



LITTLE COMPTON TAXPAYERS ASSOCIATION

• • NEWSLETTER • •

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The School - Time for a sensible solution at a sensible, affordable cost

The Project: Since 2005, the School Committee has been struggling to find an approach toward repairing the problems in the Wilbur & McMahon School. They formed committees and hired four architects to look at the problems which, for the most part, are fire code violations, end-of-life equipment, roof leaks, and worn out items such as pipes, wiring, mechanical systems.

It should be pointed out that the students are doing well and the school's academic rating in Rhode Island continues to be high performing. In other words, the facility has not seriously impacted the education environment and student performance despite all the prognostications and rhetoric that has come from the school. It's a fact!

History: The entire project goes back to August 2005 when the Little Compton fire chief (H. Hallgring) performed a fire inspection at the school and prepared a report totaling approximately \$100K of violations that needed to be corrected. They ranged from missing exit signs to fire alarm system coverage. Most of these have since been corrected.

But the School Committee, at that time, decided to identify other problems with the facility and, consequently, hired the Mount Vernon Group (architects) to perform a "facilities needs study". The report was submitted on March 21, 2006. Although the study did not identify every problem, the problems that were uncovered had a price tag of \$11.2-Million.

NOT GOOD ENOUGH!

It is at this point that the idea of a new school emerged. A Facilities Needs Committee was created to do just that. A new school was on their minds, and cost didn't matter.

The plan at that time was to recover 33% of the project's cost and loan interest from the RI Department of Education (RIDE) and stick with that plan despite Taxpayers Association warnings that the State was broke and could not be relied on. Too late! Facts didn't matter and the "new school" train left the station.

The Facilities Needs Committee hired JCJ Architects from Connecticut to assist in developing a plan. JCJ proposed a **\$22.5-Million** project which became **\$35.6-Million** when loan interest is added. The Taxpayers Association thought this to be an excessive debt for a small town like Little Compton.

In late 2009, the Facilities Needs Committee was dissolved and a new Building Committee was formed consisting mostly of the same members from the Facility Needs Committee plus additional members totaling

20-people. It wasn't long before the Building Committee brought on a new architect: Durkee-Brown-Viveiros-Werenfels Architects (DBVW).

The cult-like atmosphere continued with cost estimates reaching as high as \$45-Million at one point. The estimates were:

- JCJ's "Option 5" (Sep 23, 2008): \$22.5M (\$35.6M with int)
- DBVW's estimate (Oct 10, 2010): \$28.3M (\$44.8M with int)
- DBVW's estimate (Oct 28, 2010): \$23.3M (\$37M with int)
- DBVW's estimate (Nov 8, 2010): \$21.6M (\$34M with int)
- DBVW's estimate (Feb 25, 2011): \$19.2M (\$32M with int)
- DBVW's estimate (Mar 9, 2011): \$18.9M (\$31M with int)

RI Drops The Ball: Still believing that the State had truckloads of money to pour into Little Compton, the Building Comm. submitted its final estimate to RIDE awaiting results. The first hint of trouble came on May 2, 2011 when RIDE pared down the scope of the project by \$4-Million and stopped the Building Comm. from increasing floor space when demographic studies clearly showed declining student population - a fact that the Building Committee largely ignored.

The final blow came in a letter from the General Assembly to the Board of Regents on May 12, 2011: *"In light of the State's current fiscal condition, we are asking that the Board not act on any of the construction and renovation projects currently under review by RIDE until further direction from the General Assembly."* It couldn't be clearer than this! It's what the Taxpayers Association had been saying for a very long time.

Going Forward: During the period of planning under the assumption that the State would provide a subsidy to the project, another architect was brought in at the urging of the Taxpayers Association to take a second look at renovating the existing facility. On October 9, 2009 RGB Architects provided a cost estimate of \$10.5-Million to effect most of the needed repairs. RGB went beyond what was asked and developed several good ideas that would mitigate many of the code problems including putting in a sprinkler system and phasing the repairs over a period of 6 to 10 years on a "pay as you go" basis. The plan was summarily rejected because it only addressed what was needed rather than what was wanted.

The Taxpayers Association believes that there is significant merit to the RGB approach especially now that the State has pulled the rug out from under the Building Committee after spending \$150K following RIDE's procedures. That money could have been spent on essential repairs. Maybe RIDE should reimburse us!

(more on back)



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The Building Committee should develop a plan on repairing the facility on a pay-as-you-go basis setting priorities and constructing a timeline. There are a number of repair items ranging from low priority to very high priority. For example, some of the higher priority problems are:

- Fix the roof
- Add a second exit to the cafeteria
- Drill a new water well
- Install a sprinkler system

The school currently has carryover funds (i.e., surplus) amounting to a little over \$1-Million. This is money that the School overcharged the taxpayers over the years. This should be used to get things going. Further attempts to continue down the trail that the Facilities Needs & Building Committees have gone for the last 5 years would be a waste of time which would risk collateral damage to the facility as a result of ignoring existing problems. A leaking roof will surely damage walls and ceilings inside the building if not repaired!

It's time to stop all the schemes and reaching for the brass ring. It's time to start fixing things in an intelligent manner such that the facility is brought up to a good state of repair at minimum impact to the education program and the taxpayers' wallets. It's not only the nation and the State that are having a hard time making ends meet. It's the taxpayers as well!

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