

REPORT ON ARCHITECT'S ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
WESTERN STATE SCHOOL AND HOSPITAL  
PHASE II - CONSTRUCTION  
MEETING

January 22, 1975  
7:30 - 11:45 p.m.

COMMITTEE'S PURPOSE:

The purpose of the Committee is to aid the architect to design buildings to meet accepted program and living standards. The Committee consists of representatives from the WSSH Board of Trustees, the WSSH Parents's Group, Allegheny County Chapter, PARC, the WSSH Superintendent, and the WSSH Assistant Superintendent.

ATTENDANCE:

Lou Doughton - WSSH Board of Trustees  
Robert Nelkin - ACC-PARC  
Robert Hiltner - WSSH Superintendent  
Ruth Lynn Scott - WSSH Assistant Superintendent  
Patricia Gishbacher - Western Region DPW  
WSSH Staff Members

Norman Frey - Architect contracted by G.S.A.  
Bill Yokum - Chief Architect - DPW Construction & Maintenance

Aside from the crucial question about the wisdom of erecting new buildings on WSSH grounds, there are enough critical questions about the manner the state is proceeding to halt the building project. Reasons are outlined here:

(a) Lack of Knowledge

Frey, the architect, responded to the question, "Do you know much about retarded people", by saying "no". It was apparent that Frey was not engaged in a self-education program to learn about multiply handicapped persons. Some of Frey's questions revealed a lack of knowledge of handicapped individuals. Yokum referred to WSSH's residents as "retards".

(b) No Successful Archetypes

Frey was asked, "What prototypes are you reviewing from other states?" I guessed from his not answering, that little research is being done.



Yokum suggested that the Pennhurst layout be sent to the Committee to review. Aside from the Pennhurst plan, there is no reason to believe the architects are researching what has failed or succeeded in the past.

(c) Resistance to Input

Frey was repeatedly asked whether he would prepare rough sketches and concepts to aid the Committee in visualizing the project. He was not enthusiastic and did not commit himself to providing rough sketches.

Frey was asked when the Committee would see his sketches in the Preliminary Stage. He responded, "one week to ten days before submission (early March) to Harrisburg."

Regarding input, Yokum stated, "These jobs can get awfully messed up with too much input. Norman Frey's contract is only with the General State Authority. The G.S.A. alone, can grant special permission to deviate from his contract."

(d) The Die is Cast - Rigid Attitude

The response to the request for the presentation of rough sketches and discussion of concepts was, "We don't approach the idea that we are going to make changes."

In regard to some specific changes suggested, Yokum said, "It's too late now. We must finalize our plans tonight. We have to draw the line at some point."

Frey said, "They (G.S.A.) consider the approved Scope as a Bible." Comments on the approved Scope appear here.

(e) The Scope is not Accurate

The Scope approved by G.S.A. and forwarded to the architect is dated November 14, 1973. The Scope was not revised after revisions, dated November 23, 1973, were suggested by the Commissioner of Mental Retardation and the Region's Institutional Representative.

At the time of submission, November 14, 1973, the education building was needed to help the IU #1 comply with the Right to Education Consent Agreement. IU #1 appropriately now has plans to educate most of the residents in community schools. At the December 12, 1974 Liaison Committee Meeting, the WSSH Assistant Superintendent estimated 30 individuals would not go to community schools for medical reasons. This drastic change is not accounted for in the G.S.A. approved Scope.



The institutional population may change considerably making the Scope and proposed buildings obsolete. Current plans include the transfer of 100 residents to the Park Nursing Home in Pittsburgh. Right to Education and Community Living Arrangements' effect on the type of residents left at WSSH is undetermined. These building plans are aimed at a moving target and cannot be successful.

Hiltner said that the central office cut the original Scope without consulting Western's administrative or program staff. I gather that WSSH staff intend to live with these random cuts so that the project is not delayed.

As late as Yokum said it was in the time table, many changes were still being proposed at this meeting. Hiltner said in his opening remarks that some of the changing factors were shift in philosophy of the IU #1, increasing degree of handicaps of Western residents, and the fact that more than 1/2 of the school-aged residents will be older than school-age by the time the building is completed. Some of the suggested changes in the Scope were the best estimates of persons present, but were not supported by any data or research.

(f) No Documentation for the Scope or Space Requirements

The Scope only generally refers to the uses of these Phase II buildings. Many questions remain unanswered.

Space Requirements may be accurately proposed by WSSH program staff, but no reasons accompany the Scope. Because no justifications are available and the eventual uses are vague, it is impossible for the Committee and probably the architect to evaluate the accuracy of the space estimates.

Members of the Committee requested documentation from the brain-storming sessions that led to these specifications. Hiltner stated that notes or minutes were not kept of the brain-storming sessions leading to the proposed Scope.

It's also difficult to determine whether the individual needs of program departments have been coordinated in this 11/14/73 Scope.

(g) Limited by State and Federal Regulations

When asked about innovative materials, Frey said their use was not probable. "I am limited to the materials listed by the Department of Property and Supplies."

Yokum said that even though sprinklers are not his choice for the best fire safety devices, they are the ones that will be installed as a result of Federal codes.



Frey was not even aware of the state and federal program regulations that he would have to comply with. There were no references to attempts to comply with JCAH, AC/FMR standards.

Yokum told the Committee a couple of times that he does not like to plan buildings based on current theories, because theories come and go. He cited the trend away from "normalization". "The trends won't be the same when this building is completed." One of the Committee members surmised that if this was his attitude, he would probably use 15 to 20 year old drawings as models. Infact, the architects talked of reviving some of Frey's 1966 drawings for this project. Yokum said they would be good, but "bigger than needed".

(h) Proposed use is Limited in Flexibility

The architects predicted that innovative ideas would be shot down when the Life Safety Code is applied. One member of the Committee expressed that the severely handicapped individuals are doomed in Cedar and Pine Lodges by this design. The severely handicapped individuals' living areas will not improve via Phase II. This was seen as a definite deficiency.

(i) The Pennhurst Debacle

Yokum referred to Pennhurst as a plan not to repeat. "Pennhurst is a nightmare." "We can't even pin down the blame for this disaster." "I don't like to think about it." "Two million dollars worth of garbage." He told of various problems like light switches in the showers. However, he promised to send the Pennhurst layout as a prototype to follow at WSSH!

Members of the Committee expressed extreme concern that Pennhurst not be repeated at WSSH and doubt whether the state could build a decent Phase II.

(j) Air-conditioning - Not this year

At the December 12th Liaison Meeting, the Committee was informed by Hiltner that the electrical renovations might be completed by this summer, but there were some difficulties. Yokum, at this meeting, informed the Committee that the electrical work may not be completed until late in the summer of 1976 because of problems obtaining transformers. Yokum said there could be air-conditioning on the lodges if WSSH used a system called "shedding". He suggested the laundry should work at night, etc. Members of the Liaison Committee have heard promises about the air-conditioning for a number of years. ACC-PARC has written a couple of letters requesting help from Deputy Secretary Meyers, but has never received a response. The delay in air-conditioning at WSSH is a splendid example of the incompetency of the DPW.



(k) Stop the Pennhurst Western Plan

For the reasons stated above, Phase II construction at WSSH is doomed, destined to disaster. The planning is chaotic. The buildings will be obsolete before completion. There is no reason to believe that Phase II construction at WSSH will be different than the construction at Pennhurst.

There are sensible pragmatic arguments why this building should occur in the community rather than the farmlands of Washington County. Also, if the state allocated 240 group homes, \$33,333 each, for Life Safety Code renovations, 1,920 persons would have decent community residential buildings.

When will we as professionals, advocates, and taxpayers wake-up?

RN:cp

Report by

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