Town of Sherman
Board of Education
and School Building Committee

Joint Special Meeting Minutes
Monday, June 30, 2025
7:00 PM
Mallory Town Hall

Presentation Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GfwOoxHkPh0

Members Present:

Board of Education (BOE): Matt Vogt* (Chair), Kate Frey, Kristin Grasseler, Tim Laughlin*, Ryan McGlinchey

School Building Committee (SBC): Bob Gamper (Vice Chair), Jim Best, Christian Decuhna

Board of Selectmen (BOS): Don Lowe* (First Selectman), Joel Bruzinski* (Selectman), Bob Ostrosky* (Selectman), Andrea Maloney* (Town Treasurer),

**Also members of the School Building Committee*

Members Absent:

Marryanne Febbraio (BOE), James Philipakos (BOE), Kerry Merkel (Chair, SBC), Carrie DePuy (SBC), Dave Febbraio,

Other Attendees & Invited:

Michael LoSasso (Principal, Antinozzi Associates), Samantha D'Agostino (Project Manager, CSG), Brian Ouellette (President, Newfield), Stephen Buccheri (General Manager), Mike D'Angelo (Project Executive)

Call to Order and Roll Call:

M. Vogt called the special meeting to order at 7:03 p.m. and then conducted roll call.

Public Comment:

None at this time.

Discussion & Action Items:

D. Lowe opened up the session acknowledging that the BOE, BOS, and SBC was thrown an unexpected curve ball. He gave credit to the talent of the people in the room and believes they can figure it out. He welcomed all questions and comments, emphasizing that tonight's meeting is informational. He went on to add that he does not anticipate that they will resolve the issue tonight. Rather they will take time to assess and will reconvene within a week or so to arrive at a solution.

⇒ **Review of Bid Results & Overages:**

M. LoSasso expressed how disappointed he was in the results, reiterating it was not anyone's expectation. He stated they had multiple estimates all the way through design before Newfield was engaged to manage the project in a manner that would come in on budget. He said they have asked several questions since the bidding opened to ascertain what happened and have suggestions for how to move forward. He then directed everyone to open up the distributed handout.

The first page of the handout outlined a compilation of the bid results which represented the lowest bids. Per M. LoSasso two bidders dropped out as they were disqualified. There was one 'no bid' as it relates to the elevator. He stressed that the coverage was good as they had multiple bidders on some aspects (e.g., hazmat), despite the outcome. He went on to state that the construction project budget is $32.6M while the bidding overages total $7.93M.

Per M. LoSasso, Newfield has conducted bid scope review meetings with the lowest bidders to: review the results of the bid package, confirm the contents of the bid package and validate that the bids are accurate and complete. Factors influencing bid results were construction market uncertainty (materials acquisition) and forecasted regulatory requirements. Concerns expressed by the bidders they talked with included: labor; sub-contractors mentioning tariffs; memories of COVID and the inability to acquire materials; future regulatory requirements for concrete carbon reduction and for refrigerant transitions.

M. D'Angelo echoed the point about materials. He advised when they talked with the trades during the bidding process, they mentioned tariffs and the impact on material costs. One example is steel which even translated into increased for the steel piping for fire protection. He said it bled into mechanical costs, plumbing costs, and is trickling down into other trades. M. Vogt asked if the bidding totals include actual prices or anticipated prices. Per M. D'Angelo it is both. C. Dacunha said in his business he is already seeing the same thing. M. Vogt asked if it would be possible to enter into an agreement now for immediate purchase of materials. M. LoSasso said it would not be of benefit as the bids are already over budget, however, they have some strategies for how to lower bid costs. J. Bruzinski asked if it could be done with a re-bid on certain items with that caveat. T. Laughlin said it was a valid question and suggested moving through the presentation to determine if some of the questions would be thus addressed.

J. Best inquired about bid escalation and if it was a fixed bid or if the costs will go up as market conditions change. M. LoSasso said it is fixed and the trades have built the anticipated increase due to potential market conditions into their bids. B. Ostrosky underscored that he understood the reasons, however it is a big number (25%) and asked if other people are seeing something similar. M. LoSasso said he spoke to their estimator and he said he has not seen this and the only exception he knew of that was close to this was a 15% overage on an elevator project. M. LoSasso said Newfield is imminently expecting more bids back on other projects so there will be additional data to examine.

Per M. LoSasso, the bid scope reviews conducted by Newfield provided valuable insights to help Antinozzi develop two strategies to address the overages: value engineering and programmatic design revisions. As it relates to value engineering, they have created a value management list with 100 potential cost savings alternatives for materials and systems. An example would be swapping an EPDM roof membrane for a TPO membrane, which could be a measurable savings. He said half of the items could generate $2M in savings but not all savings will be palatable and the entire list will not generate $8M in savings. Therefore, the other option is to consider would be programmatic design revisions (e.g., reduce additions and/or remove additions) even though the design was to bare minimum program requirements.

D. Lowe asked if the trades that bid on the project were local. M. D'Angelo said the closest trades that bid were in Brookfield and New Milford. D. Lowe suggested perhaps reaching out to local trades if appropriate. M. LoSasso said they are anticipating putting re-bid packages out with M. D'Angelo stating there could be opportunities for sub-contractors. J. Bruzinski and B. Ostrosky expressed the need for more data to understand if the anomaly is that the project is located in Sherman and there is low likelihood of recurring revenue or if the issue is market timing.

T. Laughlin said it would be beneficial to look at other neighboring towns in Fairfield County and agreed that there is a need for comparables. He referenced challenges encountered by other municipalities (Greenwich & Darien) that experienced increased costs and the resulting impact to their school building projects. T. Laughlin stressed though that he doesn't think they have the luxury of engaging in a 'wait and see' approach. He pointed out that the school facility director's last day is August 1st and the school is half apart with a need to start school in a temporary building after the summer window. He encouraged going through the value management list and exploring programmatic modifications collectively to explore potential solutions that will drive value for the taxpayer.

B. Ouellette said he doesn't believe it is just Sherman. He anticipates the same bidding scenario will occur tomorrow in Hartford and Norwalk recently had to drop a school from their overall five school project. S. Buccheri shared that they solicited 700 vendors/contractors. Union shops were the low bidders, with open shops preferring to work in other areas other than Sherman. He advised while local contractors can certainly do the work it would be hard for them to sign onto this project due to all of the regulations and paperwork. He also said that there is a 20-25% delta in rate between union and non-union shops. R. McGlinchey asked about prevailing wage with a short discussion ensuing on the topic.

M. LoSasso walked everyone through three options for consideration with respect to programmatic space reductions. Option 1 proposes reducing a larger classroom on the upper level which was intended for co-teaching of a unified third grade class. This classroom reduction is also recommended in the other two options. Option 1 also proposes utilizes part of the media center for STEAM space and a reduced art room footprint. On the lower level, Option 1 proposes removal of the addition which provided for an extra Pre-K classroom. They are also forecasting modifications to the greenhouse.

M. LoSasso explained that Option 2 is similar to Option 1 but more of the building is removed. In particular, the upper-level north addition is eliminated with the exception of the small vestibule and necessary support walls. Option 3 eliminates the addition of an open-air classroom, which would allow for removal of the fabric structure and benches. None of the options have been presented to Newfield for consideration and must be vetted with the school's educators. M. LoSasso believes removal of square footage will be necessary to meet overages. J. Bruzinski asked if specific square footage is tied to the referendum language that was passed. T. Laughlin explained that was not the case and is not typical for school building projects. He noted however, that it was a part of the conceptual plan and often the conceptual plan changes. B. Ostrosky said any changes procedurally will require going back to Planning and Zoning, Building Department, the Fire Marshall, etc. He then asked if this will impede the temporary plan with the school. T. Laughlin said that some aspects can continue but others may be slowed due to local approvals. C. Dacunha requested a quick analysis of what the impact would be if the overage is only \$3M – meaning what has to be given up and what is the impact to the taxpayer. B. Ostrosky said they would need to see what could be done with different levers such as leveraging surplus, bonding changes, etc.

M. Vogt wanted to rephrase the original intent and goal of the project was to get a school that would last 20 years and that they went through a lengthy process to arrive at this point. He expressed the concern is that we will be back in the same situation in 10 years. K. Frey focused on the co-teaching for 3rd grade, offering her experience as a teacher in a similar situation and how it can work.

M. Vogt asked about state funding and if there is an opportunity to ask for more money now that bids have come back higher. M. LoSasso said he has seen some districts go back and ask for more, which happened during COVID.

M. D'Angelo walked through the next steps proposal from Newfield's perspective. He recommended breaking guaranteed maximum price (GMP) into two parts (initial and final). He said it may seem unorthodox but is somewhat commonplace. This would allow them to secure critical early trades to start construction and handle programmatic space revisions as change orders. There is an opportunity to seek favorable pricing with value management items. J, Best asked what would happen if tariffs get worse vis-à-vis the GMP. M. D'Angelo advised if you re-bid specific packages there is a risk this could happen. K. Grasseler asked about bid expiry. Per M. D'Angelo said it is a 90-day period. B. Gamper asked about going back to the taxpayer with B. Ostrosky clarifying how that would work in practice.

T. Laughlin asked for a motion to move into executive session.

D. Lowe **made motion** to move the meeting into executive session.

Seconded by: J. Bruzinski

Vote For: All in Favor.

The joint meeting membership came out of executive session at 8:24 p.m.

⇒ **Review and Discussion of Value Engineering and Potential Program Modifications:**

(Covered above in first agenda item.)

⇒ **Review and Discussion of Authorized Appropriations, Bonding and Available State Supports**

(Covered above in first agenda item.)

⇒ **Review and Discussion of Next Steps, Timing & Temporary School/Construction Activities:**

(Covered above in the first agenda item.)

Public Comments:

None at this time.

Board/Committee Comments:

None at this time.

Adjournment:

M. Vogt moved to adjourn the joint meeting at 8:24 p.m.

Notes respectfully submitted on July 10, 2025 by Christine Aruza