Sandy Hook Advisory Committee

Donald J. DeFronzo

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On behalf of the membership of the School Security Infrastructure Council (SSIC) I want to thank you for the opportunity to meet today and discuss our common undertaking. While the Sandy Hook Advisory Committee (SHAC) has a very wide ranging charge, the mission of the SSIC is quite narrow and specific.

P.A. 13-3, sections 80 to 83, authorizes an SSIC comprised of 9 members - the commissioners of the departments of Administrative Services, Education and Emergency Services and Public Protection, plus 6 members appointed by legislative leaders.

The SSIC is charged with developing "…school safety infrastructure standards for school building projects under chapter 173 of CGS." The legislation directs the SSIC to examine a variety of school building safety infrastructure areas, including: entryways, ballistic glass, solid core doors, locking systems, closed circuit television monitoring, use of security cameras, class room security and other security infrastructure features and design strategies.

These standards are to be developed by January 1, 2014 and submitted to the legislature at that time. Effective July 1, 2014, all school construction and renovation applications for state funding must comply with these standards, or not be approved.

In Connecticut we know that concern for school safety is not new. It is a consideration in virtually every school construction project. What we also know is that, despite this concern, we lack uniform statewide methodologies for assessing and addressing school security infrastructure design. Until now school safety has been, almost entirely, determined by local decision makers leading to a very

uneven and unpredictable level of school security design across school district lines.

As an alternative, a uniform comprehensive threat assessment process and corresponding building plans will help ensure a threshold level of awareness, responsiveness and security.

Implicit in the authorizing legislation, and a starting point for the SSIC is the belief that schools are vulnerable facilities subject to the threat of violence with the potential for loss of life or serious injury to students and professional staff. We also believe that protective school design techniques can make school grounds and school buildings safer places in which to conduct educational activities.

Thus far, the SSIC has met four times with an emphasis on acquiring expert information pertaining to our task.

SSIC members were informed that the state's current school building grant program has no specific security requirements, other than those inherent in the State Building Code. While security features are eligible expenditures under the grant program, there are no uniform standards, and schools vary widely in terms of what is included in local plans.

In June the Council heard expert testimony from the State Building Inspector, the Director of the region's National Fire Protection Association; the Director of the State's Emergency Management - "all hazards" Planning Group and representatives of the state's Office of Counter Terrorism.

Subsequently, in July, the Council heard from design and architectural professionals from across the state, lock experts and representatives demonstrating a new interactive-interoperable real time audio/visual communication system linking schools, public safety officials, first responders, hospitals, utility companies and others.

Earlier in August a session was dedicated to hearing from educational professionals including testimony from the state's largest teacher unions, AFT and CSEA and also representatives of the CT Federation of School Administrators, the CT Association of Public School Superintendents, the CT Association of Schools, the CT Association of Boards of Education and the CT Association of School Business Administrators.

One additional public meeting will be scheduled in early September for comments from local officials, first responders and the general public. Following that, a series of work sessions will be scheduled to complete our work on the standards.

Although the Council is still in the early stages of its work, I can share with you some emerging principles which may shape our direction.

While the work of the SSIC is born of the events in Newtown involving a rouge shooter, other potential threats, both natural and manmade have led the Council to consider an "all hazards" approach to school design and security standards. As a result, we will likely broaden the preventive design standards to incorporate the most up to date seismic and weather related design requirements, while also considering architectural and design deterrents to terrorists, environmental and chemical accidents or attacks.

In pursuing this goal the Council is trying to strike the right balance between development of state wide schools security standards and the need to give local school systems the flexibility to design schools which are responsive to local needs.

It is safe to say that we recognize the need to avoid overly prescriptive and rigid standards, recognizing that each school site and facility has distinct infrastructure and design needs.

We have looked at several comprehensive security assessment tools or check lists and will likely select at least one them for school systems to use in security planning.

 (The School Vulnerability Assessment Checklist developed by the National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities; The School Security Assessment Protocol used by the state Office of Counter Terrorism and the Integrated Rapid Visual Screening program developed by the Science and Technology unit of Homeland security)

These tools are comprehensive in nature and include assessments of:

School Grounds and Site Access Controls (Outer Perimeter)
Outdoor Fields, Facilities and Playgrounds

Building Access Control; Entry doors, Windows, Walls, Roofs and Reception Areas
(Secondary Perimeter)

Corridors, Interior Doors and Lockers (Building Interior)
Stairs and Stairwells
Elevators
Exitways

Classrooms, Portable Classrooms, Specialty Rooms, Labs, Shops and Computer Rooms

Food Service Areas, Restrooms and Student Common Areas

Library and Media Center
Health Services Area
Auditorium, Theater, Performing Arts Areas

Indoor Athletic Facilities

Emergency Communications, Power Supply, Fuel and Water

Security and Surveillance Systems

Fire Alarm and Control Systems

Mechanical Systems

Custodial and Equipment Rooms

Areas of Refuge/Community Shelter, and

Design Features for Storms, High Winds (blasts), Snow Load and Seismic Events.

These assessment tools may be augmented with optional compliance measures and best practice design suggestions.

The Council will likely require that plans incorporate security design strategies into every level, or layer, of school facility construction including:

Site development and preparation;

Perimeter boundaries and access points;

Secondary perimeters up to the building exterior, and

The interior of the building, itself.

Another important point is that the conduct of these local assessments must be an inclusive process involving police, fire, medical, school and other local officials. This public safety team approach is not only important in the assessment phase, but throughout the design and construction period as well.

The need for redundancy and collaboration is essential.

Central to the security assessment process and the development of the SSI Plan is the need to conduct an emergency response time analysis to determine the actual amount of time needed for a police response in a crisis situation. This exercise will also help in appropriate design decisions related to architectural safeguards, locking technologies and locations and other measures that could deter or delay an intruder for an amount of time necessary to ensure an onsite public safety response prior to deep building penetration.

Additionally, improved interactive and interoperable communication systems, new locking devices, better surveillance equipment, physical design features, stronger doors, ballistic glass and design and location of parking facilities are all area being reviewed.

Dozens of design security features are included in these assessment tools, which serve to heighten security awareness and force consideration of preventative architectural adaptations or modifications.

It is this heightened awareness and willingness to meet threshold security design requirements which is the central focus of the Council's work. At this point, one very "real option" may be to require all school construction, renovation and school facility funding applications to include a School Safety Infrastructure plan document based on of one of these security assessments.

After submission to the Department of Construction Services these plans will be reviewed by professional staff in the Office of School Facilities for responsiveness to observed weaknesses, for their effectiveness in mitigating potential threats and for their overall compliance with design requirements and grant specifications. This process is intended to be constructive in nature, with staff advising and assisting districts in their efforts to develop acceptable plans.

In summary, the Council views the challenge as one of comprehensive threat assessment and threat mitigation requiring a commitment to a recognized range of design standards that achieves:

Deterrence – deterrence to prevent unwanted visitors from gaining access to school grounds or buildings, and deterrence in averting the impact of natural threats which could result in potential harm to students, staff and property;

Detection – detection to quickly detect, locate, identify and contain the movement of an unwanted party who has gained unauthorized entry to the school grounds or building;

Delay – delay to impede, isolate and forestall the movement of an unwanted party within a school building; to prevent access to classroom areas and common gathering points within a school allowing adequate time for a public safety response; and

Response – to ensure that coordinated, interactive and reliable communication system are in place to facilitate an immediate and effective response from public safety and medical agencies.

As I have said, we are still early in the process and I know members of the SSIC would be very receptive to any of your ideas or suggestions.

In closing, I want to thank all of you for your conscientious efforts to improve our schools and the safety of our communities.

Thank you.