

Wednesday, May 7, 2025

MINUTES OF THE FACILITIES COMMITTEE OF
THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION, held
May 7, 2025, at City Hall, 45 Lyon Terrace,
Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 4:32 p.m. Present were members Chair Jennifer Perez, Andre Woodson*, and Albert Benejan Grajales. Board members Joseph Sokolovic and Willie Medina were present. Board member Robert Traber* joined subsequently as noted.

*remote participation

Dr. Royce Avery, interim superintendent, was present.

Mr. Benejan Grajales moved to approve the minutes of the meeting of April 1, 2025. The motion was seconded by Mr. Woodson and unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on the ed spec for the East End school.

Jorge Garcia, chief operations officer, said the facilities master plan indicated renovations were needed at schools in one area of town and it was believed the state would not approve grants based on

the acreage of the sites. He described the process looking for a site in that area of town. He described the Remgrit parcel, where GE still holds environmental and remediation might cause a long delay. He described the former Harding High site. He said the goal is to get all the circulation of school traffic on site.

Mr. Garcia said a pre-K-8 school is proposed for 840 students. He said the building would be net zero, with sustainable utilities. He said the district was saving a million dollars a year on LED lighting through past projects. He described the process used to cost the project, which is at \$120 million. An outside construction company estimated it at \$125 million.

Mr. Garcia said the district would receive additional reimbursement percentages beyond 60/40 from the state based on pre-K programming and LEED certification. He said we're looking to get 90 percent reimbursement on the project. He described the need for more pre-K space in the district.

Mr. Garcia said the facilities master plan included a facilities conditions assessment. He said Beardsley, Edison, and Hall need \$60 million in Tier I repairs. He described the new school as continuing the most efficient means to deliver the highest level of service in an urban school district. He said the new school and the site would be safe and attractive for the

neighborhood. He said the current building on the site, the former Harding High, is an eyesore.

Mr. Traber* joined the meeting.

Mr. Sokolovic identified a typographical error in the document provided by Mr. Garcia. He said it incorrectly stated the facilities master plan had been adopted by the board. He said he had been begging the board and the superintendent to move the facilities master plan forward for debate and/or possible amendment. He said transportation costs involved in closing three schools or redistricting the entire city should be explored. He said this has not been approached in an equitable manner. He asked why renovating as new schools in the East End could not be treated the way Winthrop School is. He asked why Bryant was dropped off the list.

P.J. Karaffa, chief information officer, said the final version of the facilities master plan was not finished yet. He said the board was provided a draft version. Mr. Garcia said Hall, Beardsley and Edison had the highest capital needs costs per student. He said the opportunity was here because we have a delegation that is prepared to fight for the reimbursement rates that we need. He said the City Council was briefed and feels strongly about this. He said we often talk ourselves out of opportunities in Bridgeport. He said kids would have a fighting chance in the new building

that would be ADA-compliant and have air-conditioning.

Mr. Garcia said he was not here to debate, but to give recommendations based on data.

Mr. Sokolovic said the situation needed to be thoroughly discussed and analyzed. He said the process feels rushed. Mr. Garcia said every other city in the state is rushing to get projects on the state list, and we risk that the state caps out on school construction. He said the buildings are in disrepair, not healthy, and not safe. He said the buildings did not fit the criteria for a state renovation grant due to acreage without the use of eminent domain. He said the city would have to pay one hundred percent of such costs and they would not be ADA-compliant.

Mr. Karaffa noted Beardsley, Hall, and Edison are K-6 schools, so students are bused out for 7th and 8th grades.

Mr. Traber said we need to make a better effort to get the opinion of the neighborhood. He said two members of the delegation agreed with him, and they also are in support of this submission to the state. He suggested there be a solid week of meetings in the cafeterias of Hall, Beardsley, and Edison, with a follow-up meeting in Harding.

In response to a question, Mr. Garcia said the capacity of the school was based on the projections for the next year by an outside agency.

In response to a question, Mr. Garcia said the state reimbursement rate for renovating a building is roughly 80 percent; the reimbursement for new construction is about 68 percent. He described the success the Stamford delegation has had in negotiating a large reimbursement rate for the next 25 years. He said he was optimistic about getting a 90 percent reimbursement rate for the building.

Mr. Traber said this was focused on three schools in his general neighborhood that had been neglected. He said Bryant School had been renovated, but that work was not done well. He said his concern was that we have not yet had a chance to hear from the neighborhood. He said the application could be withdrawn in the event of significant opposition. He said he was open if someone came up with a better plan.

In response to a question, Mr. Karaffa described how the enrollment projection was increased by the outside agency. He added that the state could reduce the size of the school.

In response to a question, Mr. Garcia said the site plan includes a lane for parents to pick up and drop off children.

In response to a question, Mr. Garcia said some students from the Beardsley-Hall-Edison group will go to Hooker School, which is fifty percent underutilized. He said Marin will see some relief.

Mr., Traber said pre-K was a much-needed service in our part of town. Mr. Woodson said creating new schools and closing old buildings will make us look good with the state.

Mr. Benejan Grajales moved “*to the full board the ed spec for the East End school.*” The motion was seconded by Ms. Perez.

In response to a question, Mr. Karaffa said updated enrollment projections include four pre-K classrooms. He said because the school will be pre-K to 8 kids in the area will remain in the same school. He said there could be overcrowding, but at this point these are the projections. Mr. Sokolovic said the facilities master plan is predicated on a shrinking population in Bridgeport over the next ten years. Mr. Karaffa said the same firm did the projection for the new school. He described the uncertainty associated with the projections, including pre-K classes and charter schools.

In response to a question, Mr. Garcia described costs per square foot and costs per student at Hall, Beardsley, and Edison.

The motion was unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was on the ed spec for the specialized school.

Mr. Garcia said one of the recurring themes of discussions about the budget has been costs for out-of-district placement. He said there had long been talk about building something to stave off these costs. He said when it was decided to move Skane to Winthrop, we pivoted to the Skane site.

Mr. Garcia said the site would accommodate all the traffic circulation. He said it was proposed to build a specialized center on the Skane site that would help us to start changing the dynamic of special education in the district. He said we understand that we have to start doing things differently in Bridgeport.

Mr. Karaffa said the building would be pre-K to 12, starting with pre-K to 8. Students who reach 8th grade would need a wing to have a continuum.

Dr. Avery said special education was a massive undertaking. He said if we don't build programs in-house, we can't bring kids in-house. He said there were going to be a lot of dollars at the state level to help districts bring more dollars back into the district for programs.

Mr. Karaffa said we took the recommendation of the state technical assistance team. He said the program could be built into a regional special education center once we are sure the school is operating in the manner we need it. This would be a decision for the board and the state in the future.

Mr. Garcia said the site would give us the ability to build additional square footage. He said the state's reimbursement rate on the specialized center is 95 percent on a \$75 million project. He said this would demonstrate fiscal responsibility, and it was time for change and disruption.

Ms. Perez pointed out typographical corrections.

Mr. Benejan Grajales said this was an amazing project, particularly since we pay a lot of money for students placed outside the district. He said this was something our parents need, and it will make them happy.

Mr. Woodson said this was a long time coming and he congratulated the staff that has worked on it. He said it would demonstrate fiscal responsibility to the state.

Mr. Traber said it was a vast improvement over what was previously proposed because it is a site dedicated to the special education kids. He said it was

a good sign that there were communications with the state technical assistance team.

Mr. Sokolovic said he was much more supportive of this, but he did have some concerns. Mr. Garcia said the portion of the property given to the city was not usable because it drops down about twenty feet. Mr. Sokolovic said we could have rented that property and received revenue.

In response to a question, Mr. Garcia said there is currently septic on site, and there are opportunities to bring sanitary lines and water to the building. He said the City Council would commission a feasibility study. He said that would be costly feature of the building but is included in the cost estimate.

Mr. Sokolovic said private entities want us sending children out-of-district, and even the state profits by children going to their special education sites such as CREC. Mr. Karaffa said the programs in the building will be focused on the needs of the district. He said it would be hard to bring children who are medically fragile back to the district. He said other special education facilities are being investigated to establish programming in the new building.

In response to a question, Dr. Avery said the students who would be able to be brought back to the district would be based on PPTs. He said the programs had to be built first. He said returning a child to the district

would be mutual decision between the district and the parents. Mr. Karaffa said the brand-new building and the area would help sell parents on the program.

Mr. Garcia said through Dr. Avery's leadership we're looking outside the box and visiting other programs, which has been very powerful.

In response to a question, Mr. Garcia said the city charges the district the permit costs for schools that they basically own and are turned over to them eventually. Mr. Medina said he saw the \$1.5 million and \$2.2 million for permits.

In response to a question, Mr. Garcia said the outdoor area at Skane is serene and inviting, which will be great for this type of programming. He said the building will be large enough to accommodate an eventual expansion to a regional facility. He said we should think big. He said the costs are based on a 45,000 square-foot building.

Mr. Karaffa described the possibility of a sensory room. He said the highest number of children in the building could be 263. He said right now BLC has about 60 children. He said the maximum size of self-contained classrooms has been twelve students.

Mr. Benejan Grajales moved "*for the full board of a specialized school.*" The motion was seconded by Ms. Perez.

Mr. Traber said CREC is a regional education center like CES, created by the state.

The motion was unanimously approved.

The next agenda item was the Bassick decommissioning update.

Mr. Benejan Grajales thanked Mr. Garcia and said his team does any amazing job.

Jaimie McCarvill, finance manager. said the team has been working since March 1st. She said our department removed custodian supplies that are usually used in the summer. The decommissioning team met with each department head, which has resulted in tremendous cooperation. She said furniture is not being moved at this time until it is known what is needed at the new Bassick and what will be redeployed to other schools.

Ms. McCarvill said seven 30-yard dumpsters have been used already to recycle metals and other materials. She displayed photos of the work in progress.

Ms. McCarvill said each department is marking their own boxes in preparation for the movement. She said the plan is to leave the building broom-swept to be turned over to the city.

Mr. Karaffa described the planning and programming committee for Bassick and its work.

In response to a question, Ms. McCarvill said she was not sure what antique material would be moved to the new Bassick. Mr. Benejan Grajales said a lot of historical material was left behind in the old Harding High. Mr. Karaffa said that has been discussed at the cabinet meeting with Mr. Garcia.

Mr. Benejan Grajales described his tour of the new Bassick High, which he said was amazing.

The next agenda item was an update on the facilities master plan.

Mr. Karaffa said we've been meeting with MP Planning and StudioJAED. He said there will be a final copy for the board in the next two weeks. He said other districts do not vote on facilities master plans because it is used as a guide. He said it could be voted on, but the votes could also occur off of the ed specs.

Mr. Karaffa said part of the process is how we can take the ten-year model and understand capacity levels and have enough space for our children to go to school.

Mr. Benejan Grajales thanked Mr. Karaffa and said he trusted him. He said people don't see the work going on behind the scenes.

In response to a question, Mr. Karaffa described how redistricting might take place. He said methodologies would have to be determined first. He said special education programs are being looked at in terms of quadrants of the city. He said high schools are pretty maxed out right now, so redistricting would not gain anything. He said a decision of redistricting elementary schools might involve reducing transportation costs or more equalizing capacity in schools, which would have to be discussed with the board.

In response to a question, Mr. Karaffa said the last redistricting was probably in 2012, but that was minor, not massive. Mr. Traber said he has heard horror stories about living in one place and going to school halfway across town. He said nobody who is here currently was involved in prior redistricting decisions. Mr. Karaffa said moving a boundary line may help in some situations. He said boundary decisions are made in connection with projections. Mr. Traber said a new district would have to be created for the new school on Mill Hill, which would affect other districts around it.

Mr. Benejan Grajales said he didn't want people to think that we are here making decisions to close

schools because sometimes the message goes wrong. He said there have to be discussions and it takes time.

Mr. Benejan Grajales moved to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Ms. Perez and unanimously approved.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:33 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John McLeod

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