

School Construction Project Priority List Review Committee  
MEETING MINUTES  
Tuesday, January 29, 2013  
11:30 AM in Room 2B of the LOB

The Meeting was called to order at 11:36 AM.

Chairman, Representative Andrew Fleischmann, shared opening remarks and introduced Donald DeFronzo, the Acting Commissioner to The Department of Construction Services.

Co- Chair, Senator Andrea Stillman, shared her opening remarks as she addressed the committee.

DeFronzo presented the 2012-2013 School Building Project Priority List to the Committee (composed of 27 projects in 15 different communities). He introduced the staff present with him and further explained the different sub-sections of the list. The floor was then opened for questions.

Rep. Fleischmann inquired about the astericks on table two, with 4 of the 7 school building project's projected enrollment pending further support from the district.

Paige Farnham replied that the 4 school building project's projected enrollment did not need to be formalized yet. She stated that the figures submitted were reasonably sufficient for a grant application.

Rep. Fleischmann further asked if there is a requirement for the schools to make more accurate projects before a building project goes through.

Farnham responded that no grant payments will be made until enrollment meets the set standards and that The State Department of Education has notified the districts as to what specifics needed to be fixed.

Rep. Fleischmann asked why the price per square foot was so much more expensive for some projects.

Farnham stated that in order to get detailed reasons why, she would have to pull up the project files and deferred the question to Kathleen Demsey.

Kathleen Demsey explained that there are many factors that could accompany the difference but the biggest was funds that needed to be spent for the acquisition of new sites and the Real Estate prices associated with this.

Rep. Fleischmann asked to have the figures separated to get a better idea of the relative costs. He further questioned what the "fitness centers" being added to magnet schools referred to.

Farnham stated she would have to go back and look at the files for specific descriptions but that they were separate from gymnasium space specifications.

Rep. Fleischmann requested clarity on security features of new school projects and what specific guidelines needed to be followed.

DeFronzo noted that security expenditures are reimbursable and specific security features are left to the discretion of the town in which the school will reside. He further added that besides specific building requirements needing to be met pertaining to infrastructure, there is no universal standard for school security when building or renovating a school.

Rep. Fleischmann further questioned that there was no guidelines in any department pertaining to entrance security for a school building and whether there was staff with expertise on the subject matter.

DeFronzo added that there was not for a school building but there is a review process for safety and security standards in all new state construction building projects that is reviewed by members of his staff.

Sen. Stillman posed a question in relevance to table four and whether it is normal for construction costs to go up.

Farnham insisted that the increases in cost were not due to the construction industry but rather fluctuations in price determined in the significant amount of time between a grant application, a grant commitment, and completion or near completion of a project.

DeFronzo suggested that the costs are not escalating significantly and that the market place is still very competitive.

Sen. Stillman asked about security and if there were any safeguards in place to make sure that construction companies weren't abusing funds being provided by the state.

Farnham explained that when referring to security measures, costs can appear as a line item cost component. She added that this established cost structure becomes firmer and can be lined up for a bid which avoids the state being taken advantage of.

Sen. Stillman reiterated that she never wants state funds to be abused and further asked about funding for the fitness centers.

Farnham clarified that in order for a space to receive funding, it must be justified in relevance of how it relates to school programs and receive the approval of the Department of Education following review.

Sen. Stillman added she is glad to see that the space is reviewed.

Senator Boucher questioned the cost comparisons related to industry standards and asked if staff was available to look into bids being too high to meet safety standards following an event.

DeFronzo felt that though his staff has been reduced, they are very good at looking over space standards and can review proposals in professional ways. He added that there is a Committee on School Construction Standards which aims towards benchmark cost estimates for projects, and explained the time frame.

Sen. Boucher asked about cost comparisons relating to safety and security.

DeFronzo stated that trade groups had been coming forward and proposing general industry standard ideas dealing with school security. He added that they had been referred to the Governor's Commission as well as the Legislative Task Force.

Senator Frantz posed a question as to the structure of the committee and voting process.

Rep. Fleischmann explained that the vote is not to fund the priority list but to move it to the Education Committee which would then send it to the Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee.

Sen. Frantz inquired about the relevance of the different categories.

DeFronzo responded that the tables have different priorities and are reviewed by professionals. He then explained the different categories.

Sen. Boucher asked if there was a trend in the number of construction projects with enrollment being down.

Farnham did not believe that there was a trend impacting the volume of grant applications and explained that school construction entitles many different aspects from renovation to entirely new schools. She added that smaller projects would have lower costs.

The Committee Clerk announced the Roll call with the following members voting in the affirmative:

Rep. Fleischmann, Sen. Stillman, Rep. Ackert, Sen. Boucher, Rep. Floren, Sen. Frantz, and Rep. McCrory.

Sen. Fonfara was absent from the vote.

Rep. Fleischmann recessed the committee at 12:18 PM, holding the vote open until 3:00 PM. The Priority List passed with 7 voting: 7 yes, 0 no, 0 abstentions, 1 absent and not voting.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:00 PM

Christopher Calabrese

Clerk

Richard Eighme

Assistant Clerk