



Caledonia Central Supervisory Union
Cabot School, Twinfield School,
Danville School District, Peacham School District
Caledonia Cooperative School District (Barnet, Walden & Waterford Schools)

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October 18, 2022

To: Clayton Cargill, Danville Board Chair
From: Mark Tucker, Superintendent
Subj: Getting to a Decision by the Building Advisory Group

Clayton,

I am writing to try to put into context the work that has been undertaken by the Building Advisory Group, and to suggest a path forward so that they can complete their assignment. The fundamental task the Board gave to them was to look at the renovation/building options from TruexCullins that you asked them to consider, and to gather community members to get their opinions on a path forward, with the aim of recommending one of the three options to the Board for their *consideration* and possible approval.

The three options on the table are:

1. Renovate the existing buildings, to bring them up to code and build additional classroom space, a new second gymnasium, and other 21st century design features in the form of a new elementary wing, at an estimated cost of approximately \$71M to complete.
2. Option 1, but scaled back in terms of its design of the new elementary addition (e.g., a multi-use space combining cafeteria and gymnasium instead of separate spaces) at a projected cost of \$60M.
3. Build an entirely new school building on land owned by the school (the soccer field). Upon occupation of that new building, some parts or all of the existing campus would be demolished to recover land that would be used to replace the soccer field upon which the new building was built, at an estimated cost of \$70M – \$80M to complete.

The above are gross-level descriptions of the three project options that highlight the scope differences; none are described in full here.

In Board meetings, we have discussed a fourth option – do nothing and spend no money – but the Board does not support this idea and you did not ask the Building Advisory Group to consider the do-nothing option. Any discussion within the Advisory Group about this “do-nothing” option is a waste of this group’s time because it goes beyond the scope of what the group was asked to do. You also did not empower this group to revisit the “close the high school” scenario that the Board revisited in July and rejected. Late attempts to bring that option back to life and to possibly create a brand new “option” based on a PK-8 school in Danville is, with all due respect to those who are trying to do right by the larger community, wildly off task and should receive no more attention in Advisory Group meetings.

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The Advisory Group should not allow themselves to be distracted by the question of high school choice as a path towards a cheaper alternative. (In this scenario, some have argued that it would be cheaper to renovate or build without grades 9-12 in the mix, but the Board has already said it is not interested in closing the high school.) Additionally, they should not be inventing a new option out of whole cloth, such as building a new PK-8 structure and renovating *part of* the existing structure to house the high school until the town decides (eventually, maybe?) to add on to the new PK-8 building.

I think, as an outside observer who has attended just one of their meetings but hears about the rest of the meetings from trusted sources, that the group has been pulled off task by persons in the community who fall into one of two general categories. 1) persons who are genuinely committed to arriving at a solution that will best meet the needs of Danville students over the foreseeable life of this project but have lots of possibly helpful questions, and 2) persons who are opposed to *any* project, either because they fear the tax implications or because they retain a perspective about the condition of the school building itself that is not borne out by the engineering and architectural study completed so far.

Please do not read this as criticism of community input – all taxpayers in Danville should have the opportunity to ask their questions and express their concerns about this important project, but as time has gone on what I see happening is the advisory group getting pulled back to square one almost every time they meet. As one or more new residents come into a meeting for the first time, with no awareness of what has been discussed before, or, for that matter, what the group has been tasked with accomplishing, the basic laws of group dynamics set in and the group retraces its steps to catch these new attendees up to speed. Questions have been raised by persons who think the concerns of the Board cannot be serious because they were told (incorrectly) in 2017 that the building was in pristine condition. These folks either haven't read or don't believe what our architects found in their study that point to the need to *do something*. This repeated return to the basic question of why we are even looking into the building issues has resulted in some members of the group expressing their opinion that they may vote to do nothing; this is not an option that they should be considering (see above).

Another distraction has been the concerns raised within the group meetings about the projected cost of the project and its impact on local taxpayers. The advisory group appears to be spending a lot of time worrying whether the project will be accepted by the wider community in a bond vote – but that is a Board concern, not theirs. Any recommendation that eventually comes from the advisory group that is couched solely in terms of “This is the cheapest option that we think the community will support” will miss the mark, as their assignment is to make a recommendation based on the best interest of educating our students over the next 30-40 years, and to leave it to the Board to decide the path forward and how to finance and sell the project to the wider community. Any work that has been undertaken independently by the advisory committee to understand the financing mechanisms, either as a group or by interested individuals on their own volition, is a task that they should lay aside.

The Advisory Group will not be making decisions for the Board, and they will not be held accountable for the ultimate outcome of this effort. They may come forward with a recommendation of one of the three options they were tasked with considering – and that is it. For that matter, they must be prepared to accept that the Board is not bound by their recommendation, and may choose another option. The Advisory Group should remain focused on the assignment they have been given, and leave the rest to the full Board to wrestle with.

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How to Come to a Decision

My recommendation for getting to a decision by this group to the Board is as follows:

- The Board restates the mission of the group, with all that is allowed and all that is not allowed
- The group considers the three alternatives that are on the table from a practical impact perspective. For example:
 - One could argue that options 1 and 2, are comparable. In that case, the choice between them comes down to preferences for building shared space (i.e., a cafetorium) versus separate spaces, or;
 - One could argue that the incremental difference in cost between option 2 and 3 is not substantial and that option 3 results in a school structure that meets the needs of ALL Danville students grades PK-12, without the attendant disruptions of doing some renovation in the existing space at the same time that kids are trying to learn.

I think it is important for this group to distinguish between the role that they play as members of the group and the role that non-group-members play in terms of informing their work. The non-group attendees have opinions that should be listened to, but it cannot be the case that every time they meet, the group goes back to the beginning to “catch up” the new attendees on issues already discussed, and it cannot be the case that everyone who comes to the meetings has a “vote” in what the group ultimately recommends to the Board. Otherwise, this group will be stuck forever in analysis-paralysis, churning over new ideas and details that are not consequential to their assignment by the Board. This may be an attractive outcome to those who don’t want to do this project because they fear the tax impact, but the place to voice that reluctance is in the voting booth when the project finally gets to a bond vote, if it ever does.



Mark Tucker, M.A., Superintendent

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