

Education Committee

MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, January 25, 2017

10:30 AM in Room 2D of the LOB

The meeting was called to order at 10:39 AM by Representative, Fleischmann

The following committee members were present:

Senators: Sen. Slossberg, Sen. Boucher, Sen. Frantz, Sen. Osten, and Sen. Formica,

Representatives : Rep. Fleischmann, Rep. Lavielle, Rep. Rojas, Rep. Davis, Rep. Walker, and Rep. Ziobron

Absent were:

Senators: Sen. Fonfara

Representatives :
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Representative Fleischmann convened the meeting, making his opening remarks, passing the floor to Senator Slossberg..

Senator Slossberg made her opening remarks passing the floor to Senator Boucher.

Senator Boucher made her opening remarks passing the floor back to Representative Fleischmann.

Representative Fleischmann called the Department of Administration Services Commissioner Melody Currey, along with the Director of the Office of School Construction Grants & Review Kosta Diamantis

Commissioner Melody Currey read from written testimony.

Representative Fleischmann opened the floor for questions from members.

Representative Fleischmann asked a question to the Commissioner in regards to the letter about the two projects not recommended in going forward by DAS and if the reason for that was because there had been new information received.

Commissioner Currey referred to her testimony to answer the question in the affirmative, as well as deferring to Kosta to answer the latter half of the question.

Representative Fleischmann proceeded to ask what changes there were to the list since last year.

Commissioner Currey explained that some projects were unable to move forward and so were not included and that others were shovel-ready and complicit.

Representative Fleischmann asked for clarification from Commissioner Currey about non-shovel-ready projects as well as the enrollment estimate issue, specifically the confidence that DAS has in those estimates.

Commissioner Currey referred to testimony and then referred it to Kosta, who indicated that his section had done an eight year look forward and an additional five year look back in regards to this issue. Furthermore, he indicated that predicting enrollment for new programs is difficult and new information for Shepaug is still coming in.

Representative Fleischman asked whether the five year look back was new.

Kosta said that it was –but not statutorily required – and that enrollment estimates were improved by looking at total capacity figures. Better estimates could allow them to run other programs in the same school to save costs and build smaller schools.

Representative Fleischmann thanked Commissioner Currey and Kostas for answers, opened the floor for more questions.

Senator Frantz, who asked questions regarding over-borrowing for the school construction projects and remarked on the subject of how tragic it would be to see there be no funding approved at the last minute.

1 Commissioner Currey referred to her testimony, there was input as well from Kosta..

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Senator Frantz then passed the floor to Representative Lavielle.

1 Representative Lavielle, asked questions in regards to how DAS goes about reviewing the enrollment estimate numbers and their entire process in general and how it could affect construction projects.

Commissioner Currey referred to the guidebook which explains this process and that they are still working with schools on this ‘Living Document’. They have found that assessing estimates bottom-up, by looking at square footage, is better than looking top-down. She then referred it to Kosta who explained that enrollment estimates are further

complicated because schools providing estimates are not experts. He concluded that these schools applications were still vetted until given statutory approval, so DAS can change if schools decide to change.

Representative Lavielle thanked Currey and Kosta for coming to testify and for their explanation. She then passed the floor to Representative Walker.

Representative Walker, asked questions in regards to the five year look back mentioned by Kosta as well as inquiring how much these projects cost per capita.

Commissioner

Currey referred to her testimony and deferred to Mr. Kosta, who explained that school districts are required to submit 8 year enrollment projections which can be used to figure out costs per capita over time, and both square footage and 5 year look backs are also figured in.

Representative Walker followed up by asking if costs are usually estimated per capita.

Kosta replied by saying that costs could also vary depending on whether the school was a technical school, and therefore could require more space or expensive equipment, Like Shepaug who desire an equine program.

Representative Walker then asked if there were corrections or reimbursements if the 8 year enrollment projection was off.

Kosta replied by saying that costs won't change after approval, but they hoped that new or renovated schools would attract kids from magnet schools.

26) Representative Walker then passed the floor to Senator Boucher.

Senator Boucher commented that the process was confusing, especially planning and zoning and asked why there was a five year look back. she then asked questions in regards to the DAS taking the ability for communities to pay for some or all of the projects and whether the community needed to vote if the principal applied for a grant.

Commissioner

Currey replied that the vote would happen between applying for the grant and approval of the grant and added that planning and zoning only affected approval if the land had been bought for construction. Currey also replied that the 5 year look back made estimating enrollment easier and that the community decided the district's ability to pay, not DAS.

Senator Boucher then passed the floor to Senator Slossberg.

Senator Slossberg asked questions in regards to the program cost and Change Orders done by DAS and thanked them for their work with schools and for dropping costs.

Commissioner Currey replied that the new rule for change orders is that they are to be submitted to the agency within 6 months of approval. Previously, a court decision

interpreted legislation differently than intended, which was that approval was when Board signed the change order. This created the problem that there was not sufficient documentation for change orders and this left costs with the town once the contractors left town.

Senator Slossberg asked if there had been any late change orders since.

Commissioner Currey replied that there hadn't been any.

Senator Slossberg remarked on testimony and passed the floor to Representative Ziobron.

Representative Ziobron asked questions in regards to how the DAS informs schools who are midway through the process about the Department's policy changes.

Commissioner Currey said that procedures were explained at events held for the school and that any schools that have felt denied by the policy change in change orders have been spoken with.

Representative Ziobron thanked Commissioner Currey and mentioned that change orders could also save costs, and then gave the floor to Representative Fleischmann.

Representative Fleischmann further questioned Commissioner Currey regarding the amount of projects in 2017 as compared to 2016 and asked if anymore projects could be cut.

Commissioner Currey referred to her testimony to answer the Representative.

Representative Fleischmann gives floor to Senator Boucher.

Senator Boucher asked a question regarding current and future projects in Greenwich and the state mandate about race in schools.

Commissioner Currey referred to her testimony to answer the question.

Senator Boucher yielded the floor to Representative Fleischmann.

Representative Fleischmann motioned to vote on Item #4 on Agenda regarding a program to support regional collaborative efforts to enhance cost efficiencies for students.

The motion was seconded by Senator Slossberg.

A motion was made a to recess the meeting and keep the voting open until 2:00PM

The meeting was recessed until 2:00 PM.

Leslie Navarrete
Committee Clerk

William Allen
Assistant Clerk
