



School Construction Aid Task Force
January 8, 2024, 2:00 p.m.– 4:00 p.m.

Per [Act 78 of 2023, section E131.1](#) (see page 196), a School Construction Aid Task Force is created to examine, evaluate, and report on issues relating to school construction aid.

Approved Meeting Minutes

Task Force Members Present:

Mike Pieciak, State Treasurer
Bruce MacIntire, Vermont School Custodians and Maintenance Association
David Epstein, Gubernatorial Appointee
Chris Young, Vermont Principals' Association Designee
Jon Wilkinson, Gubernatorial Appointee
Sue Ceglowski, Vermont School Boards Association
Michael Gaughan, Vermont Bond Bank
Eric Lafayette, EEI Services
Jeff Fannon, VT NEA
Peter Conlon, Chair, House Education Committee

Also Attending:

Ashlynn Doyon, Treasurer's Office
Jill Briggs Campbell, Agency of Education
Scott Baker, Treasurer's Office
Jeremiah Breer, Treasurer's Office
Bob Donohue, Agency of Education
Steve Wisloski, PRAG
Tom Huestis, PRAG
Julia Richter, Joint Fiscal Office
Erica Loomis

Call to Order and Opening Remarks:

Treasurer Pieciak, attending via phone, appointed Rep. Conlon to chair today's meeting on his behalf. Rep. Conlon called the meeting to order at 2:03 p.m.

Approval of December 20, 2023 Meeting Minutes:

Rep. Conlon moved to approve the meeting minutes from December 20, 2023. Mr. MacIntire seconded the motion. The Task Force approved the minutes unanimously with no additions or changes.

Public to Be Heard (Public Comment):

There were no public comments entered.

Review of Working Group Draft for Whole Task Force Feedback:

Ms. Doyon presented to the group the updated debt subsidy scenarios that Public Resources Advisory Group (PRAG) ran at the Task Force's direction.

Ms. Briggs Campbell asked a question about how two sets of bonds would support an annual programmatic need.

Mr. Lafayette asked a question about the definitions of project funds and total subsidy, as represented in the chart.

Rep. Conlon expressed that even the \$400M project funds number could easily be met with the needs of one or two large projects.

Mr. Gaughan suggested that it could be helpful to represent to policymakers a metric such as, for every \$100M of school construction activity at this level of subsidy, the State would be contributing X. He also noted that the Vermont Bond Bank's market discovery work so far indicates that they could support \$1 billion in project funds over a decades long program.

Mr. Wilkinson highlighted that the Task Force should not forget about the other program administration costs to consider that are not going to be paid for with bonded dollars.

Mr. Epstein noted that he thinks that the state subsidy amounts contemplated in the chart are small relative to the overall state budget. He expressed concern that if the scenarios are put into the report at these levels that the legislature is going to think that the Task Force is endorsing these amounts as adequate.

Mr. Lafayette echoed this sentiment and suggested that the current chart almost paints too rosy of a picture of what we are up against and does not contemplate the perpetual spending on school construction aid that will need to happen in order to for a program to be successful.

Ms. Doyon noted that discussions of the scope of need and the compounding effect of the need over time, do come before the financing section in the draft report.

Ms. Briggs Campbell put some draft language in the Teams chat to try and capture the above comments.

Mr. MacIntire expressed that if we include numbers that would fit within a current scenario than we are doing a disservice to representing the problem.

Mr. Wilkinson suggested that these points should be highlighted in an Executive Summary at the beginning of the report.

Mr. Epstein asked about modeling more bond issuances over a longer period of time to demonstrate programmatic ramp up.

Ms. Doyon cautioned against doing too many variations of the modeling and noted two themes in the comments 1) a desire to see what the state commitment and project funds would look like over a longer period of time, and 2) to have a really high number modeled out to show the order of magnitude of the need.

Mr. Gaughan indicated his willingness to assist PRAG and the Treasurer's Office with updating the modeling.

Ms. Briggs Campbell began discussion of the other components of the draft report and asked Task Force members to share high level comments.

Mr. Young noted that the Task Force may wish to put more emphasis on the desire for 21st century learning environments.

Mr. Gaughan suggested adding a point about rural resilience to the school facilities assessment section. He offered to send bullet points for inclusion.

Mr. Lafayette asked that energy efficiency be added and that a reference be added to correspond to the “growing body of research” assertion. He also asked a clarifying question about the combined statewide operating and maintenance budgets.

Mr. Donohue presented more detail on the cost per square foot number.

Mr. Lafayette asked whether or not it is true that towns with higher poverty rates have a harder time passing bond votes, citing Burlington and Winooski as examples.

Mr. Wilkinson suggested adding a note on the Brigham decision and equitable funding.

Mr. Young suggested that equity and a modern educational system that supports 21st century learning, be moved to the top of the prioritization list.

Mr. Lafayette asked a question about the defining the terms “economization” and “educational alignment”.

Mr. Gaughan suggested noting the inflation factor in the magnitude of the issue section.

Mr. Lafayette noted that he was hoping for a program that every school would be able access funds and have it be an open process where you really incentivize work that the State wants to move forward with, but also still provide some school construction aid for projects that the State does not approve.

Mr. Young added that we want to make sure that the money is being used to support the educational mission of the State and of the school, and that we do not want it to be just spent because someone has an idea of how to improve beyond what would be a reasonable endeavor for that particular town.

Mr. Gaughan noted that he feels really strongly that the consideration of the legacy asset in the event that a building is no longer used or is there is a new school built to replace it, needs to be a part of the this report, otherwise, we may have misaligned incentives and not get the results that we hope for.

Mr. Wilkinson indicated that he would send some written comments to staff on the PCB section.

Rep. Conlon suggested including in the appendices some of the individual comments and suggestions from Task Force members, that don’t necessarily have the consensus of the large and complex group.

Adjournment:

Mr. Wilkinson moved to adjourn. Mr. Lafayette seconded the motion. The Task Force voted unanimously to adjourn at 4:02 p.m.