

School Building Committee Meeting Minutes (DRAFT)
Great Hall, Wellesley Town Hall
March 5, 2020
5:30PM

Present: Chair Sharon Gray; Vice Chair Thomas Ulfelder; Virginia Ferko; Marjorie Freiman; Mary Gard; Steve Gagosian; Joubin Hassanein; Meghan Jop; Matt King; David Lussier; Melissa Martin; Heather Sawitsky; Jose Soliva; Jeffery Dees; FMD Project Manager Kevin Kennedy; FMD Project Manager Dick Elliott; Jeff D’Amico of Compass Project Management.

Absent: Ellen Quirk; Ryan Hutchins; Charlene Cook; Cynthia Mahr

Ms. Gray opened the meeting at approximately 5:35 p.m. She announced that the meeting was being broadcast live and recorded by Wellesley Media for later viewing.

Ms. Gray noted Mr. D’Amico will lead the discussion this evening as Alex Pitkin and Kristen Olsen from SMMA were unable to attend.

Public Comment

Christine Mizzi of Suffolk Road said she attended the abutters’ meeting and had met with neighbors the previous night. She stated that abutters want Upham rebuilt, with considerations such as centering on the site, no through street connection, proper screening, and controlled lighting. She expressed concerns that Hardy and Upham abutters were invited to the same meeting. The traffic study rating of A for the Upham intersections is an important consideration.

Donna Paglia of Bristol Road addressed the ledge removal issue and believes this is a short-term process for a long-term result. It is a common practice to blast ledge in Wellesley. Ledge materials can also be reused. The project is for the greater good of the Town.

Mary Long of Bristol Road, a direct Upham abutter, said she was frustrated by the plans she heard at the meeting, and wondered whether the current school would be impacted by the construction. She also raised the issue of the impact on the tree canopy, and added that many neighbors are very concerned about the blasting.

Pam Snyder of Bristol Road said as an abutter she is in favor of having both schools kept open, but prefers that Upham not be rebuilt first. It could be rebuilt later as the last school. She expressed concerns about blasting, construction traffic, the tree canopy, and long-term disruption to the neighborhood.

Amy Gottschalk of Audubon Road said she is very disappointed with the redistricting map that would send her part of the neighborhood to Sprague, and asked for more extensive traffic study on relevant intersections.

Ciara Belliveau of Sagamore Road expressed concerns about the redistricting map, and possible safety concerns about crossing Route 9. Her family appreciated walking to Upham and that would not be possible under the new map where Upham is not rebuilt.

Kate Sullivan of Norwich Road asked that there be a total carbon footprint calculated for both redistricting maps. The carbon sequestration is only part of the equation. Emissions from idling cars is a missing component.

SBC Business

Approval of Minutes – No minutes were approved at this meeting.

Hardy/Upham Project

Redistricting maps: Mr. D’Amico displayed the current 7-school district map, and shared the two redistricting maps for a Hardy build and for an Upham build, which were finalized and approved by the School Committee in late February.

Ms. Martin explained the redistricting process. A superintendent’s advisory committee on redistricting included parent representation from all seven elementary schools, School Committee member Matt Kelley, assistant superintendent Cindy Mahr, and transportation director Deane McGoldrick. Class size guidelines are to be maintained, and the goal was to distribute students as evenly as possible across town while respecting natural boundaries as much as possible, and encouraging walkability. Sometimes those factors compete with each other and create a natural tension. The committee received numerous emails on the maps with suggestions and concerns, and there was a survey sent to families and a public hearing before School Committee voted final maps. Ms. Martin described the process as the most difficult decision-making she has yet personally faced while serving on the School Committee.

Ms. Gray opened the discussion to the rest of the Committee. Dr. Lussier said the work behind creating these maps was difficult and most often conflicting. The FutureThink enrollment projections were used to create enrollment estimates for each component of the map that was used in the redistricting process. Future enrollments are estimates, and difficult to determine with precision. Early maps created parity with enrollment, but there was significant competing feedback from residents looking for changes based on factors like walkability. The redistricting committee also considered natural boundaries, as roughly 50% of students live north of Route 9, as well as south of Route 9. There were many tradeoffs. Ultimately, the scenarios should allow for some flexibility with changes over time.

Mr. Soliva asked how the 40B and other new housing developments were factored into the maps. Dr. Lussier said they are baked into the FutureThink enrollment projections, so have been incorporated into development of the new maps.

Ms. Martin added that projecting where students will live in the future is difficult, however in looking at the overall number of residential properties in each attendance zone, the allocation is fairly evenly distributed, which hopefully will allow for ebb and flow of enrollment within demographic areas.

Dr. Lussier said closing a school does not necessarily make the district less walkable, and noted that he believes the districts from 1982-2002 were more walkable than the current districts.

Ms. Jop said a significant amount of land in Wellesley could be developed in the future, including areas in the Fiske and Hunnewell districts.

Ms. Gray noted during the redistricting process she saw more potential for growth in the Fiske and Hunnewell areas and so felt comfortable with the district lines in those areas. She also noted that crossing Route 9 in the middle of town a big concern and made for very difficult decisions by School Committee. She feels that the redistricting committee came up with the best maps they could, given where the houses and students are located, and the desire to preserve walkability across town.

Ms. Gard wondered if making buses more available would alleviate the stress of crossing Route 9, noting also that school traffic is a town-wide concern. Dr. Lussier noted that one aspect of current WPS strategic planning is potentially eliminating bus fees altogether. Other issues to consider are a lack of locations to store buses and a shortage of drivers. Ms. Martin thinks this is a great opportunity to consider a long-term implementation plan.

Ms. Gray noted anyone outside of two miles receives free busing, and added that there is a difference between proximity and true walkability. She asked Dr. Lussier whether there was much discussion during redistricting about how to measure the quality of walkability. He said that that could be a factor for future discussion.

Options Review: Ms. Gray discussed the abutters meeting that took place the night before. She said it was well attended, with about 50 residents coming to the Wellesley Middle School library. Much of what was discussed included blasting/ledge removal, compaction, and concerns about damage and liability at the Upham site; questions about why new construction on the Upham footprint was not a considered option; some strong feelings about not wanting to connect Dukes and Wynnewood roads, even with a gate. From Hardy abutters, there were concerns about opening up the back roads and a preference for maximizing the usefulness of the Route 9 access. Mr. King pointed out that it was predominantly Upham abutters who spoke. He thought overall the comments and questions made for good conversation.

Mr. D'Amico began reviewing the options, including two at the Upham site and four at the Hardy site, plus the base repair option at Upham. The cost estimating phase is under way.

Mr. D'Amico Reviewed the Upham Site General Summary which included

- Blasting (May be two phases of ledge removal)

- Access through site is not critical – but use of rear parking would be beneficial
- The building should avoid edges of site
- Phase 2 work involves regrading up to 222' level
- Access from four sides is possible

SMMA has a strong recommendation among the Upham options for Option 6A @ 365 students, located at the center of the site, avoiding the grade changes at the southern portion. In the firm's opinion, no option reduces ledge or tree removal substantially.

Upham site topography was reviewed, including grading throughout the site. Ms. Gray asked if the Upper Field at Upham would become more of a flattened, accessible area. Mr. D'Amico said it is worth checking with SMMA, as the same amount of ledge removal may not be required in that area.

A conceptual floor plan for Option 6A was previewed that can be customized based on feedback gathered. The main corridor of the school would have 3 cohorts off the main spine with the addition of the Skills program and the gymnasium. A cross-section view was shown to display the plateau of the site where ledge would be removed.

Option 6B New @ 365 Student was reviewed with similar challenges with topography. Its location is closer to the edge of the site. With either option, exact siting and sizing of potential playing fields would be subject to other factors including feedback from the Committee.

Mr. King asked where the underground stormwater would be placed on the site and whether any associated ledge removal would be accounted for in the early cost estimates. Mr. D'Amico said he would bring that feedback to SMMA.

Mr. Gray and Mr. King commented on the feedback from direct abutters regarding the process for blasting, potential damages, and claims that may be needed. Mr. King said a big part of the feedback is fear of the unknown. The project team will document the conditions and perform due diligence. Neighbors understandably want comfort as to what the process would look like and what would be the path forward.

Dr. Lussier said, given the feedback at the abutters' meeting, it would be helpful to understand the difference in the amount of ledge removal if the school is built on the existing Upham footprint vs. the center of the site. Mr. Ulfelder agreed that there is a need to go through a public process showing what is possible as far as a plan that minimizes the destruction of the tree canopy and the removal of the ledge.

Mr. D'Amico reviewed the reasons why SMMA had not previously explored building a new school on the existing footprint, including cost concerns and a need for swing space. But given the abutters' questions, the project team will take time to do the due diligence on a new option on the footprint and bring it

back to the SBC for discussion and to the cost estimators for pricing. Mr. Ulfelder said he would like to see site options that directly address the significant concerns they are hearing. Mr. Pitkin is working on other options and will present them before any decisions will be made.

In response to Mr. D'Amico's question as to which is the preferred site plan between 6A or 6B, the consensus was 6A would be a better option. Ms. Freiman agreed but also advocated for looking for other ways to site the building that would minimize ledge and tree removal.

Mr. D'Amico reviewed the Hardy site general summary, which included:

- Very constrained at the center of the site due to Hardy Road turnaround
- Relieving Weston Road backups will require some version of thru-site access
- Recommended to avoid southern portion of the site
- Topography is impactful to either the fields or the building
- Access from four sides is possible with pros/cons

Mr. D'Amico reminded the SBC that at the last meeting, SMMA had recommended that if all other factors with the Hardy option were equal, it would recommend building on the existing footprint, either addition/renovation or all new.

All new construction options behind the existing school are considered "the same" – re: scope of work, cost, site amenity building out, etc. There is a general preference here for new option 7A or option 7B. Each can be fine-tuned in the next phase if one of these options is selected.

In regards to site circulation, the concept of gating to limit access to any new entrances to the Hardy site (from Lawrence, Hickory or Route 9) was discussed. In addition, Ms. Gray noted that one attendee of the abutters' meeting was concerned that Lawrence Road is narrow and would need improved sidewalks for students to share the road properly with cars. Ms. Jop said sidewalk evaluation and improvement would automatically be part of the Project of Significant Impact permitting process.

The addition/renovation option at Hardy was discussed at length. Mr. Gagosian expressed concern that some of the wayfinding issues with the existing building would be repeated in an addition/renovation option. Ms. Jop is concerned that the gym would be located on the opposite side of the parking lot. Mr. King said given the town's success with incorporating historic Sprague into that renovation/addition, the wayfinding issues could be mitigated, and the Hardy addition/renovation option still has potential.

Options 7A and 7A were reviewed, which include the possibility of either removing and/or planning to preserve the historical portion of the Hardy building. Mr. Gagosian said if the new school is built in the center of the site, any attempt to preserve and reuse the historical portion of Hardy would require taking the building down to the studs and would come with significant additional cost. Upon a question by Ms. Gray, Mr. D'Amico said the cost of keeping the historic building would be included in the early

cost estimating for the options 7A or 7B with the new building in the center of the site. Of the two, Mr. Pitkin's preferred option is 7B.

Mr. Gagosian and Mr. Lussier expressed a desire to have the building nestled into center of the site, giving it a more neighborhood feel with a protective boundary around it. It would also be beneficial for queuing, and for accessing Route 9. Dr. Lussier said if the project team does not attempt to address the extensive issues with Weston Road, a major opportunity would be missed.

Ms. Ferko asked if there was feedback from Hardy abutters on where the preferred placement of the building would be, and if they are concerned about saving the original building. There has not been substantial feedback from abutters relating to this question.

Ms. Gard asked whether the energy use intensity would be higher for the addition/renovation option, and whether there would be less room on the roof for photovoltaics. Mr. D'Amico said yes on both counts.

Ms. Gray looked for Mr. D'Amico's guidance in next steps and narrowing down the options. Ms. Freiman suggested to eliminate option 7D, the new Hardy on the front of the site, given the lack of swing space, and a desire by some to push the building to the center of the site. The Committee reached consensus to eliminate that option.

Ms. Gray clarified the options for pricing which included for Hardy an add/reno and Options 7A/7B. For Upham it will be a base repair, 6A and a new optioned to be developed on the footprint. Five options will be returned for review.

Ms. Gray confirmed March 26th would be the next meeting date and asked the Committee if they would like to schedule extra meetings in between to review added data and meet the deadline of April 2ⁿ of their preferred option.

Mr. D'Amico reviewed the following upcoming milestone schedule:

- SBC recommendation of preferred option – April 2
- Joint meeting with SC & BOS to review SBC recommendation of preferred option – April 9
- Town meeting update on the recommendation of preferred option – April 13 or 14
- Joint meeting with SC, BOS & SBC to vote on recommendation of preferred option – April 30
- SBC submit preferred option to MSBA – May 6

Mr. Ulfelder said he does not believe the schedule is realistic, as there are still pieces of analysis missing. He doesn't believe the SBC can make decisions based on old or incomplete data in the timeframe suggested. Ms. Freiman also suggests having an additional meeting to discuss new options and updates.

In a discussion of criteria, Ms. Gray asked Mr. D'Amico, based on comments from the abutters' meeting, about the timing of ledge removal and rock crushing and how the noise and vibrations might impact students. Are construction impacts truly neutral for each option or might there be more disruption with one option vs. another?

Ms. Freiman asked Mr. D'Amico if the requested information could be prepared within two weeks. He responded that some but not all items could be completed on that schedule. She then asked the committee if a "red, yellow, green" color coding of criteria would be helpful in prioritizing items. The Committee tentatively agreed to meet March 19.

Mr. D'Amico noted that LEED Silver certification is required by the MSBA, and would be incorporated into the cost estimates. Mr. Ulfelder and Mr. King noted that detailed information on the sustainability of each option had not been presented. These are important components that need attention. The MSBA process typically address these issues during schematic design. Members discussed concerns about not having all the information needed to make an informed decision.

Dr. Lussier feels it will be hard to get to an April 2nd decision even with additional meetings given all the information that they are still waiting for. He does not want to make a rushed decision with delayed important information. He proposed possibly looking at a Plan B to prepare the committee and community with new information and adjusting their timeline.

Adjournment

At approximately 8:45PM upon a motion by Mr. Ulfelder and a second by Ms. Martin, the School Building Committee voted unanimously to adjourn.

Documents and Exhibits used

- Redistricting Maps as voted by School Committee
- Existing School District Map
- Previous 6 school district map from 1982 – 2002
- Redistricting Presentation slides from School Comm. mtg on Feb 11, 2020.
- SMMA Power Point presentation