lego First club through Girl Scouts because there is no STEM activity like that offered after school at elementary level.

Parents and educators agreed that it’s difficult for the community to understand 1) what STEM is and 2.) how important it is, unless you have a child involved in STEM learning/activities.

- Question: What can be done to increase the understanding of that among everyone in the community?
- How to show what STEM opportunities look like? (*Potential for a video here?*)

Educators also mentioned that STEM teaches kids to be creative thinkers, and participation in STEM helps distinguish students on college applications. Exploratory spaces are valuable.

Parent wanted to know if STEM opportunities would be available to students with special needs?

DISCUSSION TOPIC 3: PROJECT COST

Resident/former board member opened the discussion stating the main reason his family chose to live in North Colonie was strong schools and lowest true value tax rate compared to other top districts (Bethlehem and Niskayuna). He continued that initially he was astounded by the cost and size of the project, but he thinks the facilities improvements are very important.

Parent asked about the importance of new turf athletic fields? Another parent (who coaches) explained that the fields are built on wetlands, so the drainage is very poor. Turf fields would allow for increased use, not only for practices and events, but also for physical education classes (all students).

Parent asked if drainage solutions had been explored as opposed to new turf field? And what about cost?

A few participants said they did not believe project cost factored into the vote outcome.

Others disagreed. One educator said two of her friends (single moms) voted no because of the financial burden it will place on them. A parent said she voted yes because of her kids, but that the tax increase is going to “kill her budget.” She and her husband just built new home in district. She said it was not fair that the Town of Colonie is allowing all this growth without regard for the consequences to the district. Asked if district officials had been consulted by the Town before approving all the new housing developments?

Parent who did not vote on project asked if the benefits the district claims the project would create is worth the huge amount of debt that would result? Also wondered how other states are able to offer good education for less money than New York's per pupil cost.

Another parent asked about the feasibility of building a new elementary school? Former BOE member said that opens up another issue: re-districting, which in his experience, no one ever favors.

Some thought the district tried to rush the building project vote specifically to meet deadlines for enhanced aid (from Maplewood annexation).

Question about whether the district would still be eligible for any enhanced aid on a building project?

Other factors in vote defeat mentioned:

- One voting location, residents not understanding reason for that
- Media reports
- Price tag of project
- Not having children in district
- Too many parents assumed it would pass
- No understanding of the need for project

➤ *What components of the project do you value most?*

From the list provided, participants were asked to circle the top three components they valued most. Vote results by a show of hands, as follows:

- Moving 6th-grade to MS, creating a 5th hall – **12 votes**
- Enhancing security at front entrances – **8 votes**
- Expanding media centers with idea labs at all elem. schools – **5 votes**
- New classrooms at Boght Hills – **5 votes**
- Expansion of HS auditorium – **5 votes**
- Expanded parking and construction of bus/drop off loops – **5 votes**
- Synthetic surfaces for two fields – **1 vote**

DISCUSSION TOPIC 4: PERSONAL VOTER REGISTRATION

Participants in complete agreement that no one in the community understands the personal voter registration issue. No participants were in favor of a March referendum to establish personal voter registration.

Some wondered if the district could petition NYSED for a waiver to allow multiple voting locations for next vote? Participants said the key to getting approval is a strong get-out-the-vote campaign! Must get elementary parents to the polls.

Several participants mentioned that on Dec. 15, the day of the vote, the parking lot at Goodrich looked full, and the presumption was it would take too long to vote. Some heard that as a reason neighbors, friends did not vote.

Group Discussion Notes – Room 8

DISCUSSION TOPIC 1: ENROLLMENT

- Two individuals dominated the discussion and reported they felt enrollment data used by the district to make project decisions was “fundamentally flawed.” Another said she thought enrollment projections were “heavy.”
- One claimed to have researched NYSED data and added data from Census Bureau to compare his estimates with district claims and found his analysis did not show huge enrollment growth.
- Random comment: “You can pay someone to write a report that says anything you want it to.”
- Both said they could not find the full enrollment reports on the district website. Said they would like to read full reports.
- Their skepticism regarding the foundation on which the capital project was designed, unfortunately, set the tone for the entire discussion. Also, they were by far the most vocal of the group.
- Asked to reflect on the district’s decision to move the sixth grade to the junior high, most said they could understand that to be appropriate for relieving overcrowding of elementary schools. Some expressed concerns about having students 6-12 on the same buses, but this was batted down by a board member who was in the room who said the schools would have separate buses. While some had reservations about students being young, one participant was able to convey she thought it could provide added opportunity for students.
- Random comment: “In the current budget, administrative costs rose 10% but instructional budget was flat. Money should be going to teachers.”
- All in room agreed that class sizes at the elementary level should not be above 25.

DISCUSSION TOPIC 2: STEM OPPORTUNITIES

- Several people in the room felt the district materials were generally “high on emotion, low on facts.” They felt they did not have enough detail to truly understand the issue. They wanted to be able to see what an elementary STEM lab might look like.
- There was mention that the blueprints in the newsletter were too small.
- Some in the group felt opportunities to provide more detail on these improvements were missed. What about sharing with students? “My ninth grader knew nothing about the project.”
- Some felt information was too focused on space modifications and not enough detail as to how that space would actually be used by students/teachers.
- “Explain what a pod is, what it looks like.”

DISCUSSION TOPIC 3: PROJECT COST

- At this point, there was a more free-flowing conversation, but still dominated by two men who did not believe enrollment was increasing at the rate described by the district.\
- “\$196.4 million was HUGE. You have to be mindful that taxpayers are being crushed.”
- “They didn’t tell you what Phase II would be.”
- “It is really young families v. empty nesters.”

- “Empty nesters don’t want to deny the younger kids, it’s just that as you get older you realize the people don’t need all this stuff. I didn’t need a pod.”
- “I voted for it because it is important to protect the value of our homes.”
- “Empty nesters are the largest growing demographic in the district.”
- “District must relate costs to teachers and classrooms.”
- “Assumed the district would recalibrate and present a pared down plan but I’m thinking they are going to put up the same plan.”
- “Plan was full of what I like to call ‘nice-to-haves.’”
- “All districts need to do a better job in putting money aside on a rolling basis...doing projects on a more routine basis.”
- “It’s not my job to determine what the district needs but the demographer and the architect are certainly not looking out for the district.”
- “What about having a district engineer on staff who has an unbiased opinion?”
- “My taxes will probably increase 15 percent, but my Social Security will only increase 2 percent.”
- “The district must come to us truthfully with transparency.”
- “Just because the state aid is there doesn’t mean we need to spend it.”
- Trying to get them to focus on elements of the plan they supported or were put off by, I got the sense that specific items did not sway their votes one way or another. Here are a few comments:
- “Improved parking – connecting the two schools -- would be great.”
- “Some people in my neighborhood thought turf fields were over the top. Needed more info on those.”
- “Need to stress the investment in the town. Highlight that the cost per pupil is a great deal.”

DISCUSSION TOPIC 4: PERSONAL VOTER REGISTRATION

There was a lot of anger and confusion on this topic, but there was also SUPPORT for referendum.

Some did not believe that the change was necessary.

Many did not understand why the voting is different from the general election.

Random thoughts/specific questions

There was a suggestion to have younger parents speak to older residents about the value they see in making these improvements. This suggestion was from an empty nester who thought there were some opportunities missed when addressing older residents. We also happened to have a young dad who mostly listened but was very good at explaining why it was meaningful to his family.

Two specific questions:

- Are there that many classes with more than 25 students?
- Are there schools that are not at capacity?

Group Discussion Notes – Room 9

DISCUSSION TOPIC 1: ENROLLMENT

This has been goal of the district for years. It seems like the easiest approach by looking at this material. It's a smart idea to enlarge the junior high.

Last summer forums – the pros and cons of a 6-8 grade building were discussed. The general consensus was that it made a lot of sense – addresses space issues, balances opportunities. It's the best way to manage.

Junior high is an interesting time. You get used to it and adapt. Not a big deal.

I think it makes sense. Other districts do this. Sixth graders are ready, and it will help alleviate overcrowding.

Joe looked through all the options. The other options don't make sense. The room is there. They came up with a good option.

There are some elementary schools with sixth grade. It was part of discussion in summer. It's the best option financially. They talked about the maturity level. Think they would be ready.

I understand cost effectiveness but I would rather see kids stay at the elementary schools. Need to look beyond financial reasons. Kids are pushed to mature too soon. Moving students to middle school promotes a much higher level of maturity. I take pride in having a true junior high building. District has done a lot to address concerns with evening activities. Introducing younger students to older students opens them up to a whole new world. On a personal level, see kids growing up too fast. See a huge difference in maturity level between sixth grade boy and eighth grade boy.

I love the fact that sixth grade is in the elementary school. There's a big difference between sixth graders and seventh and eighth graders. Thank goodness we're not talking about fifth grade. Cost-effectiveness – this is a huge bill. I don't mind the idea of a new school. This school looks very similar to when I came here. We don't need to have all the bells and whistles. I wasn't aware of the first meeting. Why wasn't town aware of these issues? There's no green space anymore. Neighborhoods are everywhere. Project will affect children who aren't born yet. Seems like first step is to involve the town. The development they are allowing doesn't look like our neighborhood anymore.

The kids have to have a place to go to school. The school district is just responding to the demands of the community. I see issues with sixth graders growing up too soon. Bringing in the town now doesn't do any good.

Sixth grade was at the junior high when I went to school. I left elementary school and remember being petrified of older girls. They wore make-up [etc.] The transition went ok. A lot of schools have sixth, seventh and eighth grade there. Sixth graders would be riding the buses with high school students. That was a whole other level of intimidation. Bringing the town in is incredibly important. We do have turnover of older people moving out. I learned about previous conversations around this issue after the fact. It needs to be communicated.

Let's stop it [development] now. People are talking to town. School is just responding to what's happening. If people are upset, tell the town. Developers are making money, want projects to go thru.

What is the plan for sixth grade at the junior high? *[Administrator in the room provided some background information about expanding the hall model].*

DISCUSSION TOPIC 2: STEM OPPORTUNITIES

I don't understand why we don't send students to BOCES for these programs? If we already have resources available locally why don't we use them?

BOCES is an option for some stuff. Are these cost-effective? Having such resources in district and at elementary level helps kids.

Agree with using BOCES for upper grades. Like idea of this coming back. ELA/math is so important. Would like to incorporate more science but honestly technology isn't reliable in the classroom. Students enjoy extracurricular activities. There's a lot to cover already in class. There are so many other ways to get children learning.

I remember doing cool things in science. I don't have much else to say.

[Statistics were shared about the importance of incorporating computer science, such as half of jobs by 2020 will require some knowledge of computer science]. It's an issue of equity, economy and national security. There's evidence suggesting benefits to introducing young women to computer science before the ninth grade. Computer science doesn't actually require computers in classrooms, it's about problem-solving and computational learning. Tech companies expect students to get this kind of experience in school.

We need to adjust programs. American kids are behind.

I assume the curriculum needs to be updated. Students need basics in STEM. Investments need to be made. Do more cost effectively. I don't think the community fully understands. There needs to be better communication and more in-depth communication.

What would computer science involve for elementary students? *[question directed to an individual in the group with a background in computer science]*

There are all types of different ways to learn science concepts. Shows kids how to be creators, not just consumers of information.

All three of my children learn differently. I'm very concerned about the new system. I can't help kids with math homework. I can get the answer, but can't show the way they need it. I don't understand STEM. See it as major dollar signs and run away. I don't want kindergartners to do this. Want them to learn cursive, go back to basics. STEM would be a nice addition, but not sure it's needed considering everything else that's going on. People feel angry – got steamrolled. We all feel so small. Not informed.

Not everyone understands STEM. Can see a need to increase availability at high school. Increase at junior high – not sure how much hands on kids are already. Struggling with Common Core. There is a lot of cross over. Sounds like need for more curriculum changes than actual facilities.

Things will start to shift already. Kids don't get to master anything anymore. Then asked to do something else. Teach cursive for two weeks and move on. Sometimes we need to go back to basics in younger levels. STEM is more relevant for higher grade levels.

DISCUSSION TOPIC 3: PROJECT COST

Value Most: Top 3 ranked by group:

- Enhanced security measures at the front entrances of every building. (7)
- New classrooms at Boght Hills to allow for an additional class section for each grade level, reducing class sizes districtwide. (7)
- Moving the sixth grade to new Shaker Middle School, creating a fifth hall. (4)

Value Least: Top 3 ranked by group:

- Addition of synthetic surfaces for Walker Field and Lower Maloy Field for multipurpose use. (6)
- Expansion of Shaker High School auditorium. (4)
- Expanded parking and construction of dedicated bus and parent drop-off loops at Shaker Middle and High Schools. (3)

It all goes back to communication. I don't think they hid the vote location. The total dollar amount was a tough pill to swallow, especially for those who don't have children in the district. When initially registered for kindergarten classes heard 22 students per class then 22 months later district is busting at the seams. This was a lot of money when it was broken out into phases. Didn't think a lot of final information on things.

Agree 100 percent. Everyone wants to put brakes on for another. Don't care if we're lowest in true tax value. It means nothing to me. I have to pay 2x [as a homeowner and business owner].

Thought the last meeting at high school was going to be a discussion about what they were proposing – and why these options work. The meeting was more about what the district wanted to do [without a discussion]. Times are hard for a lot of us in this area. I bought my house thinking that my income would go up. This is a big deal. I want to see more flexibility with the project. Three children will benefit but want to see more flexibility. District needs to communicate it more.

This meeting was on the news. Did the same with others. But a lot of people don't know what's going on. I think about how can they get this information to my mother and father? It's not my job to tell them. It's been on Facebook, but my parents are not.

I talked to all types of people in the district. \$196.4 billion is too hard a pill to swallow. We have a great reputation and have had it for years. Most residents voted no. We don't need these bells and whistles. Need better security, move classrooms at a level that's reasonable. Don't need to have super expensive car. Couldn't stomach that dollar amount. Knowing some of these projects will affect the yearly budget. People said no way. Ranked second lowest, but won't hold if tax increases because of project. Don't need premier auditorium. Could stagger start time at middle/high school and that would change traffic. Have junior high start a little later. Other workarounds they can do. Wouldn't need to renovate parking.

If sixth grade at junior high we would need to accommodate the increase in staffing. What are our needs? What are our wants? Do we need synthetic turf fields/high school auditorium? Pare down what we need/want. We do this in our own homes.

Watch what we're spending – nicety because of Maplewood bond act is at a low interest rate. Benefit of doing now is overall low cost. If put off now, costs will be more. My accounting brain kicks in – what's cost of borrowing not at that rate? But we don't need the Ferrari.

There's renovation cost and what they are talking about.

I can see a few wants at the low rate. My son will be gone before all this hits. Comes down to how much we can afford.

Cost is the biggest reason it went down. People just couldn't afford. I know what the size constraints are of auditorium. Children are falling off the stage. Maybe they can do something different that would be cost-effective. We get a lot of awards. Students are amazing. We need to deal with class size and make sure it's safe for everyone.

Communication is a big part of why it went down. Have to think of ways to reach everyone. There are so many channels and no one listens to all of them. Schools taxes cost a lot. Consider grant work, particularly in STEM area and through companies. New York State announced opportunities last week. What other funding opportunities are available?

The dollar amount was just too much to swallow. When the vote took place the details of the actual cost got lost given all the controversy around the location. The actual project needed to be explained better. Nothing is cheap today, but think it can be pared down.

DISCUSSION TOPIC 4: PERSONAL VOTER REGISTRATION

I don't think having just one location to vote was that big of a deal. A lot more people have eyes and ears open. If there's only one polling location or multiple, we'll see a lot of people vote. Goodrich has a big parking lot, easy access. Is there a cost to hold a referendum vote? How many people vote in budget?

District didn't push annexation enough. I know there are others who thought they did. There was criticism of the timing of the vote. Traffic was bad on vote day because of the weather. It went quick. Done in 20 minutes and back. There is a comfort level when people vote in their own school. They feel like they're part of a community. There would be a one-time cost but then we'd be done and vote at elementary school. What is the cost to do the referendum to go back to what we had? How much did they save to have it at Goodrich?

Inflammatory piece of yellow paper came in the mail. Don't think it was intent of district at all. When district explained. It would be nice to have at a local school. It would be easier, but do I think it would be necessary, no. Does the vote have to be during the week? More parking is available. Or could they do during a workshop day when kids aren't here.

No preference for location. Just need to be clear on what "personal registration" means. Community would need to know more about what it means. Joe was hesitant to move forward with multiple polling locations knowing it wasn't legal. People need to know more about this.

Who is the watchdog for the budget? Did they do due diligence with estimate before going through? Not sure this process occurred. Projects evolve start out with a budget that changes.

Budget committee meetings are online mid to late February.

It's more advantageous to go to my school. But do I care where really? No.

It all comes down to communication. Just tell us where to go and we'll go there.

Media got a hold of this and put a spin on it. For some people it was the only way they heard about it.

Joe didn't want to hide anything. He explained at September meetings. Very clear and concise. Joe had all the how's and why's laid out. It was good information that got missed by everyone.

Think intentions are always good. We've seen the budgets go through every year. They would only scale it back if it didn't pass.

As part of budget committee, I'm really impressed. They do a good job about what goes into a budget. They try to make good choices. Buses are managed tightly. Trade-in values are just like cars.

Additional concerns were brought up related to communications:

Communications was a huge issue with the whole process. Some people got postcard in mail, but not all.

Those signed up for SNN at elementary school didn't get emails about the discussions. It should have been sent out to individual schools. Not just district level. And what about people without kids in the district? They don't think they should register for SNN.

For a future vote/referendum, mailers are essential. People never got original mailer about original vote. Menands and Maplewood side did not get.

Hit the pavement and/or make phone calls. We get calls all the time for state, local elections.

Boght Hills had a big sign at drop-off about vote. Never saw a sign like that. Couldn't it be by the road or near a spot more obvious. What about billboards?

All elementary schools have a message board – use them.

Heard from a neighbor who got an inflammatory postcard. It was different from the 2-page yellow sheet. They never got anything from the district on the bond vote.

Questions to follow-up on:

- Why hasn't the town been involved in the planning process thus far?
- What is the plan for sixth graders? How would it look at middle school?
- Why don't we send students to BOCES for STEM programs? Are there cost savings by having it here? If we already have resources available locally why don't we use them?
- What's the cost to do the referendum to go back to what we had?
- What are our needs? What are our wants?
- What other funding opportunities are available? Grants?
- Is there a cost to hold a referendum vote? How many people vote in the budget?
- What is the cost to do the referendum to go back to what we had? How much did they save to have it at Goodrich?
- Does the vote have to be during the week? Could it be on the weekend? Or a professional development day?
- Who is the watchdog for the budget? Did they do due diligence with estimate before going through?
- What about billboards [to communicate about the vote/project]?

Group Discussion Notes – Room 10

DISCUSSION TOPIC 1: ENROLLMENT

- There was no information about the educational reasons (advantages) for moving sixth grade to the junior high school.
- Don't understand the cost breakdown – the middle school costs (\$63 million) is so much more than any of the other options; why was that chosen?
- Maybe it's the nostalgia factor, but I (community member) wonder if we're asking sixth-graders to grow up too fast – pushing them to go where they're not ready to go; please address this if you put this piece up for a vote again.
- Person who went to all the planning meetings for the project said there were discussions about this subject prior to the vote and many people felt that the sixth-graders would actually benefit because they'd have an extra year of expanded opportunities if they moved.
- Angst over the possibility of redistricting with this move because it would pull neighborhoods apart if kids weren't going to school with their neighbors.
- For the next vote, think about promoting the enrichment opportunities that may be available to the sixth-graders if they move.
- Why didn't we know about this before? The decision was made and shoved down our throats; need to have more PR to parents to explain why this option was chosen.
- I agree; there is a big question in my mind how this decision was made and how the classrooms were separated; hard to find information about the project; I felt uneasy trying to make a decision.
- Administrator: what would make people more comfortable?
- Response: wanted more detailed information but it was nowhere to be found.
- I would agree – especially for senior citizens and parents who don't have children who are school-aged.
- Parent who attended all planning meetings reiterated that all of these questions were covered at the meetings.
- Had two enrollment studies – don't know who the second person/group is; reputable? Also, if there are two phases to this project, why couldn't there be two separate votes? The town may slow down building in the area and we may not need the extra space, it may not be necessary. Also, the question of getting more state aid if the vote passed – the state aid is our money anyway, we pay state taxes.
- Response from teacher in the room: but you have to think about it this way: that money that you paid in state taxes will go to another district for its building project, not N. Colonie.
- I'm very concerned about overcrowding; it's not good for the kids; I grew up in Watervliet and our classes were overcrowded – I don't want to do that to the kids here.

DISCUSSION TOPIC 2: STEM OPPORTUNITIES

- We all understand the need for STEM; you don't need to sell us on that.

- With expanding STEM opportunities, we were wondering what the “total cost of ownership” would be; in other words, what would the added costs be for new staff, set-up, equipment, etc. associated with this?
- Response from teacher in the room: building to purpose is more economical than retrofitting an already existing space; also, more technology would mean the need for more IT staff.
- I moved into the district a few years ago after hearing about the great teachers and high student achievement; I was shocked at the facilities when I walked through the elementary schools – how could this district do so much with so little?
- The reality of today’s world means tech facilities are necessary; I have a special needs son and great/up-to-date district facilities will mean he will be given the advantages he deserves.
- Right now, so much space is repurposed (closets, hallways, etc.) that there is no space for the collaborative work that students need to be doing now.
- Don’t think there is any question that this will benefit kids, but this is too much too soon. Community feels as if it’s been on the outside of this process – it was too much, too quickly; do they understand the need? Of course they do.
- Just don’t want it to be too little too late for the kids – just go to Watervliet to see this.
- It’s up to the parents to fight for this.
- Even so and even with the information that was shared, there’s a *perception* that the project was shoved down our throats and perception becomes reality.
- There’s an “us vs. them” mentality showing from the district and from the superintendent’s attitude.
- This feels forced, manipulated.
- Response from parent: the public was invited to every single planning meeting; there are more people in this room today than showed up for those meetings. Where were the people who were frustrated – not at the planning meetings?
- The first time I heard that there was going to be a vote was when I was called in as an election inspector.
- You need to address the people who don’t have children attending district schools.
- Would be helpful to have a cheat sheet/summary type of piece mailed with information on where to go for more details.
- We want more details with actual numbers broken out for the different aspects of the project.
- Looks as if phase I and phase II could stand alone; why were they presented together?
- Website is not clear. Why would you have building/capital project information under the heading of “legacy???”
- Would like FAQs about project with super clear information right at the top.
- District got slaughtered in this vote; you shouldn’t have let that happen; you need to get the press on your side.
- We had more information about the tax cap than we had about this project.
- Response: I think the lesson was learned; now we need to move forward.

- Parents all lead busy lives, so we can't rely on the district as the sole source of information; I started asking questions after talking with neighbors.
- Need an emphasis on "we are they."
- I grew up here, I support the district but we need reasons for this project, we need *transparency*.

DISCUSSION TOPIC 3: PROJECT COST

- One thing that keeps coming back to me is the options in this process. We want to know if this is the Cadillac option and what are the other options. What's the Cadillac option? What's the Buick option and what's the Yugo option? And what are we giving up with each of these options. We want that kind of detail, that kind of transparency.
- Response: there were options presented.
- You need to use the media for your benefit; the people of North Colonie spoke and they want more information.
- One question heard out in the community: this is a lot of money going to structures; what about teachers? Administrator and someone else responded by saying that the teachers were covered in the general operating budget and the building project funding is separate. Everyone seem satisfied with the information.
- Question about whether the high school could handle the additional populations; someone responded that the project included new space at the high school.
- Person who is a volleyball coach in the district reiterated need for better facilities; she goes into other districts' buildings and North Colonie's facilities are embarrassing after that.
- Discussion moved into what the district could do to show the problem: photos on the website and in the printed information; everyone seemed to like the idea of student-led tours of the buildings and then a general gathering in the cafeteria afterward for district staff to answer questions.
- Back to the cost of the project: we may have to settle for the Buick option – especially for people in the district who are on fixed incomes; for some senior citizens, the additional cost may force a decision between paying to get their driveway cleared in the winter vs. paying the increased taxes.
- I didn't understand until much later that the cost increases would be phased in over time and that they wouldn't start for six years; you need to make this information clearer to the voters.
- And we want to know year by year what it costs – a detailed breakdown.
- Do a myth vs. reality information campaign rather than having the same statements go out over and over; we heard the same thing in several different newspaper article from the superintendent.
- I should have been an easy "yes" vote....but I couldn't make an informed decision
- What attracted me to move to this district: this is what I had growing up; I had school administrators research different districts in the Capital Region to help me decide where to move – you had the athletics, higher standards, better educational programs; my first choice was Delmar, but the taxes were too high.
- Group started prioritizing bulleted list of projects and talking about where the emphasis should be in a building project (at Latham Ridge. Forts Ferry and Boght, for example); resident then led the group in

saying that she wasn't comfortable doing this; you just want a list of things you can take out of the project in order to get a yes vote; we're not going to do the list of priorities.

- We still have people stuck on the amount of money.
- Go out with same project (one recommendation); most follow-up comments disagreed.
- You need transparency. What is your primary objective with this project, what do you want to achieve?
- Divide the vote into 7-8 items that people can pick and choose from. In the past, we've had separate bond issues on buses and other items, so why can't we do that for this project?
- People would say yes to the security projects.
- But they're not well-explained; what do you mean by reconfiguring the front entrances? Why?
- Even the way the Q&A in the brochure that was sent is structured, it basically has the message, "this is the plan" (forced).
- It's worth going back to the voters, but with more information.
- ***We want to be stakeholders with you, not just check-writers.***
- The way the message is presented is just as important as the message itself.

DISCUSSION TOPIC 4: PERSONAL VOTER REGISTRATION

- Very confusing; and the media worked against you in this process.
- Never heard superintendents say other districts were restricted to one voting site.
- Almost seems like it might be too late to get the word out about the vote that would have to happen in order to have voter registration (and then multiple vote sites).
- Is it correct that if you hold a new vote in May in conjunction with the budget vote that the capital project vote would have to be held in one location and the budget vote in a separate location?
- Why can't you move the budget vote to the same location as the capital project vote?
- If the district chooses a different path for the voting, you'll have a problem.
- If you're entangled by the law, go to your representatives at the state level and ask if the vote can be held just this one time as it's been held in the past (multiple locations).
- Want both votes (capital project and budget) in one location: hold it at the firehouse.
- Or do both at Goodrich, but again, it will be about clear communication.

General concluding comments from attendees:

- Website could still be helpful for getting out information...but call it a bond issue or building project; make it easy for people to find the information.
- Have a breakdown of all the numbers – cost for each items.
- Parent mentioned that board meetings always have time for public comment, so there's an opportunity there to be heard.

- Identify some people in the district and the community to talk to their neighbors about this project.
- Our school board members need to be more active in sharing information about the project – where were they in this process the first time around? Joe could have used some help.

Group Discussion Notes – Room 11

DISCUSSION TOPIC 1: ENROLLMENT

The group understood that the moving of 6th grade students out of the elementary school buildings was necessary, and expressed the following evidence for their understanding:

- 6th grade students would have their own busing, making scheduling easier
- General perception of the fact that adding on to elementary school buildings carried more challenges, logistically and economically
- Moving 6th grade up would match the structure of other schools in the region
- Moving 6th grade up eliminates the real or perceived image of non-equity for other neighborhoods and their elementary schools

DISCUSSION TOPIC 2: STEM OPPORTUNITIES

The group generally felt that the importance of STEM, and its connection to the proposed project, were not expressed adequately enough so that the layman could understand. Most in the group felt that they fit into the “layman” category. Some items that were discussed:

- Many felt that STEM was not explained well. Some do not remember the mention of STEM at all.
- Some felt that the project should have been explained in discreet parts. For example, the moving of the 6th grade and the details associated with that would be one part, the upgrades of classrooms and school facilities to accommodate the focus on STEM would be another part.
- The concept of open classrooms didn’t appeal to many in the group who have worked in open office environments. The parent of students with special needs says that this sort of environment can be particularly ineffectual for students with learning disabilities.
- The idea of adding additional computer labs seemed to compete with the idea that the elementary schools had a severe lack of space, and some felt that a central computer lab conflicted with the idea of technology as native to the classroom environment.
- The need for STEM might be better expressed by what its impact on the classroom would be, rather than in abstract terms. Attendees were also interested in where North Colonie stands currently as compared to other schools as far as technology and ability to integrate STEM.
- It was generally agreed that the hierarchy of STEM understanding, from most understanding to least understanding, would be teachers, administrators, students, parents, and community members who are not affiliated with the school. The message needs to be catered for understanding by all levels.

DISCUSSION TOPIC 3: PROJECT COST

All attendees agreed that cost was a major decision-maker for many people, especially when they felt that they did not completely understand the need for the project. This particular group did not take issue with any of the items listed in the cost breakdown. Other thoughts:

- There was a desire to see items and costs listed as “Essential” vs. “Desirable,” with reasons given for each category.
- Some expressed that the video used to describe the project was not particularly informative, and felt like a commercial.

- The portion of the project which would have been covered by aid was largely unheard or ignored; many taxpayers got the impression that they would be footing the entire bill.
- Numbers for increased human resources and staffing were not mentioned as part of the project. Attendees would have liked to hear more about the staffing plan and its cost.
- STEM did not appear to be mentioned in many places in the project descriptions or cost breakdowns, which made the messaging seem disjointed and non-cohesive.
- Some group members wondered why there would only be a single Idea Lab.
- The stating of North Colonie's tax rank in terms of "true value" (as opposed to something more familiar, such as "assessed value") seems slightly underhanded, which created a negative perception.
- Some group members observed that the highest need seemed to be at the elementary level, but the most construction was going to be done at the high school level, which may be confusing for some.

DISCUSSION TOPIC 4: PERSONAL VOTER REGISTRATION

This particular group reached a general consensus that they would prefer not to take part in personal vote registration, as long as the single location seemed better able to accommodate the high volume of voters than Goodrich was.

- Though there was some confusion about when the district was told about the non-compliance vs. when they acted on it, once the members of the group understood that timeline, they agreed that it was a legitimate reason to hold the vote at one location. They did admit, however, that the timing was unfortunate and many assigned nefarious motives to the choice of one location for this vote.

The group was asked to pick the *top three* items that were important to them, and it broke down as such:

1. Moving the sixth grade to new Shaker Middle School, creating a fifth hall (13 votes; though some took slight issue with the idea of the fifth hall)
2. Enhanced security measures at the front entrance of every building (6 votes)
3. New classrooms at Boght Hills to allow for an additional class section for each grade level, reducing class sizes districtwide (5 votes)

"Expanded media center with attached idea labs at all elementary schools" ranked fourth (4 votes), and the remaining statements tied for fifth (2 votes each).

The group was also asked to pick the *single* least important project component, and the responses broke down as such (one being the least important):

1. Addition of synthetic surfaces for Walker Field and Lower Maloy Field for multipurpose use (5 votes)
2. TIE: New classrooms at Boght Hills to allow for an additional class section for each grade level, reducing class sizes districtwide AND Expansion of Shaker High School auditorium (3 votes each)
3. Expanded parking and construction of dedicated bus and parent drop-off loops at Shaker Middle and High Schools

All remaining items were not chosen as least important by any group member.

Attendees expressed the following concerns across all topics:

- They felt that they were receiving more information at these discussion sessions than before the vote itself.
- Many expressed that they would have liked to see the data that helped the district reach their decision, rather than the final decision alone (e.g. population trends, options considered, cost of each option, comparisons to similar districts, etc.) They also would have liked to see the decision process laid out in detail, maybe not for the public in general, but at least in a place where it would be available to those who chose to explore the information further.
- There was a perception that the district was trying to “sneak” a vote past taxpayers who didn’t have children currently in school.
- Two people learned about the vote through the negative postcard they received, and were motivated to vote because of their anger over the perception that the school was trying to exclude them.
- Mailings for the vote looked very similar to other school information, so many people without students in the district ignored them as if they were general information vs. a vote that would potentially increase their taxes. They felt that the mailers should have looked slightly different for this particular information.
- The timing of the vote gave several unfavorable impressions, many of which were erroneous (sneakiness, rushed process, apathy on the part of the district about making sure everyone understood).
- For those who attended the informational sessions, they felt that using texting as a means of asking questions was clunky and not ideal.

It was also stated by those who felt they had received adequate information that there were ways to stay informed that non-parents may not have known about. One attendee suggested that perhaps the school could partner with community centers to get information out to the public who may not be tied directly to the school by their children.

Group Discussion Notes – Room 12

DISCUSSION TOPIC 1: ENROLLMENT

- Moving the 6th grade to the middle school would make class sizes more equitable. Right now the 6th grade classes are larger in some schools.
- This move would prevent redistricting.
- How many classes deep are in each school?
- How is this going to reduce class sizes?
- Let's start spreading children out.
- Are class sizes different for each grade level?
- What is the ideal amount of students in a classroom?
- 25 or less, but some classes have 28 and 29 students.
- So, the idea is that we can't build onto the elementary schools, and just add space at the Jr. High School?
- We lost BOCES at Forts Ferry, so we lost money.
- Only two elementary schools can have additions.
- As a parent, I'd be fuming if my child's school didn't get the addition. If the addition is at the Jr. High, then every student benefits.
- I have friends that don't believe the enrollment is going to rise that significantly.
- What's the plan for integrating the 6th graders at the Jr. High?
- We are the only school district in the Capital Region with this grade level configuration.
- I think by the end of 6th grade the kids are ready to get out of the elementary school.
- We went through this years ago. I like this plan [to move the 6th graders to the Jr. High].
- The 6th graders get too big for their britches—they need to be with older role models.
- The 6th grade curriculum will be better aligned when they're in the Jr. High.
- Do you anticipate that bright 6th graders can be in 7th- and 8th-grade classes?
- Would sports be part of the move?
- Modified would still remain 7th- and 8th-grade. Sixth graders participate in intramurals.
- What's the number of children per classroom? I want that breakdown.

DISCUSSION TOPIC 2: STEM OPPORTUNITIES

- This is a phenomenal opportunity—you need to catch their interests at an early age, especially girls.
- What's the plan for teachers and guidance for this plan?
- Would you need new staff for this?
- We have a large amount of teachers retiring—we could hire younger teachers at a lower cost.
- I see problems when I see labs, computers, etc. It's a lot of money.
- We don't technically have a science lab in the Jr. High—the one we have is nothing fancy.
- Blue Creek doesn't even have a computer lab now.
- You can bring laptops in. You don't have to have a space.
- They can share Chromebook carts.
- Has curriculum changed so much that it would require a full blown science lab? Why?

- Yes. The big thing is that you need more space for hands-on experiments. Currently, the space is not safe.
- These are required labs.
- This district is far beyond antiquated compared to others.
- This district is in need of help. For being a top five district, I can't believe how bad the facilities are.
- We're band-aiding.
- We need better facilities for our kids.
- The ability to get the funding is there. We need to take advantage of this.
- I know that they do open spaces in business, but I don't know if open classroom spaces is necessary for 6th and 7th graders.
- This is how young people are working. Our children need to experience open spaces—it's essential.
- The word choice of the communication made this confusing to me. It was presented in a way that made me think there would be couches and kids just hanging out. If it's really an open lab space, say that it's more structured.
- I can assure you that students and teachers are working hard in those collaboration spaces.
- Somehow they need to better publicize what they'd like to do. They need to reach out to all taxpayers.
- We need to know the terminology.
- The communication needs to be easy to read and shorter.
- What is SNN?
- On the district's Facebook page, I appreciate that there's one voice.

DISCUSSION TOPIC 3: PROJECT COST

- The cost is the biggest factor for the vote going down.
- The information was confusing. It was not clear what the actual cost would be per year, per family.
- The cost has to be lower or people won't go for it.
- I think people voted it down because they saw the huge price tag.
- I saw two turf fields, and thought, really?
- The list of improvements came across as what can we give everyone?
- They do it intentionally to try to spread the improvements to all buildings.
- What do you do then? Take 10% off?
- The original price tag was way higher. This was paired down.
- What's the impact on my taxes today, in 10 years, in 20 years?
- Does this cost include staffing and training?
- Look at the people who no longer have children—we're not having any benefit. I would like to know where my money is really being spent.
- The benefit is with the value of your home.
- The football boosters with the help of the players should support half of the turf field. Kids could work toward the project.
- When is the town going to do a reassessment?
- I think we need to focus on the stuff to reduce the class size.
- Security is not an option [it's a must-have].

- Do we need expanded media centers for elementary school if the 6th grade goes to the Jr. High?
- The synthetic turf was a bad sell.
- What do we need to do with buses? No one is on the bus—everyone drops off their kids.
- Why are kids not riding the bus? What are the reasons?
- The project includes another lane at drop-off. This will change the flow of traffic so that it's not backed up.
- Can we tell students they have to take the bus?
- There's not enough room. My kids had to stand on the bus, so that's why I drop them off now.
- New homes will help with taxes.
- They didn't explain class size very well.
- Apartments are going up.
- The students will benefit most from the turf fields—the fields are poor.
- The turf allows all sports to use it. No other teams can play on our football field because they don't want it to be torn up. We also have to rent space at Watervliet to practice on turf.
- We need more communication and a better explanation for these things.
- The turf field could be used by gym classes, extracurriculars and weekend activities.
- We need more communication. An older person might not want to read a book.
- Some residents don't remember getting the newsletter in the mail (about 4 people in the room).
- I don't understand the security. Why would you put bullet proof glass at the front door when there is a classroom window nearby? I think the security is the least important, but I think they're mandates anyway.
- Sometimes you don't know where the front entrance is.
- An important change to the security is moving everything, like guidance, closer to the main entrance.
- Right now at Shaker HS, parents can just walk down the corridor. We need to plan to move everything.
- The auditoriums are too small. But, if there's a good auditorium at the HS, then that's good.
- I'd question the elementary media center.
- I don't know what an idea lab is—they're tried to sound new age and they've lost us.
- Why do we start the school day so early? Is this related to the parking and drop-off? It's not a good answer that sports need to start earlier.
- A lot of sports teams we play start later.

DISCUSSION TOPIC 4: PERSONAL VOTER REGISTRATION

- The district handled it poorly.
- The Goodrich Building is the central location.
- Wouldn't the registration process be like jumping through hoops to do this?
- Will this last forever? It's just bad timing, but after we do it, we'll be good.
- What' the cost to undertake registration?
- About \$8,000 or \$9,000 for the package, but we don't have to buy the package. We can do our own registration.
- Did someone vote no because of this?
- I thought it was so well organized at Goodrich.

- People don't like change, but it didn't bother me to go to Goodrich.
- We need better communication.
- I liked voting at Goodrich because my kids' school day wasn't disrupted.
- What is the percentage of people who vote on school budgets? About 1,400?
- No, don't change it from Goodrich for the next vote. It's too confusing.
- We need smaller mailings more frequently with simple language.
- They didn't talk enough about the free money. There's a real cost benefit to doing this now.
- We're hoping to get just a part of it now.
- Can we still get the aid?

Group Discussion Notes – Room 13

DISCUSSION TOPIC 1: ENROLLMENT

I went to meetings throughout the year. Everything made sense at the time. All sixth graders would benefit from this approach.

I understand that population growth was the driving factor.

We are crowded, and would otherwise need to redistrict.

Other suburban council schools are using a middle school model.

I went to several informational sessions, and this recaps everything I know.

I think it makes the most sense to go to a middle school model.

I knew about the projected enrollment increases.

I have been part of the conversations for over a year.

This is a good summation. I can't add much to this.

There's nothing wrong with being good to our kids. It's a question of finances. We have a growing population while the rest of the country is shrinking. And we have an aging population.

Neighborhood schools are good. I support decentralization.

We need to look at the minutia of the dollars and cents. \$200 million is too much. Spending \$200 million is the reason why our community isn't supporting this.

As a parent and teacher, I have been involved and have heard the issues. I understand the facts.

The biggest issue was the cost. If it didn't cost this much, I wouldn't have a problem with it.

There are elements we could eliminate without hurting kids that would reduce the costs.

I was aware of the options, and I understood the issues.

I moved to the district because of the quality of education here. I am not a fan of 6th graders going to the middle school. There are maturity issues between 6th and 8th graders, but I understand this would be the cheapest option over expanding the elementary schools.

We moved here for the schools, but we were shortchanged. The district was supposed to build a new middle or junior high school a long time ago. And now they are slapping \$200 million on us.

If we build one new school, it would solve our problems. The \$200 million isn't all of it. We would need more teachers and more buses. That's too much of an increase in our taxes.

We have the land to build a school, which would open up space at high school and elementary schools.

Why should we spend a couple million dollars on a football field? It's supposed to be about education.

It's not proven that building a new school would disadvantage the other schools. Building a new school would be a prudent plan, and everyone would benefit.

We could charge money for outsiders to rent the new turf field.

Can we charge for community use of the turf fields?

It's a community asset. People are already paying for it through their taxes.

Turf fields need to be rehabbed every 12 years.

What will happen with traffic? Wouldn't this plan increase traffic? Can we stagger start times to alleviate some of the traffic concerns?

Why not just add two wings to the junior high school? My taxes went from \$1,700 per year to \$4,600 per year. They keep going up. We want everything, but we can't afford the very best.

The project also includes new roofs, plumbing and heating.

The vote came close. People were mad.

DISCUSSION TOPIC 2: STEM OPPORTUNITIES

I don't believe the projected costs are accurate. It will actually cost more.

This is wonderful, but how can you project 10 years from now what our kids will need for STEM education?

I don't want to ante up more money. We need to find a way to pay for all of this.

There are no jobs for engineers here.

There are engineers and a math teacher in my family. I am a parent and a taxpayer. I want what's best for the kids and our community. They have to have training and equipment. They have to compete with kids from other schools who are better prepared.

I agree, the earlier the better for STEM education. My 5-year-old grandson is coding more than I have in my life. STEM should be done, but what's the best way for the cost involved?

What could be better here? We need to find better ways to explain. It's hard to articulate to folks so people will understand what non-traditional learning spaces look like.

The district has to do a better job educating voters. If you missed a meeting, it was on the news. And there were videos on the website. But we need a PDF out there with all the information to better communicate with voters.

How did you hear about it? I saw something on the news. Otherwise I wouldn't have known about it.

They are trying to slide it by us. A better job is needed to tell everyone, for example what percentage of the cost of the project is for STEM?

I am a hiring manager for Bank of America. I couldn't find qualified people here. I had to go overseas to fill local positions. We need more and better education for the workforce.

They need to do this (STEM), but we need a cost breakout for the STEM costs.

My mother in law didn't get the mailing until the day of the vote.

How many mailings to the general population were sent?

The district is doing a good job teaching kids now.

The community doesn't understand the need for space to accomplish STEM.

What is our local Regents diploma rate?

I understand that in 2017, we have a need for 21st century skills. But the community does not fully understand. In today's work style, we need to be collaborative. We need to drop down walls in cubicles. STEM employers should speak to the school community and explain "here's how we work." What are you doing to prepare our kids?

Why don't the employers finance the training programs? Instead of asking taxpayers to pay for it?

Businesses pay property taxes, too.

Niskayuna has fewer businesses than North Colonie, so residents pay more of the taxes there. We want a comparable education for our kids.

Can we ask businesses to contribute above and beyond their taxes?

I agree with a lot of this (STEM education). The younger the better. It's a generational thing. The older folks don't understand all of this. But the kids need to know it. It will make the next generation strong.

Even education struggles to understand what we'll look like in five years, five years ago. It's a muddy subject. We are connected by phones in ways we couldn't have imagined five years ago.

DISCUSSION TOPIC 3: PROJECT COST

(All participants agreed that cost was the single biggest factor for those who did not support the project.)

\$196 million is too big a number. How will it affect my taxes? That's the question. That's what people want to know: Why with all the new people moving in, why don't the new taxpayers cover all the additional costs of educating those additional students? Why should the costs and taxes be so high?

We have to do something and we have to do it now. If we get the extra 17 percent state aid, that's \$34 million. If we shelve it now, it will cost us more later.

Physical education is important. It's done more for my son, for his character and self-esteem. It's done so much for who he is as a human being.

If we wait it will cost more. My salary won't go up. This will improve instruction. It's in your best financial interest to do this, but I agree some things could come out. But we do need this. It's in the best interest of all of us.

DISCUSSION TOPIC 4: PERSONAL VOTER REGISTRATION

(Everyone agreed the community **does not** understand that a referendum would be needed if the district wants to go back to multiple polling locations.)

I understand it now. But I didn't before tonight.

The paper carried the story. It was snuck in.

Staff and administrators found out in October that we had to go to one polling location. But 4,000 people showed up to vote at Goodrich. The timeline doesn't support a referendum this spring.

The planning process should have started earlier, before the extra aid ran out.

What is the cost for having an additional referendum vote? We don't have the time for hosting that referendum.

If we approve voter registration, there are 35,000 homes. Only 4,000 voted. There would be even more hoops for people to jump through. We need to inform the people.

What would it cost to require voter registration?

The referendum didn't fail because we voted at Goodrich School.

Is there a dollar amount you could support? Just add wings to this building. We need to do something. That would cost \$80 million. We'd need to stagger start times, and change traffic patterns. But we need to keep costs down, under \$100 million.

There needs to be no tax impact.

Group Discussion Notes – Room 14

DISCUSSION TOPIC 1: ENROLLMENT

- Money
- It would be nice to keep 6th graders at the elementary school; I have a concern with them being at the junior high school. I understand money was the determining factor, but have concerns about having sixth graders to the junior high school.
- Agree we need more space.
- Why not expand the elementary schools, versus move the sixth graders?
- I assume the decision was made because it's the most cost-effective; all the information on tonight's handout is news to me.
- If you build on to the junior high, then all students benefit since they all go through that school.
- Curriculum-wise, it's easier to have sixth graders with junior high students; the sixth graders' schedule and curriculum are more like the junior high students' than the elementary students.
- Did anyone poll sixth grade teachers to ask how they felt about moving to the junior high?
- Did sixth graders used to be split between two schools?
- Is SED dictating the need to move sixth graders – does SED have the ability to dictate curriculum?
- Concern that sixth graders would be going home in the dark because of the junior high school. [Others noted that elementary students often already stand in the dark at bus stops during morning pickup.]

Do you see any opportunities that the district disregarded or missed?

- Did the district look at building a second floor on any of the schools?
- Could you move the administrative offices to Maplewood?
- How about looking at a combination of the options?
- Renovate the Maplewood gymnasium to be open administrative space; instead of offices, create an open collaborative space (similar to Google offices).

DISCUSSION TOPIC 2: STEM OPPORTUNITIES

- I don't see how the proposed building work would support programs.
- I don't think the capital project impacts programming at all – you can't just build space and magically have a program.
- The schools are at full capacity; for example, classrooms are so tight when working in small groups students/teachers overhear each other and can't learn properly. The technology is there, but it could be better used if there were more room. More space would help to create a positive learning environment.
- I would like more details about what is proposed, including:
 - Does "more advanced science and math courses" mean more AP courses?
 - Coding Club needs more space – is that for after school? And if so, why is more space needed – if school is out, isn't there plenty of space?
 - STEM lab – how large is proposed? I want specifics on size and what will be in it.
- New space isn't enough; has the district provided teachers with training on project based learning or other new learning styles, ensuring the new space would be used properly?

- Teachers are currently using new styles of teaching, including lots of small group work, but because of the space restraints, students are becoming frustrated (“I can’t hear”).
- We need to see a stronger connection between the proposed building changes and program.
- If more STEM spaces are created, will you need more teachers?
- Are there other program costs that will be created, through creating such new spaces?

DISCUSSION TOPIC 3: PROJECT COST

Participants were asked to vote for the three components they valued most; results were:

- Of highest value:
 - Enhanced security at the front entrance of every building (6 votes)
 - Moving 6th grade to new Shaker Middle School, creating a fifth hall (5 votes)
 - Expanded media center with attached idea labs at all elementary schools (5 votes)
 - New classrooms at Boght Hills to allow for additional class section, reducing class sizes districtwide (5 votes)
 - Addition of synthetic surfaces for Walker Field and Maloy Field (3 votes)
 - Expansion of Shaker High School auditorium (2 votes)
 - Expanding parking and construction of dedicated bus and parent drop-off loops at Shaker Middle and high school (2 votes)
- Of least value:
 - Expanding parking and construction of dedicated bus and parent drop-off loops at Shaker Middle and high school (3 votes)
 - Addition of synthetic surfaces for Walker Field and Maloy Field (3 votes)
 - Expansion of Shaker High School auditorium (2 votes)
 - Moving 6th grade to new Shaker Middle School, creating a fifth hall (2 votes)

Why they ranked items as high or low value/comments:

- I’m concerned the front door security isn’t enough.
- The list doesn’t mean anything without prices and details on each. For example, we may say cut the synthetic field, but it may be a very small cost.
- We need to focus on total program costs, not just building costs – also tell us related staffing, equipment costs that would go up as a result of the new space. (And if the district already has staff and equipment so program costs wouldn’t go up, just tell us.)

Other comments:

- Many questions about synthetic fields, including what is the value of them (vs. regular grass fields); could the fields be rented out to bring in revenue; what is the safety of turf for students?
- I would like to see a ranking of all these items, including what each cost.
- We didn’t receive enough details about the programs related to these changes.

- We need to put a face to the issues the district is facing. For example, one parent noted his child with disabilities is taught in a hallway because there is no gymnasium space, and someone else commented they wish they had heard about stories like that.
- The project was presented all wrong; we weren't told about the issues with the current space.
- Not all residents go to the website; we needed more mailed information.

How big of a factor do you think the cost of the project was for those who did not support the December proposal?

- Cost was a factor.
- People voted no because of the cost and because they didn't have details on what we would be getting.
- There was an assumption it would pass anyway.
- We're angry because we didn't get enough information (four people said).
- Especially if you don't have students in the district, there is a sense you didn't get enough info.
- The cost was a bigger factor in people voting no than them not getting enough info.
- With the insights I'm hearing now I may have voted differently. [Administrators circulating were able to answer questions about the synthetic fields, and what building configurations were considered (including why some were rejected), while teachers in the room were able to speak to how crowded the schools are.]
- With the additional aid it seemed like a bargain.
- There is a perception the district asked for more money because of the additional aid.
- The district needed to prove the need.

DISCUSSION TOPIC 4: PERSONAL VOTER REGISTRATION

- Why has this been brought up now? (Multiple people asked.)
- When did we know that it had to be changed?
- Why now?
- How long in advance did we know we had to switch?
- No, people don't know; they also don't understand that the next vote will be at one location again, then it could move back to multiple locations.
- How long is required to get SED approval on the project – could we still get the additional aid?
- Could they do the vote on a weekend?
- Could they do the vote online?
- Getting in and out of the Goodrich Building was tough.
- For seniors, the walk from the car into the Goodrich Building was longer than when voting is held at multiple locations, which makes it more difficult for them to vote.

Do you think the community would support a referendum to establish personal voter registration for school elections?

- Is there a cost associated with setting up registration? The district needs to tell people.
- Yes, the community would support it. (Most in the room agreed with this statement.)
- There was a common feeling that if voting were more convenient more parents would vote.
- How do other Suburban Council schools do their voting (one or multiple locations)?

Group Discussion Notes – Room 15

DISCUSSION TOPIC 1: ENROLLMENT

Consensus: Moving the sixth grade to the junior high was not a contentious part of the capital project vote. While there are questions about the process of moving the students and questions about the cost of alternative options, the decision for a 6-8 model did not adversely affect the outcome on Dec. 15.

- This is the most cost effective way to deal with enrollment
- Other districts have tried the 6-8 model and it works
- It's inappropriate to have sixth grade at the junior high
- Sixth graders are absolutely ready for the middle school by that age
- We felt this was the only choice given to us; how do the projected enrollment numbers line up with current data?
- A 6-8 model is not a one-size fits all
- What are you building for \$63 million dollars?
- How do we know if the sixth graders are ready for the junior high? We need to let them grow at their own pace.

DISCUSSION TOPIC 2: STEM OPPORTUNITIES

Consensus:

- There needs to be more of an emphasis on STEAM, rather than STEM
- Some of the proposed spaces reflected high level theories; for example, what is a STEM lab?
- We need more structure for what these spaces mean
- We are going in a different direction of collaboration; these spaces are the future of the district
- Has the district considered BOCES as an option? Not every student fits into the STEM model
- We need more detail. These spaces were not clearly communicated as a need and need to have better articulation surrounding their purpose
- There needs to be more cost analysis of these spaces.

DISCUSSION TOPIC 3: PROJECT COST

Consensus: The overall price tag was just too big. Participants said it's an imperative that there is better cost breakdown of individual pieces of the project moving forward. An emphasis needs to be made on clearer communication to those without children in the district. Many people only received one or two mailings.

- The \$196.4 million number scared a lot of people
- Why do we need to expand the auditorium?
- What are we getting for the money? There needs to be a better breakdown and better definition of the cost

- Two turf fields versus one? These are luxury items
- A lot of people are struggling, especially seniors. This was too big of an ask
- We were blindsided by this; there needs to be better communication
- We want more physical mail; access and inclusion are important aspects of this project (you might sway voters this way)
- What is the cost associated with pieces of the project?
- The district already has a date in mind for their next vote; is this all a charade?

DISCUSSION TOPIC 4: PERSONAL VOTER REGISTRATION

Consensus: Multiple opinions about whether voting should be in a single place or back in the individual schools, however everyone agreed do not address this issue before May (it will just confuse people even more.)

- The one location was appropriate
- There was a perception in the district that the one voting location was a conspiracy theory
- Seniors cannot get easy access to one location
- Goodrich was well organized; I don't see a problem with having another vote there in the future
- Table the discussion about personal registration until after the May vote; focus on the capital project and the annual budget
- The no vote resulted from voter apathy, it had nothing to do with the location of the vote
- One location is safer for our students
- Another referendum prior to May would be confusing
- We need to know the cost of personal registration
- If there is a larger turnout in May, will Goodrich be able to sustain the crowds?

Other comments:

- The Board of Education never publicly gave their reasons for why they supported the project
- What would the tax impact be from year to year for this project?
- If no changes are made to the buildings, what would class sizes look like in a few years?
- How do staffing costs factor into the project?
- What has the enrollment been over the past 20 years?
- I think the district went too positive. They need to highlight the negative issues.
- Many people did not like that so many administrators were around the voting area during the bond vote. Likened it to campaigning within 100 feet of polling place
- I think the issue is that people don't see or feel the pain. Schools are good, taxes are low. People don't really see a problem at the scale of the solution proposed. I voted for the proposal, but I always would. I think you really have to explain the problem using solid facts and analysis, because people aren't motivated enough – things are too good.

- It seemed like a lot was 'needed' at one time. Would it be better to do one thing every two years or so? Just in case the [projected enrollment] numbers are wrong?
- Generalized lack of communication to the public.
- How do we fix the problem about residents not getting mailing?
- How have the population projections from the 2015-Dec. 2018 study aligned with enrollment to date?
- How does STEM affect children with special needs and benefit their education needs?
- The district needs better outreach to the no voters. Senior Citizen Advisory Council – communicate importance of technology to jobs. Consider a cable buy to make folks aware.

Group Discussion Notes – Room 16

DISCUSSION TOPIC 1: ENROLLMENT

- By creating the new middle school concept, we will be comparable to other districts
- Vacancies at elementary schools could then be used for room
- Is the spike in enrollment true? The district needs to communicate about enrollment spikes in a better way
- Adolescence is an important milestone. I'm in support of this choice; this will expose them to social influences that are important, as well as social, emotional and behavioral academic benefits
- Try to keep the grade levels together
- How will they integrate the sixth grade into this building? Please be public with this plan; do not seclude the sixth grade
- I've worked in K-6 and 6-8 settings; I've seen things that are not great, but this is a pragmatic decision. There's no room as it is. There are sincere overcrowding issues
- There are 28 students in my wife's class and 30 kids in a sixth grade class
- Are there any historical numbers that show other "peaks" in enrollment?
- A lot of people just didn't understand what they were voting for. There was a general lack of awareness for the older generation.
- We didn't have any information on taxable cost.

DISCUSSION TOPIC 2: STEM OPPORTUNITIES

- I am a huge supporter of STEM; I'm not okay with students being pulled out of core courses to get ELA, OT, and PT
- Larger classrooms means there's less room for differentiated instruction; there's a capacity issue in that decision
- Are they thinking about STEAM instead of just STEM?
- The community doesn't understand the connection.
- It's essential for the future of our country and our world
- The district is missing the boat. STEM will draw people for world-class offerings
- I am frustrated. The district is trying to do too much at once. Why weren't some of these things done sooner? Is this project like deferred home improvements?
- Most people in the town of Colonie don't know what STEM means
- You need to link STEM to technology skills that lead to jobs. Older residents are not relating to the terminology
- I think the no voters aren't here tonight.
- Put this information in print. It is important to frame this conversation around the value of the spaces.

- Some people think this is “crazy new stuff.” Other districts who have these opportunities need to be highlighted. We will miss out otherwise; students face a lot of competition when they try to get into college.

DISCUSSION TOPIC 3: PROJECT COST

- The cost was a huge factor for “no” voters.
- I don’t think it was cost. Our yes voters didn’t come out to vote.
- If you didn’t go on the website, you didn’t understand that a lot of the project factored in state aid.
- Maybe some aspects can be done at a different time (parking, etc.) Is the expansion of the high school as important?
- They couldn’t have done a better job of educating the community. Economists can talk about long-term; it all relates to property values at a school level.
- We need a fact sheet to break down the cost. What happens to our class sizes if we don’t do this?
- The costs were disingenuous.
- Everyone in this room wants this to pass, but only people who passionately feel one way or the other voted
- Parents are not doing their part to promote this project
- Going to the meetings made you think everyone supported the project
- \$250 increase a year in taxes was routine before the tax cap
- This is a normal hit in pre-tax cap era.
- What was your \$170 million plan, \$150 million plan, \$120 million plan, etc. Some voters got a sense that this was the wish list
 - “I worry when my kids come back to buy that \$250,000 house they won’t be able to afford taxes
- Without this passing, North Colonie can’t keep its standing in the top 5
- Can we vote for options?
- We need to inform the uninformed.
- Why do we need glass hallways? Not a good visual.

DISCUSSION TOPIC 4: PERSONAL VOTER REGISTRATION

- Does this mean from now on we are voting in one location? I think it’s a cop out to say voting at one location is an obstruction because of the record turnout
- As an elementary parent, we had an event. The motivated voters are coming out
- The biggest reason for the no vote was the date
- What is the cost associated with personal registration?
- The community did not understand the process

- It would be well supported if it was well communicated
- The law is very clear
- We don't care where we go, we just want to know where to go
- Many non-registered voters came out for the first time.
- My fear is this is a huge distraction to the actual vote. I think has become a red herring for people who want to get out and vote.
- Change is uncomfortable.
- The press was bad, plus the vote was two weeks before Christmas. That was the perception.
- Parents were busy and thought it was going to pass, so they didn't get out to vote.