

February 12, 2010

Mayor Scott Jackson
Hamden Government Center
2750 Dixwell Avenue
Hamden, CT 06518

Dear Scott:

Attached please find the Hamden Board of Education Capital Projects Six-Year Plan that was approved at the Board of Education meeting on Tuesday, February 9, 2010.

Out of the 53 items requested for 2010-2011 funding, the following items are the Board's highest priorities this year. The proposed "stop gap" renovations to Ridge Hill School, detailed below, are critical. Many of us can recall other instances when the Board and Town neglected to take care of basic long-term maintenance in our buildings, leading to expensive emergency repairs when things, as they often do in older buildings, go wrong.

Ridge Hill School: \$2,055,000

This is now the oldest school in Hamden (built in 1969) that has not undergone any formal renovation, and the situation there is becoming desperate. As you can see from the attached presentation (which we would like to present formally to you and the Council), several basic maintenance upgrades must be made. The carpets are ripped, the skylights leak, the HVAC system has not been cleaned in years, the cafeteria floor continually cracks and heaves due to a flawed foundation, and the grounds and play areas are overgrown and a safety hazard. Additionally, the bathrooms are original and need to be replaced. Two years ago, a toilet and plumbing in the Kindergarten area literally exploded, and had to be replaced on an emergency basis at a cost of more than \$70,000.

Given its size and age, Ridge Hill is also the most expensive elementary school to operate. The planned renovations will greatly improve the energy efficiency of the school, including lighting upgrades similar to those which have been put in place at West Woods (and which now save us considerable electrical operating costs). In sum, the proposed upgrades will vastly improve the building, and extend its useful life for at least a decade, thus delaying for comparatively minimal cost now what would be a much more extensive and expensive renovation in the future.

I know you have toured the school to see the facility's condition in person and I would urge members of the Council to do the same. The students, staff and parents at Ridge Hill have worked extremely hard in the past few years to foster a vibrant school community -- with an active PTA, improved test results, and increased pride in themselves and their school. It is time for the Board and Town to make

sure that the quality of the building they are in reflects, in some measure, the quality of that community.

Elementary School Playgrounds

Good playgrounds promote age appropriate physical activity for children of all abilities. A modern, well-designed playground will provide manipulative play equipment which will facilitate a child's physical, emotional, social and intellectual development. Many of our elementary schools have playgrounds and equipment that are outdated. Moreover, because of cost-cutting during renovations, there is a steep inequity among the schools in terms of playground quality and structure.

For example, at Spring Glen School, the fixed playground equipment for all grades is limited to a single play structure, even though there are 60-70 students using the playground during each recess period. Incredibly, Spring Glen is the only Hamden elementary school that does not have access to a basketball court and is also the only school that has neither a permanent soccer field nor a baseball diamond. The recess area lacks slides, hand over hand climbers, and ground level / accessible play structures, all of which are standard at the other district schools. The Board is therefore recommending that the Town fund installation of a basketball court and permanent soccer goals, as well as site improvements necessary to meet accessibility and safety guidelines at an estimated cost of \$60,500. To purchase the remaining play equipment in their plan, Spring Glen PTA has committed to raising an additional \$80,000, a good portion of which has already been raised.

Similarly, the Church Street playground can barely accommodate the students that use its facilities during recess. The equipment there is old, rusted, and barely meets current standards. The \$40,000 proposed for new equipment would serve to not only improve the playground itself, but help restore pride at a school that often seems to be neglected in our capital plans.

While all of the items listed on the Board of Education Six-Year Capital Plan are important, the above improvements represent those items that we believe should receive priority funding. It is our hope that by funding a robust capital budget, the Board of Education operating budget in the area of building maintenance and repair can be significantly reduced.

Thank you in advance for your support.

Sincerely,

Michael C. D'Agostino
Board of Education Chairperson
MCD/wo

Cc: Legislative Council Members
Board of Education Members
Fran Rabinowitz, Superintendent of Schools
Hamlet M. Hernandez, Assistant Superintendent of Personnel and Administration
Marie Jordan-Whitney, Assistant Superintendent for Elementary Schools
Michael Belden, Finance Director

