

Connecticut River Collaborative Exploratory Committee
Session Notes
August 6, 2020

Updates Pertinent to Our Work

- Colebrook will open with in-person classes; the SAU board reviewed the two models we are considering and are now up to date on this project. There was confusion and lack of information prior to this.

Hiring of Financial Consultants

- The principal of RHR Smith met in person with those from the Committee who were able to join the session. Consulting costs and timeline are now available for our consideration. Things Ron Smith was hesitant to provide in the meeting were addressed in the proposal sent along to us yesterday. The timeline is longer than we had hoped. He had good advice for us – he wants to be involved in the meetings with the public and talk with committee members one-on-one. Josh, the RHR Smith staff member who is the one who would do the nuts and bolts analysis, was unable to join the session. A second staff member from the firm may be involved. Ron is a visionary type – he’s part of a team.
- References are forthcoming.
- Questions:
 - He has access to legal people – let’s get their names. Same for project manager – Bob Mason. Ron reached out to him and he is interested. Kyle will ask if his cost is separate from the RHR Smith proposal.
- We have 26,000 budgeted for financial analysis and 36,000 for project manager and we can shift funds between the two, as needed.

Single Staffing Model Work Group Draft Review and Input

- Kristin and Katie met with the guidance counselors and Karen and Debra at the beginning. The guidance counselors did the nuts and bolts work.
- Raw data and overview information is what is in the three documents we received, to date – one of the questions raised by the committee – number of staff needed – still needs to be pinpointed. What is preliminarily known is that certifications and focus/expertise would need to be hired or acquired – for instance, not enough STEM and computer science teachers.
- The work of the guidance counselors is thorough – 6-8 hours/week plus background work. With this as the baseline, we can be more creative. More focus on technology and computer science and embracing creativity that is part of the competency-based model.
- The staffing tool the work group utilized is based on a traditional model and may have hindered the process. With more time, they can mold this new interstate district to a higher outcome.
- There has been no middle school analysis yet – this is another separate curriculum. In our first grant we set aside 5,000 dollars for staffing model/curriculum creation; it is still available for them to regroup and refine the work.
- Debra asked them to not focus on town but on one location, for instance. Exemplars was the term used instead of model.
- 35-40 new courses are available in the preliminary documents we received – 6 new CTE programs based on state survey trends, etc. – if one system is created.

- The goal of this exploration is to test the value of providing a higher quality education and not just to eliminate a few positions while keeping the course offerings the same. If the models cost considerably more than what it is right now, the financial model will have to be adjusted.
- Typically, the number of administrators goes down and faculty remain constant-ish in terms of numbers as a result of interstate mergers.
- Invite super-creative thinking, including hybrid curriculum models.
- Next steps:
 - Do what is outlined above in terms of next steps – guidance counselors continuing the work and being explicit about middle school, high school, CTE in one location AND middle school in one community and high school/CTE in another.
 - Staffing model with greater transparency in next refinement.
 - Include the creation of a visual that will help translate this to the public. Three columns – what we have now; model one; model two. Showing the expansion of course offerings with new models would help a lot (35-40, for instance). Seven through twelve when on one campus. Middle school on its own 6-8.
 - Timeline: By Labor Day.
 - Debra will coordinate. Karen will coordinate contract agreements.

Public Communications Plan Provision-Making

- Sharon, Debra and Brian met. They agree:
 - We need a press release, soon – an update. Include the hiring of the financial firm.
 - Develop a website for this initiative that links to the school districts. Just update one website. Do this soon. Announce this in the press release.
 - Ben Merrill provided a proposal to create a public information document – 3,500 dollars for the creation without printing or distribution. He is experienced at this. This begins once determinations are made about model content by the committee.
 - SAU 7 hired a firm to revise its website. It is currently underway.
 - 15,000 was left from the initial Tillotson grant. We have not expended much on legal or a transportation study.
- Next steps:
 - We are investing in a website. Sharon and Debra will be the point people. They will seek out a cost from Ben Merrill on this. It would include press release and website content writing. We will be transparent about our efforts. Include reference to the website in the press release. Content will be reviewed by this committee and Carole.
 - Press release by August 14th filed at noon.
 - Kyle will contact Ben; Karen will arrange a contract with him.
 - Fallback: We will draft our own press release if Ben is not available in time to meet the deadline.

Articles of Agreement Draft Review and Next Steps

- Cappy will join us on September 3rd to help us think about content and expectations.

Rec Center Pool Opportunity Review and Discussion

- The pool is currently closed due to COVID. This adds to other financial difficulties that exist. The Rec Center board would be thrilled if this project adopted/incorporated the pool. In the meantime, it is being mothballed in a situation in which it is secure and safe even in the winter.

- Another option is that the pool will seek other funding options to remain independent.
- The last is dissolution of the corporation, which is more difficult than it sounds. To do this, it would need to be acquired by another nonprofit.
- The profit and loss statement reveals that it would be roughly 150-200k per year. Presently, it costs 300k/year to operate. The pool needs significant capital repairs – funders are interested in helping with 500 of repairs but will do it only if a home is found for it.
- The decision about whether to pursue this is not a decision this committee will make. That said, we will ask Cappy in the September meeting about the acquisition of property, such as the pool.

Note from public comment:

- Make sure the kids will fit where we put them in terms of building/classroom available space.