



School Construction Aid Task Force

September 22, 2023, 1:00 – 3:00 p.m.

Microsoft Teams Virtual Meeting
Call In: 1-802-828-7228
Conference ID: 791 002 51#

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.

Draft Meeting Minutes

Task Force Members Present:

Mike Pieciak, State Treasurer
Heather Bouchey, Secretary of Education
Bruce MacIntire, Vermont School Custodians and Maintenance Association
David Weeks, Senator
David Epstein, Gubernatorial Appointee
Chris Young, Vermont Principals' Association Designee
Peter Conlon, Representative
Jon Wilkinson, Gubernatorial Appointee
Jeff Francis, Vermont Superintendent's Association
Sue Ceglowski, Vermont School Boards Association
Martine Gulick, Senator
Chris Taylor, Representative
Michael Gaughan, Vermont Bond Bank
Jeff Fannon, Vermont NEA
Eric Lafayette, EEI Services
Ben Doyle, Preservation Trust

Also Attending:

Ashlynn Doyon, Treasurer's Office
Jill Briggs Campbell, Agency of Education
Scott Baker, Treasurer's Office
Justin St. James, Treasurer's Office
Jeremiah Breer, Treasurer's Office
Maureen Gaidys, Agency of Education
Gavin Boyles, Deputy State Treasurer
Jay Nichols, Vermont Principals' Association
David Kunin, Treasurer's Office
Bob Donohue, Agency of Education
Julia Richter, Joint Fiscal Office
Steve Wisloski, PRAG
Tom Huestis, PRAG
Christine Fay, PRAG

Calvin Cutler, WCAX

Call to Order:

Treasurer Pieciak called the meeting to order at 1:02 p.m. He introduced Eric Lafayette and Ben Doyle, two gubernatorial appointments to the Task Force who were unable to make it to the first meeting. The Treasurer also introduced the team from PRAG Resources that will be assisting the Task Force with its work.

Approval of [August 28, 2023 Meeting Minutes](#)

There were no additions or changes to the draft minutes. Jon Wilkinson moved to approve the minutes from August 28, 2023. Jeff Francis seconded. No further discussion. The minutes passed unanimously.

Public to Be Heard

Treasurer Pieciak announced an opportunity for public comment. No one asked to be heard at this time.

Structure, cadence and topics for future meetings

Treasurer Pieciak and Secretary Bouchey discussed the structure of upcoming meetings. The presented the idea that the next five meetings should be structured around the five specific charges in the statute: assessment of the school facilities, financing opportunities, the PCB issue, governance structure, and potential financing sources. After these meetings, there will be more open-ended discussion on what the recommendations will look like, with the final report due January 15th, 2024. Secretary Bouchey asked Task Force members is anyone had any concerns or comments on this proposed structure. There were none.

Sharing of taskforce charter document

Jill Briggs Campbell presented a draft Task Force Charter that lays out the charge of the statute, timeline, and meeting expectations and norms. (See draft Charter document in meeting materials.) Task Force Members are asked to bring the draft back to their organizations and constituencies and submit feedback.

Jeff Francis commented that the last bullet point seems more pertinent to AOE than to the full membership of the Task Force.

Jon Wilkinson suggested that there are many more safety issues in schools to consider in addition to PCBs. Treasurer Pieciak agreed that referencing all issues around contaminants for health and safety is valuable.

Jeff Fannon stated that he needed more time to review the Task Force offline.

David Epstein asked what the State's policies are with regard to consolidation and new construction vs. renovation. He also asked whether the recommendation is going to be done by staff or a subcommittee of the larger Task Force.

Treasurer Pieciak replied that it is the work and charge of the Task Force to present those recommendations on the criteria for prioritizing school construction funding, especially because we know that the need is going to be greater than the resources, even if we come up with a really comprehensive program. Treasurer Pieciak envisions that Treasury, AOE, and PRAG staff will craft the report, presenting drafts and options to the Task Force for their feedback.

Secretary Bouchey underscored that when components of the report are drafted, they will always be brought back to the Task Force for deliberations and approval.

Eric Lafayette suggested having a kind of digital file system for the Task Force to organize meeting materials.

Jon Wilkinson said that he foresees the Task Force will develop several options, each with price tags on them and that the legislature serves as the ultimate decision makers.

Treasurer Pieciak added that there is probably an opportunity to suggest multiple approaches at different levels i.e. full/ideal, more robust, and minimum, as well as a time framework for when we need to be addressing these challenges.

Senator Gulick asked staff to please post the recording of the Rhode Island presentation in House Education.

Secretary Bouchey noted that the State Board of Education is charged with doing the capital outlay formula, which gets into more of the details of school construction funding such as how much can actually be spent on certain materials. Jill Briggs Campbell added that the current formula is very out of date.

Staff requested that any suggested updates to the Task Force Charter should be sent to Jill Briggs Campbell for consideration at a future meeting.

Planning for future sessions: what information do we need, who do we need to hear from?

Treasurer Pieciak noted that if any Task Force members have suggestions of experts or other individuals they would like to hear from at upcoming meetings, to please let staff know.

Staff distributed a report for informational background from the National Council on School Facilities, "2021 State of our Schools".

Secretary Bouchey noted that other state comparisons are powerful and that we should look in particular at what other highly rural states are doing in this space.

Jeff Francis suggested that the Task Force should have a targeted discussion on the PCB issue sooner rather than later. Sue Ceglowski organized three panel discussions on this topic that included AOE, some superintendents, and the Attorney General's Office.

Jill Briggs Campbell added that it is worth asking the Task Force what the scope of the conversation around PCBs should be given that there is an active program. The statute says “the appropriate state action level for response to PCBs in a school.”

Jon Wilkinson said that the group has to be careful not to challenge the science too much and that the health department, DEC, and EPA are the ones with the toxicologists on staff that run these calculations.

Rep. Conlon added that the legislative intent here was that the Task Force would have a presentation and conversation about the PCB levels and how they were created from a public policy point of view in terms of school construction, with the charge really just making recommendations for the General Assembly to consider.

Jeff Francis noted that state aid for school construction has been stifled since 2008 and that he has been working very hard to get it reestablished. With regard to PCBs, he noted that Vermont took one course and other States and countries have taken a different course and that Vermont’s specific PCB policy arose without very much legislative deliberation.

Informational presentation: State of the State: School Facilities Assessment

Jill Briggs Campbell and Bob Donahue gave a presentation and fielded questions from Task Force members on the following topics (see slide deck in meeting materials).

- a. What is the purpose of the school facilities assessment?
 - i. immediate needs
 - ii. long term planning and maintenance
- b. What are we measuring? What are we *not* measuring?
- c. What are we finding?
 - i. conditions
 - ii. costs
- d. How can we use the facilities assessment to inform a school state construction aid program?
- e. Discussion of preliminary findings and implications for state school construction aid program
- f. Do we need more information on this topic? If so, what do we need to know and who do we need to hear from?

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 2:58 p.m.