

**COMPREHENSIVE PLAN ADVISORY COMMITTEE (CPAC)
SPECIAL MEETING**

MINUTES OF JUNE 11, 2008

(As Approved June 25, 2008)

Present:

Members: Kate Bedard, Connie Clancy, Lucia Foley, Bob Gelinas, Martha Johnson, Dale Johnston, Jeremy King, Jeff Labrecque, Dan Luis, Jesse Lytle, Melissa O'Brien, Kurt Schenker, Martha Terry (Excused: Nathan Therien and Linda Young)

Staff: Richard Harris, Town Planner

Liaisons: Helen Fantini (Planning Board), John Hine (Selectboard)

Public: Joan Rosner, Wendy Kelleher

Mr. King called the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m.

1. 7:00: Guest Speaker: Gus Sayer, Superintendent of Schools

Mr. King reviewed the creation and functions of CPAC and introduced all of the members present.

Dr. Sayer noted that he had received a list of questions which members had submitted to the Town Planner and he would use those questions as the outline for his discussion.

1. What does the school system need over the next generation?

The Town has been very good to the schools – Middle School and High School renovations and expansions. These projects will serve those capital needs for 15-20 years. However, there are severe needs in the elementary schools.

Mosier School is 40 years old and needs renovations.

Plains School is 75 years old. It is not adequate as a Primary School for multiple reasons. The physical space for some of the classrooms is only 650 square feet but should be 1,000 square feet. Due to the changes in technology and demands, the heating and electrical systems are recommended for replacement. Rooms within the building and its overall layout are not conducive to educational purposes and are not sufficiently “airy”.

The Town made a good decision to purchase the “Toth” property. Its’ physical proximity to both the Mosier and Middle Schools offers the prospect of creating a “3-building” educational complex. While this may increase transportation costs, such a complex provides the greatest degree of organizational flexibility.

Programmatically, Dr. Sayer suggested that there are educational issues that need to be address. South Hadley schools needs to institute some programs:

- Recently, the School Committee has established a librarian and a guidance counselor at the Middle School.
- A librarian needs to be established at the elementary grade levels as well.
- An Alternative Education program needs to be established.
- Foreign language programs need to be instituted in the elementary grades.
- South Hadley cannot host certain track and field events due to the inadequacy of the track facility. Therefore, the fields and track need upgrading for the athletic teams.

2. *What can we hope for, in connection with Plains School and the "Toth" property off Mosier Street?*

Dr. Sayer noted that the Plains School needs to be replaced. The "Toth" property offers a potential opportunity to create a "3 school" complex.

3. *What kinds of things can the school system do to become more green?*

Dr. Sayer noted that others can speak more definitively about this issue. However, he did note the following points:

- A group of students is spearheading a composting program with support from teachers.
- The schools have taken some steps to promote energy conservation; not for environmental reasons, but to conserve costs.
- Some grants have been used to implement capital investments which have a longer payback.

Mr. Harris and several CPAC members suggested that the Capital Planning Committee could consider an environmental cost consideration in ranking capital projects – the environmental costs of not doing the capital project as well as the life cycle cost of implementing the project.

4. *What can we do to involve our students more in the community?*

Dr. Sayer suggested that a youth center has not worked well. Thus, he has suggested this matter be deferred.

5. *How dependent are we on School Choice monies?*

Dr. Sayer reviewed the costs and benefits of the School Choice program. South Hadley receives approximately 140 students in this program – roughly 6% of the student population. Approximately 60-70 South Hadley students leave the district under the program to attend other systems. In terms of revenue, the Schools receive

approximately \$800,000 in School Choice revenues. Financially, it is an economic gain for the district as the per student revenue is less than the incremental costs to educate the students.

The School Department has studied the reasons students leave the South Hadley schools under School Choice:

- Family relationships
- Previously began school in the other district and wish to complete in that district
- Conflicts locally

Most of the students who choose to come to South Hadley through the program come from Chicopee & Holyoke. It is likely that most come for improved educational opportunities.

Students cannot be denied entry to School Choice due to “special needs”. However, the district is fully reimbursed for all special needs costs.

Dr. Sayer noted that the cost for South Hadley students leaving the district under School Choice is approximately \$300,000. This amount is shown in the Town budget as a cost under the General Government – not under the School Department expenses. However, the revenue is shown under the School Department.

Mr. Gelinas noted that the cost for education could be calculated as a function of the 2,300 students and the \$18 million School Department budget.

Selection for School Choice slots is done by lottery. South Hadley could accept more than 140 students, but has chosen not to do so.

6. *What percentage of students live outside South Hadley and how do we transport them -- thus creating more pollution?*

Dr. Sayer stated that South Hadley does not pay for any transportation for School Choice students. The parents/students must provide their own transportation.

7. *There is a group of students at the high school who have put together a great project involving our cafeteria trash. Are there are such programs in place or planned for the future and how can we offer incentives for more students to get involved?*

Dr. Sayer noted that this program is undertaken by the members of the Environ Club.

8. *What is the status of our school buildings in terms of maintenance, energy efficiencies, etc.*

South Hadley's school buildings were evaluated last year and rated as "well maintained". The School Department is continuing to work on energy conservation measures.

9. *If we should go to a longer school day, what would be the impact on the budget and our buildings?*

Dr. Sayer offered these thoughts and analyses of extending the school day:

- An increase would have no real impact on the buildings.
- A longer school day would require more pay for teachers. (a one-hour increase would require a 16% increase in payroll expense – the largest item in the school budget)
- It is unclear what is actually gained by increasing the school day. Usually, the increase is in expanded offerings for music, arts, and athletics – not academics.
- Teaching is hard work and increasing the school day could lead to more burn out. That results in the increased time becoming less productive.

The state is using some grant monies to test the extended school day.

10. *What is our current school population and in what schools do we have room to grow in the next 10-15 years? Where will we be crowded and what shifts in grades might this mean?*

South Hadley has a current student population of approximately 2,300 pupils. There has been a slight decline each year for the past several years. However, it is not projected to continue to decline. MISER projections indicate a gradual increase over the next 10-15 years.

11. *Have you had any discussions with the Planning Department to anticipate where the next large development might come in town? This might lead to where we might build a new school and decrease the need for transportation?*

Dr. Sayer stated that there have not been any such discussions.

12. *If money were no object, what would be your goals for our school system?*

Dr. Sayer offered the following "wish" list:

- A librarian needs to be established at the elementary grade levels as well.
- An Alternative Education program needs to be established.
- Foreign language programs need to be instituted in the elementary grades.
- Reading improvements. Too many kids are not reading as well as they should be.

13. Transportation concerns – I'd be interested to hear about getting kids to school, and related issues of safety, efficiency, traffic, etc.

Dr. Sayer commented that South Hadley has some inherent problems due to its “rural, suburban” natural. Sprawl and the lack of sidewalks impede the ability of students to walk to and from school. He noted Morgan Street and Brainerd Street as two corridors where the lack of sidewalks necessitates providing transportation.

An analysis of sidewalk needs has been undertaken in conjunction with the DPW. Dr. Sayer stated he will provide a copy to the Mr. Lytle, chair of the Transportation subcommittee.

The School Department spends approximately \$500,000 per year for transportation of students using 11 buses. This figure does not include Special Education transportation.

Follow-Up Questions/Discussion

In response to various questions, Dr. Sayer added the following comments:

- The School Department has discretion over class population sizes. However, the policy is to try to limit Primary grades to classes of 20 pupils and intermediate grades to classes of 25 pupils. Most classes are in the 20-22 pupil range. However, physical education classes may be as large as 35 pupils.
- Plains School is considered “overcrowded” because some of the class rooms, as noted earlier, are too small for the number of pupils.
- Mosier School has 23 class rooms; some class rooms are actually “resource” rooms that are used for classes.
- The Middle School has the most spacious arrangements, but 1-2 could be adjusted.
- The High School is similar to the Middle School; some class rooms could be shared.
- The School Department typically has 20% of the class rooms vacant at any one time due to scheduling of classes and allowing teachers to have their own rooms.
- It will likely take 2-3 years before work on a new building to replace Plains School actually is underway. Dr. Sayer noted that the Departments request for placement on the School Buildings List by the State was not approved. He reviewed the process for replacing a school and the fact that the State would not allow upgrading of Mosier School and construction of another school to occur at the same time.
- Replacement of Plains School is likely to cost in excess of \$20 Million.
- An architectural site plan for use of the “Toth” property has been prepared and is available for review.

- The School Department needs an alternative program for “difficult” students. A “regional” approach could be explored.

Mr. King thanked Dr. Sayer for coming.

2. Minutes of May 14, 2008 Special Meeting and May 28, 2008 Regular Meeting

Mr. Harris had distributed a copy of the May 14, 2008 minutes at the beginning of the meeting. But, it was agreed that review of minutes would be held until the next meeting.

3. Review of Status of Plan Elements

Mr. Harris reviewed a new 3-step process which will be used to develop and review the plan elements:

- Issue Identification and analysis
- Data back up and analysis
- Goals, Objectives, and Recommendations for Strategies and Improvements to address the issues

Before progressing beyond the initial phase, the subcommittees will reach agreement on the issues. It would be a vast enhancement to the process and assistance to the Committee members to reach agreement on the Issues before progressing too the recommendations aspect. Similarly, it would be helpful to everyone if the issues were agreed upon prior to completion of the data collection – as with the Transportation Element where more data needs to be collected to evaluate certain issues already raised by the committee. One example, the recommendations reflected a lack of awareness that the DPW already maintains an excel database on roadway and sidewalk conditions.

The Committee will be holding some “mini-gatherings” at the end of July and using the results of those events as well as some other forms of input to identify and reach consensus on the issues in August.

Therefore, instead of having VHB spend all their efforts on drafting of the complete elements and submitting them before there is consensus on the issues; yet continue the effort in a productive fashion and an effective use of VHB time and our contract, VHB will provide the Committee with 2-4 page “Issues Analysis” for each of the following four elements:

- Transportation
- Housing
- Economic Development
- Municipal Facilities and Services

It is our intent to review these at the June 25th meeting (not June 18th – that meeting will be cancelled) and make these part of the basis for the mini-gatherings which will be less formal than the Community Gathering in March.

Therefore, VHB is to provide the Issues Analysis by June 16th.

Mr. King noted that the need to restructure the process arose from the Municipal Facilities and Services subcommittee meeting. That particular element has such a diverse and broad realm, that it would be difficult to approach it any other way.

4. Reports of Subcommittees

Mr. King inquired as to where each subcommittee stands in its work.

- a. Municipal Facilities and Services. Ms. Johnson stated that they have met and begun the process of identifying issues and possible names of persons to ask to attend the mini-gathering.
- b. Economic Development. Mr. Labrecque stated that they have met with Mr. Harris and had a very informative and productive meeting.
- c. Housing. Ms. Clancy stated they would need to reschedule their meeting so that they could meet with me.
- d. Transportation. Mr. Lytle stated that they are to meet with me shortly.

5. Scheduling of Mini-Gatherings

Mr. King noted that the Mini-Gatherings would be held July 23, 24, 28, and 29. He inquired as to when the Subcommittees wished to schedule their events. After considerable discussion, the following schedule was identified:

- Municipal Facilities and Services – July 23
- Economic Development – July 24
- Transportation – July 28
- Housing – July 29

Ms. Rosner suggested that a different name should be chosen for the July events. She suggested that “mini-gatherings” implied small meetings which might discourage people from attending.

Mr. King thanked Ms. Rosner for the comment and stated that Ms. Young, Ms. O’Brien, and Mr. Harris will decide what to call the events.

Ms. Foley noted that Granby has a series of speakers at their public events.

Mr. Harris cautioned that having “speakers” could result in the public listening when we want the public to do the talking.

6. Report on Public Information Efforts

Mr. King and Ms. Johnson reported on the efforts to have “CPAC Corner” in the Town Reminder.

Ms. Johnson also discussed the Ledges Open House event. Several people expressed interest in the Comprehensive Plan effort. She has provided several more email addresses to Mr. Harris.

There was substantial discussion about the possibility of a municipal mail-out for the July events. The prospect of a mail out using SHELD notices was discussed.

Mr. King suggested researching the possibility of using the automated calling system for some future meetings.

Ms. Johnson suggested the desire to have a poster or banner for publicizing future meetings. Ms. Bedard and Ms. Foley stated they would work with Mr. Harris on this effort. Mr. Harris noted that the banner needs to be finalized by June 26th to be effective (He noted that he will be out of Town from June 27th to July 8th.)

7. Other Upcoming Events

Mr. King noted the following events:

- July 9th meeting – Green Discussions: VHB and PVPC representatives
- July 3rd Fireworks – Banner, poster display
- July “Gatherings”. The consensus of the CPAC members was to have these events begin at 7:00 p.m.

8. Adjournment

Motion – Ms. Johnson moved and Ms. Bedard seconded the motion to adjourn. All members present voted in favor of the motion.

The meeting adjourned at 9:02 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

As Approved

Richard Harris, Recorder