

## Summary Report of

# Exeter High School Future Search 3

September 19, 2002

On September 19, 2002 approximately eighty-five school and community members of the Exeter Region Co-operative School District convened in the Annex school gymnasium to explore options regarding the future of Exeter High School. The School Board's purpose in convening this future search was to solicit the group's input as to whether the Exeter Region Cooperative School Board should:

- proceed with renovations to the existing high school on Linden Street, *or*
- give voters an opportunity to vote for a new high school on an alternative site at the March 2003 School District Meeting.

This third future search was prompted by two occurrences: the resolution of the school bond lawsuit and the unforeseen availability of a single piece of land that met pre-identified criteria for serving as a site for a new high school

The summary report provides an overview of the information that was presented at the future search, along with the key participant recommendations, accompanied by their concerns and suggestions for going forward.

Randy Benthien of Benthien Associates, Inc., an organization, development and leadership consulting firm based in Goffstown, New Hampshire facilitated the gathering (as he also did for the previous two future search conferences). He has written this report, as well.

## Contents

Information-Sharing and Deliberation Process	Page 2
Recommendation to the School Board	2
Reasons for Building a New School on the Alternative Site	2-3
Concerns about Building a New School on the Alternative Site	3-4
Miscellaneous Suggestions	4
Comments about the Future of the Linden Street Facilities	4
Appendix A: The Agenda	5-6
Appendix B: History of Future Search 1 & 2	7
Appendix C: Financial Overview	8
Appendix D: Comparisons & Contrasts	9

## Information-Sharing and Deliberation Process

The day unfolded as follows:

The morning was spent hearing presentations – *and asking dozens of questions* – about:

- the current status of the Linden Street renovation plans, including the approved bond monies;
- the availability of a recently discovered 118 acre site on Old Town Farm Road that could become the home of a new high school;
- the impact and implications of building new on an alternative site; and
- a comparison and contrast between renovating on Linden Street vs. building new on Old Town Farm Road.

A power point overview of aerial photographs of the two sites preceded a guided bus tour of the alternative site for everyone.

Upon returning from the site visit, participants formed ten discussion groups for in-depth dialogue and debate. The groups evaluated the comparisons/contrasts presentation (*see Appendix D*) and were asked to answer the question: “Should the ERCSD Board proceed in bringing a bond forward in March 2003 for the construction of a high school (complete with athletic fields) on the Old Town Farm Road site?” A representative of each group then presented the group’s decision to the whole group, including the pros and cons they saw, as well as any suggestions they might have come up with.

## Recommendation to the School Board

*Almost unanimously, the group voted to recommend to the ERCSD Board to bring a bond forward in March 2003 for the construction of a new high school on Old Town Farm Rd.* The actual vote break down was:

- 69 in favor of building a new high school on the alternative site
- 4 opposed
- 1 abstention

Many of those present felt that an overarching reason for putting the question to the voters is that the voters deserve to have a voice in whether to stay with the plan, to renovate, or switch to building new. They agreed with the School Board that to not give the taxpayers this vote would be inappropriate. It is a big opportunity and a momentous decision. The Board was congratulated for having the courage to bring the alternative site to community discussion, rather than ignoring it, and merely proceeding as previously decided.

## Reasons For Building a New School on the Alternative Site

Participants voiced many reasons for preferring to build a new high school rather than renovate the existing high school. Several of those reasons received considerable attention and support:

- An entirely new high school on a site large enough to contain it effectively was seen as a **much better value** than the renovation plan for Linden Street. People thought the voters would be getting a “bigger bang for their buck.” They felt that the estimated costs to taxpayers of building new and renovating were fairly equal (approximately 4 cents more per \$1000 of valuation – 88 cents vs. 84 cents). Several comments were made about the variable costs of a renovation project (“you never know what you’re going to find as the renovations proceed – and what that will do to the total project cost”).
- The alternative site offers greater potential for **long-term growth**. Exeter’s new high school for either site will be built to accommodate 2,000 students. This will meet current

population projections through 2012. However, given the amount of land at the alternative site (118 acres), there is far greater potential for future growth options there, than at Linden Street, where space is extremely limited (30 acres). Additionally, individuals noted that the Linden Street site falls below acreage norms for a high school this size.

- Participants believed the alternative site allows the most **flexibility** in achieving the best **educational design**. Renovations inevitably mean compromising on plans – and never getting exactly what you want – because of various structural constraints. However, building a new high school enables the community to design a facility that will *best* meet educational needs.
- Building at the alternative site means **no disruption to teaching and learning during construction**. Participants felt very strongly about this. They were deeply concerned about the impact renovating the high school would have on students and staff and the ability to learn during the course of a three year (or longer) renovation.

#### *Other reasons included:*

- The **athletic facilities** would be greatly improved. The alternative site has room to build at least seven new fields and we would be able to retain the current fields at Linden Street.
- **Parking** at the alternative site (estimated to have 1,000 parking spots) would be nearly double that at Linden Street. And **congestion** in downtown Exeter would be eased.
- A new school on a new site would likely create a much **greater sense of ownership** in the school for all towns in the cooperative – more than exists now.

#### **Concerns About Building a New School on the Alternative Site**

Although the group strongly supports building a new high school, they did have several concerns and questions. Among the more frequent ones were:

- Participants raised many questions about what the **true costs** of building a new high school would be. They want to see specific and accurate projections on the total cost of the project, including:
  - water/sewer (and their long-term maintenance) with comparisons against well and septic
  - primary and secondary access roads (developing, widening, sidewalks) and their long-term maintenance
  - bussing
  - security monitoring.
- The alternative site raises **bussing** concerns, including: possible increased costs (fuel, maintenance), length of time on buses for students in East Kingston and Kensington (recognizing that other towns, like Brentwood, would have shorter commutes).
- After seeing the alternative site first-hand, many participants said they would like to see the **primary access** to the new school be off of **Rt. 27**, and not Old Town Farm Road. They would much prefer having Old Town Farm Road used as the secondary access road.
- Making Rt. 27 the primary access to the new high school would have the additional benefit of mitigating the **impact on abutters**. Considerable concern was expressed for the abutters near the new site. Although there are certainly fewer abutters near the alternative site than abuts the Linden Street site, it was pointed out that that part of Exeter is rather quiet – and this would change somewhat with a new school being there.

- Currently, **water and sewer** are not available at the alternative site. It is approximately two miles from the alternative site to where water and sewer service now ends on Rt. 27. The group asked several questions about extending water and sewer to the alternative site, including:
  - What will the real costs be? (Installation and maintenance of the two miles).
  - Will it lead to more development in that part of Exeter? Should we be concerned about sprawl in that part of Exeter?
  - Should we consider septic/well as an alternative – perhaps the better alternative?
- Participants voiced concerns that in leaving Linden Street, Exeter will be losing an important part of its **community** (and likewise, students will be missing out on being part of the downtown Exeter community). However, participants see an **opportunity** to build community by developing part of the Linden Street facility into a senior center, recreation center, etc. (Also, through building a new high school, there is an opportunity to establish stronger relationships among the surrounding towns and create a “regional community.”)
- If the ERCSD Board proceeds with bringing a bond forward in March 2003, considerable effort needs to be given in **educating voters on how we got here** – why building a new school is preferable over renovating, and an explanation of the true costs (including a history of previously passed bonds). Special care needs to also be given to the wording of the warrant article, so if it does not pass, the renovation on Linden Street can go on as previously planned.

### Miscellaneous Suggestions

- Build a flexible use building so that other uses can be entertained to benefit the communities.
- Efforts should be made to reach out to community organizations, like New Outlook Teen Center.
- High school seniors currently enjoy certain privileges (being able to leave school for lunch, for example). Consideration should be given as to how they can continue to receive such privileges in a very different setting.

### Comments about the future of the Linden Street facilities if a new high school is built.

- It would be a good space for the SAU offices – and eliminate \$60,000/year in rent.
- It could serve as storage for bulk purchasing, allowing the district to save money.
- SST would not have to move to a new facility; it could expand at its current location – and save all the districts relocation costs.
- Should population estimates be wrong, the building could be used for future growth.
- Alternative education and adult education would have more room to expand.
- Perhaps the Linden Street site is not worth keeping and could be sold.
- Maintaining these facilities will incur costs. How costly will it be to keep and maintain them?

## Appendix A: The Agenda

### Exeter High School Future Search

Thursday, September 19, 2002

Site: The Annex Gym

**Our Purpose:** Our purpose today is to solicit your input as to whether the Exeter Region Cooperative School Board should proceed with the renovations to the high school or give the voters an opportunity to vote for a new high school on an alternative site at the March 2003 School District meeting.

8:00 Arrival and Refreshments

8:15 Welcome, introductions and overview of the day

*Skip Hanson/Randy Benthien*

A review of what's happened in the past so we can be prepared to address the questions of today's Future Search

- Summary of the goals and accomplishments of the first two Future Searches (1999, 2001) *Randy*
- Update on resolution of the high school lawsuit *Roy Morrisette*
- Update on current status of approved bond money and other potential funding resources as it relates to the current site and alternative site *Walter Pierce*

#### **Presentation of new opportunities/information that caused us to come together today**

- The availability of an appropriate piece of land for a new high school within Exeter that overcomes many of the earlier objections to building on a new site *Lucy Cushman*
- How a decision to build new (away from Linden St. site) might impact other Programs and SAU functions (*e.g., SST, Alternative Education/Flexeter, Adult Education, group purchasing, maintenance facilities, SAU Offices, and future educational needs*) *Linda Henderson*

10:00 Break

#### **Presentation of the alternative land**

- An aerial overview *Greg Kann*
- Visit the site – guided bus tour *Skip Hanson/Walter Pierce/Donna Bates*

**A Comparison and Contrast: Presentation of the challenges and realities we continue to face if we proceed as planned with the high school renovation on the current Linden Street site or go to the Old Town Farm Road site**

*Skip Hanson and Walter Pierce*

- Design layouts
- Fire and safety
- Environmental
- Timeline
- Costs
- Student/Academic
- Other

- |       |  |                     |
|-------|--|---------------------|
| 11:45 | Working lunch – Discussions  | <i>Small groups</i> |
|       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Discussion of the Comparison and Contrast presentation</i></li> <li>• <i>Should the ERCSD Board proceed bringing a bond forward in March 2003 for the construction of a high school/athletic fields on the alternative site?</i></li> </ul>                      |                     |
| 1:15  | <b>Coming to consensus and recommendations</b>   | <i>All present</i>  |
|       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Each group will do a 5 minute report on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Brief overview of your findings</li> <li>- 3-5 highlights</li> <li>- Your group's conclusion to the questions</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Conclusions of all groups present</li> </ul> | <i>All present</i>  |
| 2:50  | Thank yous and adjournment   | <i>Kim Casey</i>    |
| 3:00  | Departure  |                     |

## Appendix B: How We Got Here

### *A Brief History of the Key Decisions from Future Search 1 & 2 as a Context for #3*

#### **Future Search 1 – May 1999**

- **Purpose:** To explore options for transforming Exeter High School into a modern and coherent educational facility
- **Recommendation:** To remain on the existing site with a combination of renovation and building expansion.

#### **Future Search 2 – October 2001**

- **Purpose:** To answer the question, “Where do we go from here?” *This Future Search was prompted by ongoing delays in beginning the renovation and construction of the high school (caused by lawsuits and appeals related to the 60.76% bond vote at the March 2000 School District meeting).*
- **Recommendation:** To stay the course and plan to begin renovation/construction once resolution of the lawsuit occurs (presumably in the District’s favor).

#### **What did Future Search 1 & 2 have to say about building a new high school on an alternative site?**

- Participants voiced strong support for building a new high school on an alternative site. They saw this as an attractive option – though untenable – because no suitable piece of land was available to meet identified criteria.

#### **What did Future Search 2 have to say about SST?**

- Participants expressed unanimous support in recommending that the ERCSD Board and the SST Board pursue the possibility of the SST moving from the high school to its own new building on a separate site.

#### **Desired criteria in an Alternative Site**

- Be a central, accessible location for all communities
- Be in Exeter, due to the presence of full-time fire and police departments
- Must meet safety concerns including timely/easy access for Exeter fire and police
- Have the possibility of city sewer and water
- Large enough to include several athletic fields
- Affordable

#### **Why Future Search 3?**

- With the resolution of the lawsuit, ERCSD can commence the building and renovation of the High School on Linden St.

#### ***But should it . . . ?***

- Now that a suitable piece of land has been located that meets the criteria identified at the two previous Future Search gatherings?

## Appendix C: Current Site Funding Authorized

### Warrant Article Funding

1. 2000 Bond Vote	35.5 million	EHS and SST
2. 2000 Warrant Article	.5 million	Purchase of Kensington Land
3. 2002 Warrant Article	3.5 million	Dev. of supplemental fields
4. 2002 Warrant Article	4.225 million	SST Lease – 20 years @\$368,355/year

**TOTAL                    43.725 million**

### TAX RATE IMPACT OF EXISTING OBLIGATIONS

**84¢ per \$1000**

### ALTERNATIVE SITE ESTIMATED COSTS

A. Cost of New	43.6 million – 46.2 million
B. Water/Sewer	2.0 million – 2.0 million

**TOTAL                    45.6 million - 48.2 million**

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### ADDED TAX IMPACT OF NEW CONSTRUCTION ON ALTERNATIVE SITE (Assuming 48.2 million)

**4¢ per \$1000 (= 88¢ per \$1000)**

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(Capital Reserve Fund = 2.4 million which may be applied to offset construction costs in either scenario – needs voter approval)

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## Appendix D: Comparisons and Contrasts Worksheet

Presentation of the challenges and realities we continue to face if we proceed as planned with the high school renovation on the current Linden Street site or go to the Old Town Farm Road site.

▶ indicates the Building Committee's assessment of which site has the advantage.

		Current Site	Alternative Site
<b>Design Layouts:</b>	Centralized site	▶	
	Athletics		▶
	Abutters		▶
	Size of site		▶
	Design flexibility		▶
	Bussing		▶
<b>Fire &amp; Safety:</b>	Life Safety Issues	▶	
	Potential secondary access		▶
	Parking and Traffic control		▶
<b>Environmental:</b>	Environmental concerns		▶
<b>Timeline :</b>	Sequence of construction/ Length of project		= ▶
<b>Costs:</b>	Project		← =
	Water/Sewer	▶	
	Maintenance		▶
<b>Student/Academic:</b>	Impact on students/academics		▶
	SST		▶
	Alternative Ed		▶
	Adult Education		▶
<b>Other:</b>	Maintenance/Purchasing/SAU		
	Offices/Storage		▶
	Future Educational space needs		▶
	Impact on Community		?
	Municipal Services	▶	

### Projected Start and Completion Dates Between the Two Sites

	Start	Finished & Available
<b>Linden Street</b>	Fall '02 or Spring '03	Spring '06 – Fall '06
<b>Old Town Farm Rd</b>	Spring '03	Fall '06

