Co Chairs State Rep. Cynthia Soto and State Sen. William Delgado convened the first meeting of the Chicago Educational Facilities Task Force at 10 AM.


1. Welcome & Introductions

State Rep. Soto gave opening remarks and welcomed the T F members, invited witnesses and members of the public. She presented the full slate of Task Force members, citing by whom the member was appointed.

State Sen. Delgado also made opening remarks, and underscored the importance of the Task Force’s work.

Task Force members asked if there was a timeline for the completion of the Task Force’s recommendations, and it was clarified there is no timeline and that the task Force does not have to complete its work by the Adjournment of the current legislative session (now scheduled for May 7, 2010).

2. Overview of the Chicago Educational Facilities Task Force: PowerPoint Presentation

The Task Force Co-Chairs asked that the T F’s Pro Bono Advisor, Jacqueline Leavy present the Overview explaining the origins, purpose, and legal mandates of the Task Force. CEFTF HB 363 PP Final_3 18 10.ppt

Following the presentation, Eduardo Garza representing the Chicago Public Schools introduced his colleague Ms. Pat Taylor, CPS Chief Operating Officer, and asked that she be seated with the Task Force so she could comment on and participate in the proceedings. He stated that she had direct knowledge on some topics which he does not have.

3. Introduction to Educational Facilities Master Planning Best Practices

Invited Expert Witness: Mary Filardo, Executive Director, 21st Century School Fund (Washington, DC) and Founder/Facilitator of “BEST” – “Building Educational Success Together,” a national collaborative of practitioners and researchers working on educational and facility master planning.

Via the Internet, Ms. Filardo narrated the presentation of a PowerPoint introducing her Washington, DC organization (21st Century School Fund), BEST, and 10 key principles for best practice in Educational Facility Master Planning. IntroFMPlanning Final_3 18 10.ppt

Ms. Filardo went on to add that at a time which capital funding is tight, that is exactly the time when school districts need to allocate some money for planning to ensure that scarce capital dollars are well spent and not wasted. She added that in her experience, districts do not undertake master planning
without incentives or mandates, or a combination of them, needed to move school districts to do comprehensive, coordinated educational and facility master planning.

Ms. Filardo underscored the complexities of this Task Force’s charge of creating policies that help prioritize projects, and that while it is a difficult task, it is important. However, she strongly believes that it is an absolute fiscal necessity to have a good facilities plan. She underscored that when a district has little or no funding for capital projects, it is an important time to plan. She believes that a good facilities plan includes not just capital priorities, but also identifies under what circumstances districts should close and consolidate schools. She stated that providing capital funding to the neediest schools is fiscally prudent; and that planning dollars are some of the best funds you can spend. Ms. Filardo pointed out that there are best practices for collecting and evaluating data on facility conditions as well as tools available that enable district planners to link student performance data to the district’s facilities analysis.

Ms. Filardo stressed the challenges involved in effective comprehensive facility planning, but suggested that community stakeholders, educators and parents are key partners in arriving at a plan that embraces the 10 key principles outlined in her presentation: (1) Vision, (2) High Quality Public Education, (3) Vibrant and Safe Neighborhoods, (4) Fair and Equitable, (5) Complete and Comprehensive, (6) Coordinated, (7) Accurate and Complete Data, (8) Manageable and Feasible, (9) Publicly Open, Inquiry-Based Process, and aimed at (10) the Future of Our Public Schools.

The district’s educational vision is the basis for its facilities plan. The plan sets out a shared vision that has been developed between the district and stakeholders. The educators and the community have important insights to contribute to the process of balancing the plan between educational and facilities planning.

Ms. Filardo stated that her experience has been that when given accurate data, people are practical and willing to solve problems together. She added that she has never found a problem that the community could not wrestle with and deal with. Ms Filardo observed that with the creation of the CEFTF, CPS has an opportunity to shift how it shares information with the community and by so doing, the community will help to solve the problem with common sense and practicality.

RE: Principle 5 – “Complete and Comprehensive….” Ms. Filardo noted that school district decision makers alone may not necessarily be able to assess the quality of a facilities master plan, hence her 10-point framework to help communities evaluate any facilities plan.

RE: Principle 6 - “Coordinated…” She added coordination should be done with other local government agencies, environmental groups and agencies, neighborhoods, etc.

RE: Principle 7- “Accurate and Complete Data…. While you may never have all of the data you may want, what is available is often enough to begin working with.

RE: Principle 9 – “Publicly Open, Inquiry Based Process…. Communities in which the schools are located have so much information to bring to the data and analysis, that is important to integrate this into the decision making process.

RE: Principle 10 – “The Future of Our Public Schools…” You must look long term. Ms. Filardo emphasized the importance of strategic planning, which includes ensuring the facilities plan fits the current as well as the future needs of the community.

Co-Chair Rep. Soto and other members of the Task Force then asked questions of the witness.

Rep. Soto: Why can’t the Chicago Public Schools plan with the communities to ensure continued use of local school buildings for students from local families? It seems like CPS improves schools, then pushes out the children who had previously attended them. Rep. Soto indicated that her district is undergoing demographic changes due to gentrification. As the neighborhoods change, the neighborhood schools are improved; however, the local students are oftentimes sent to schools outside of their neighborhoods, which present issues such as overcrowding as well as a number of safety concerns (i.e. students traveling far distances, combining rival neighborhoods, etc.).
Ms. Filardo: Inclusion of community in educational and facility planning is critical, and is considered a “best practice” around the nation. Local residents often can contribute to creative solutions to difficult and complex issues that school districts must deal with in planning for public school facilities siting, design, layout, and educational uses.

When asked about other school districts with Facilities Plans, Ms. Filardo responded that each district is different and has distinct challenges, no one has a “perfect” plan or process. The Los Angeles, CA Unified School District (LAUSD) created a facilities plan after a court case (the Williams Case). Washington, DC has a $2 billion Long Range Facilities Plan that is updated every 2-3 years. The State of Maryland requires that all of its districts submit a Master Plan every 3 years for approval by the planning department, counties, and state. Also in New Jersey, there are districts called “Abbott Districts” (low-wealth, high-poverty communities that were part of a lawsuit on equitable school funding) where Master Planning is required by the State. New York City and New Orleans have all been working on master plans.

Eduardo Garza (CPS) called on Ms. Taylor to question the witness: Ms. Taylor made the following comments: Introducing her remarks by saying she has been CPS’ Chief Operating Officer for the past 10 months, she expressed interest in doing a 5-year Capital Plan with a longer-range view to address: What are the schools which are in the worst shape? Where are the safety hazards? What, then, are the projects that CPS can afford to do in any given capital budget year? Ms. Taylor went on to say that CPS used to do facility assessments looking at each construction element. But, she cautioned, the “old way of assessing” CPS’ school buildings is really under-estimating the real costs that CPS would incur to upgrade certain buildings. Ms. Taylor used the example of McCorkle School, slated for closing due to poor facility conditions: If the “old” assessment said that the building needed $4.1 million, that didn’t reflect all of the costs she believes CPS would face, and asserted that the real cost of repairing McCorkle would be more like $8 million after you consider the required building code upgrades such as ADA and environmental.

Ms. Filardo responded to Ms. Taylor’s remarks, commenting that a facilities plan is not just about capital decisions, but that it should also address the relationship between capital and educational program priorities.

Ms. Taylor’s remarks prompted responses from other Task Force members, as follows:

Ms. Evans, Chicago Teachers Union: CPS should present the Task Force with a comprehensive list of which schools have received school repair dollars, and then show what has happened to these schools in terms of use and educational programming. Ms. Evans remarked that she has observed schools being brought into a state of good repair by CPS, only to be closed, consolidated, put into CPS’ “turn-around” program, or turned over to charter school operators under the City’s and CPS’ “Renaissance 2010” program.

Ms Carroll, Blocks Together: Ms. Carroll concurred with Ms. Evans, and reiterated that CPS’s capital spending is not transparent, and that CPS should provide the Task Force with information showing what is happening with the “Modern Schools Across Chicago” school construction bond program, and how the funding generated from it is being spent in relation to the Renaissance 2010 Program.

Ms. Berry, Chicago Principals and Administrators Assoc.: Dr. Berry agreed with Ms. Evans and Ms. Carroll that CPS’ capital spending priorities seem to prioritize schools in gentrifying neighborhoods, while letting other facilities languish without adequate investment, and questioned how CPS is choosing which schools to repair, in relation to other educational programming and school restructuring decisions.

Ms. Taylor, CPS: Ms. Taylor stated that she is constantly searching for additional funding, especially from City Aldermen and the City’s Tax Increment Financing (TIF) Program, and that the availability of TIF dollars often drives what CPS can do in any given year. She also stated that she cannot provide information as to what happened to schools that have received facility investments, vis-à-vis CPS’
educational programming decisions, the Renaissance 2010 program or the Modern Schools Across Chicago Program (which is TIF-funded). She stated that she would have to confer with her colleagues at CPS on how that additional funding has affected the educational aspect of facilities investment, but would be willing to provide data on facility spending over the past 5 years.

The exchange among Task Force members continued when Ms. Taylor referred back to Ms. Filardo’s presentation about working with the community, and added that CPS is trying to benefit neighborhood residents and students through special programs. She cited the example of “The Ground Breakers” Program which employs 55 “high risk” CPS students (middle-school and high-school-aged) to build play lots at various schools. Ms. Taylor said that the Ground Breakers Program has been ongoing for 5 years.

Ms. Berry, CPAA: In response to Ms. Taylor’s comments, Dr. Berry stated that the CPAA has never been informed of the “Ground Breakers” program. Dr Berry said that CPS should disclose the details, and provide the Task Force with a list of the schools where the Ground Breakers have worked on projects in the past, and where they are currently working. Ms. Taylor said she would provide that information.

In summary, it was agreed upon that CPS would provide the Task Force with the following:
- List of schools that were given to charters and AUSL
- List of all schools that received facility investments, with the capital costs, over the past five years, including schools funded through Modern Schools Across Chicago.
- Chicago Public Schools’ Chief Administrative Officer Robert Runcie (and other CPS staff that deal with the educational aspect of facility investment funding) will report to the Task Force on which schools receiving facility investments were closed, consolidated, or turned over to charters or contract schools, including the sources of funding for renovations, new construction, and capital repairs.
- List of schools where the CPS “Ground Breakers” Program has operated in the past, and is currently operating.

Ms. Filardo’s presentation having been concluded, the Task Force moved on with the agenda of the day.

4. Testimonies by Other Invited Expert Witnesses

State of Illinois Capital Development Board (CDB):

The Co-Chairs had requested a presentation by the CDB on its role in school construction, repair and facility planning.

Ms. Marcy Joerger, CDB’s administrator of the State School Construction Program then made a presentation on the Capital Development Board. Under the State’s 1998 School Construction Law, a matching funding formula was established, based on the wealth of school districts around Illinois, for awarding state funds for school facilities. Ms. Joerger explained that local school districts must provide a match to get state funds. However by state statute CPS is automatically awarded 20 percent of all available State capital dollars for school construction and repairs.

She reported that the last State Capital Program, Illinois FIRST, was passed over a decade ago, and all of these funds had been allocated, leaving a backlog of projects in non-Chicago school districts. However, during the ILGA’s last session, two appropriations were made to address school facility needs: $148 million to address the backlog of facility projects in 23-24 school districts around the state; and $1.3 billion over a 3-year period in new State Capital Program appropriations, but none of which have been released this year.

Ms. Taylor, CPS: Ms. Taylor noted that CPS works with the CDB on an ongoing basis, and sought further clarification that funds from the City’s TIF program could be used as matching dollars for State
school construction grants. Ms. Taylor added initially the **Modern Schools Across Chicago Plan** was to build 27 schools, but one has been removed since then. CPS has opened 5 schools, and next year 17 will be built. CPS plans to move forward on the remaining next year. The first schools built through this program were funded largely through TIF funds, while the 2nd phase will be CPS funds that are “front-funded”. Ms. Taylor will provide a list of all schools who received TIF funds and for what projects. Ms. Joerger said that she will have to check and will get back to CPS on this question. Ms. Taylor added that the City is working more aggressively to use TIF for repair and not just new construction.

When asked about how districts compete for the current state construction grants, Ms. Joerger stated that the School Construction Law specifically requires the match and that the law would have to be changed to allow districts to receive State school construction grants without having matching funds. She added that the most districts could get is 75% of the total funds, but many projects are subject to a local referendum for approval. Even CPS has challenges in matching some of the state grants. When asked, she added that all districts are held to the same standards of the RFP, reporting, etc.

Further details in about the CBD’s functions and operations are provided at the ICBD website: [http://www.cdb.state.il.us/schools.shtml](http://www.cdb.state.il.us/schools.shtml).

There being no further questions for Ms. Joerger, the Task Force called the final guest witness.

**Third Ward Alderman Pat Dowell:**

The Co-Chairs had invited Chicago Third Ward Alderman Pat Dowell to provide testimony to the Task Force regarding the City Council Resolution Alderman Dowell introduced. The Resolution calls on CPS to defer decisions on school closings, consolidations, turn-arounds, and other decisions with facility impacts until such time as the ILGA’s Chicago Educational Facilities Task Force could conduct its work. Since Alderman Dowell was unable to attend in person, her written statement was read into the record of the meeting. [Ald. Dowell's Testimony 1](#); [Ald. Dowell's Testimony 2](#)

**Gallistel Elementary School, Chicago, IL:**

Representatives of Gallistel School made a presentation about the decade-long effort by the school to get a new building. The parent representatives, Ms. Patricia Zuniga and Ms. Elena Rios explained that Gallistel’s Principal, parents, teachers, staff and community have participated every year since 1996 in CPS’ annual Capital Improvement Program Hearings, at which schools may request funding for the coming year for their facility needs. Gallistel has been chronically overcrowded for well over a decade, and currently operates in 3 buildings, one of which was built over a century ago. The hardships for students and teachers of operating in 3 scattered sites threaten to compromise classroom outcomes, and are affecting the health and safety of students.

Ms. Rios testified that despite well-documented overcrowding conditions, Gallistel has been passed over for a new building since the inception of the CPS CIP in 1996. Every year, Gallistel’s community brings hundreds of community members, parents, and students to the CPS capital budget hearings, but has yet to get a commitment from CPS for a new building to accommodate its still-growing enrollment. Ms. Rios stated that Gallistel is a prime example of the negative educational impact of inadequate school facilities as well as the lack of transparency in CPS facility planning, and questioned how CPS is setting its priorities.

Ms. Taylor, CPS: Ms. Taylor engaged the Gallistel witnesses regarding funding and conditions at the school. Ms. Taylor stated that if the community could assure CPS that TIF funds would be made available, that would help Gallistel’s request to progress, though she also stated that she could not make any promises. Ms. Taylor also said that she would be willing to come to the school and requested that she and Ms. Rios exchange contact information.
Ms. Rios and Ms. Zuniga countered that CPS officials have been to their school many times in the past, that their principal had been discouraged from being vocal about the overcrowding conditions, and that their local Alderman (10th Ward, John Pope) was reluctant to commit revenues from TIF districts in his ward to school construction, as such expenditures did not create jobs or stimulate the economy (the primary purpose of Tax Increment Financing).

Ms. Taylor responded that she was surprised by Alderman Pope’s response to the community.

State Rep. Jerry Mitchell: Rep. Mitchell introduced himself as the Minority Spokesperson for the House Elementary & Secondary Education Committee, and expressed his strong concern over the chronic facility problems and overcrowding at Gallistel. Rep. Mitchell stated that the work of the Task Force should include resolving the kinds of poor conditions for students and teachers at Gallistel and other schools like it. Rep. Mitchell concluded his response to the witnesses by stating that all of Gallistel’s testimony should be reflected in the Minutes of today’s proceedings and should be provided to all members of the Task Force, noting that the ILGA schedule had required the other legislator members of the Task Force to leave the meeting to participate in the Session.

5. Adjournment

The Task Force adjourned at 12 PM, with assurances that a complete record of the proceedings would be transmitted to all task force members and also made available to the public. ILGA Staff will work with the Co-Chairs and Task Force members to set the schedule and help the task force move forward.