

**Wellesley Public Schools
School Committee Meeting
February 6, 2020
Great Hall, Wellesley Town Hall**

The meeting was called to order at 5:50 PM, joining the School Building Committee (SBC) in open session. Those School Committee members present included Chair Melissa Martin, Vice Chair Linda Chow, Secretary Matt Kelley, member Sharon Gray, and member Jim Roberti. Members of the SBC present included Virginia Ferko, Marjorie Freiman, Mary Gard, Steve Gagorian, Ryan Hutchins, Meghan Jop, Matt King, David Lussier, Cynthia Mahr, Melissa Martin, Ellen Quirk, Heather Sawitsky, Jose Soliva, Joubin Hassanein, Charlene Cook, and Jeffery Dees. Facilities Management Department (FMD) Project Managers Kevin Kennedy and Richard Elliott were also present. Those Board of Selectmen members present included Chair Marjorie Freiman, Vice Chair Thomas Ulfelder, and members Jack Morgan, Lise Olney, and Beth Sullivan Woods.

REVIEW CONCEPTUAL COSTS OF THREE SCHOOLS

Ms. Gray reviewed the agenda items and noted the citizens' petition to put a non-binding referendum question on the ballot in March:

Do you believe the Town of Wellesley should keep our current seven neighborhood elementary school model by rebuilding and/or renovating the Hardy, Hunnewell and Upham Elementary Schools, instead of closing one school and redistricting all of our elementary students into six schools? Please vote YES or NO

Ms. Gray noted that given the referendum, the School Committee had asked FMD Director Joe McDonough to model the potential impact of the question with conceptual costs of building three schools. Ms. Martin explained that this request was made to the FMD in light of varying cost estimates that have been shared in the community.

On behalf of Mr. McDonough, Mr. Gagorian reviewed the significant factors potentially affecting the cost analysis of building 3 schools, including background, schedule delays, 2 schools vs. 3 schools, MSBA reimbursement, total cost, projected tax impact, operational impacts, and carbon emissions. He noted the background had just been covered by Ms. Gray. He stated FMD's belief that in the event the referendum passes, the schedule will dramatically change after the current four-year process to get to this point. FMD's prediction is that there would be an additional two-year delay, at minimum, and most likely longer.

Mr. Kelley questioned whether the modeling included escalation only for the predicted two-year delay, assuming that all three schools would be built at once, or if it also included the impact of an expected longer construction schedule. Mr. D'Amico explained that for the current cost estimation exercise, only the two-year delay was considered, and that the actual ultimate cost would be higher.

Mr. D'Amico noted that using the existing data from the HHU project work, they were able to determine the additional construction cost for 2 schools vs. 3 schools being

between \$40-46 million, plus costs associated with an additional 2-year delay. In response to a question from Ms. Martin about determining square footage for spaces in the school and how it is calculated, Mr. Pitkin explained that the square footage of rooms for specialized purposes (physical therapy, occupational therapy, the Therapeutic Learning Center, the Skills Program, a full-sized gym) remains the same whether it in a 240-student school or a 365-student school, resulting in some duplication of space when building 3 schools vs. building 2 schools.

Ms. Sullivan Woods questioned the Massachusetts School Building Authority's (MSBA) support for studying a 240-student school on the Upham site. Mr. D'Amico explained that the agreement with the MSBA required study of a 240-student school as well as a 365-student school, but that based on the District's educational plan, the 240-student option had been eliminated in the first submission to the MSBA in December. The focus of the ongoing feasibility study is currently on building a 365-student school.

Mr. Morgan noted that after significant work, the HHU Master Plan Committee voted a recommendation to the School Committee:

that it seek approval and funds to undertake a feasibility study to build new schools at the Hardy, Hunnewell, and Upham sites, with the plan to build a 19 section school at Hardy or Upham, followed by a 19 section school at Hunnewell, followed by a 19 section school at the remaining site, provided however, that funds will be sought for the design and construction of the first two schools upon completion of the feasibility study, but funds will be sought for the design and construction of the third school only upon further recommendation by the School Committee, which should occur if elementary enrollment reaches or appears likely to exceed 2,350 students on a trending basis and/or the current school configurations are limiting educational needs.

Mr. Morgan noted that the cost estimates are interesting, but that he would not have supported the work to produce the estimates, as it represents moving backward in the decision-making process. Ms. Martin noted his position but repeated the need to have actual cost estimates to talk about with residents.

Mr. D'Amico reminded the committees of the timeline and contractual agreement with the MSBA and the potential impacts of delays or interruptions, including:

- Possible delays well beyond a few months could jeopardize participation in the MSBA grant program.
- Contractual deadlines of May 2021 could be missed.
- Current net reimbursement for the 18 section H/U school project is estimated to be in the range of \$13M and the 12-section school it could be \$11M.
- If the Town does not meet the contractual deadlines and requirements, then it would not satisfy the MSBA agreement.
- MSBA is a needs-based program with a waiting list of districts each year.

The total additional cost of building 3 schools instead of 2 would be between \$40,120,000 and \$46,161,000, not including any potential loss of MSBA reimbursement. This would mean an additional tax impact of \$296 to \$341 per household per year. In addition, operational impacts include annual operational budgets over the life of the building, increase in School Department and FMD personnel services and expense budgets impacted. Annual operational costs are estimate at approximately \$600,000 per year.

Mr. Gagosian explained the additional carbon impact of the increased square footage related to building a third school. The increase in building size would produce approximately 170 to 200 additional metric tons of carbon dioxide annually.

Mr. Gagosian summarized the conclusions of the analysis, stating that building three smaller schools now would:

1. Significantly increase capital costs and corresponding tax impact.
2. Increase annual operating costs to the Town.
3. Increase carbon emissions.
4. Delay the replacement of obsolete schools by a minimum of two years, and possibly longer.

Mr. Kelley asked why loss of the MSBA grant is not included in the assumptions regarding additional costs, given the information Mr. D'Amico provided about the sensitivity to the MSBA process schedule. Mr. D'Amico explained that the town cannot assume what the MSBA would do in the event that there were a delay and that the MSBA would wait for any local process to play out before responding.

Mr. Ulfelder asked the project team why the square footage of the proposed new schools is significantly larger than the existing schools in town. Mr. Pitkin said that the size of the grade level classrooms would be the same. There is a greater need for special education spaces. There is a new requirement in the MSBA model for innovation/STEM labs for project-based learning. There is a need for full-sized art and music classrooms. The utility/service side of the existing school buildings is much smaller than recommended and allowed by the MSBA (although the Town is not seeking full-service kitchens, given the District's model of central preparation of elementary school lunches at the Middle School).

Mr. Morgan noted the conscious decisions that have previously been made in the process to meet future educational needs. He noted that the Fiske and Schofield renovations were based on the lack of swing space and the ability to complete those projects over the summer, as well as urgent need to address classroom environmental issues. He noted his opposition to building schools aimed at late-Twentieth century education, rather than building for the future.

Mr. Roberti asked what would be done with the cost analysis and how the work was funded. Ms. Gray noted that no additional work order was required in order to fund the

work and that no board or committee was charged with any particular response to the analysis.

Mr. Kelley noted that the square footage of Sprague was not far out of line with the proposed Hunnewell building, especially considering the additional purpose-built spaces proposed for the TLC program at Hunnewell. Mr. Soliva noted that building new buildings allows the town to design exactly the spaces needed and at the sizes needed.

Dr. Lussier emphasized the education plan was thoughtfully developed with the help of the educators working in these buildings every day. He noted that three classrooms per grade give the flexibility to accommodate increase and decrease of enrollment while still meeting the educational program, without repeating mistakes from the past that resulted in the need to add on modular classrooms.

Ms. Gray clarified that the square footage of Sprague is around 68,000 sq. She also described a list of 60 elementary schools built in the last 10 years across the Commonwealth that are consistently a minimum of three classrooms per grade.

Ms. Chow left the meeting at approximately 7:00 PM.

HARDY/UPHAM SITE IMPACT ANALYSIS

Mr. Pitkin reviewed the agenda topics for the Hardy/Upham PSR Options – Site Analysis, Plan Concept Option Updates.

The SMMA landscape architect has walked both the Hardy and Upham sites, documenting trees and other natural features. Every tree at 6” caliper or larger was documented and rated “good”, “fair”, or “poor” for its existing condition. The plan is to walk the site with Town officials and confirm a common understanding of site conditions and quality. The plan is also to evaluate carbon sequestration values for each site, in terms of the delta between existing conditions and the planned site development.

Mr. Pitkin reviewed the mapping of the Hardy site and the identification of each tree. He described the general condition of the trees and wildlife habitat. It has a mix of oaks and other hardwoods, with successive growth and minimal wildlife habitat due to the development patterns of the town. The general health and vigor observed was rated as “fair”.

Similarly, he reviewed the Upham site. He noted the area was likely a third growth area, likely having been cleared by the town in the past. It has a mix of mature oak with individual white pines and cedars. There is thin soil with a high acidic PH due to the abundance of oak leaf litter within the woodlands. There is minimal wildlife habitat due to the development density and school activities. The general health and vigor observed was rated as “fair”.

Mr. Pitkin summarized the options being studied for each site, including an evaluation of a base repair at Upham, new construction at Upham, and new construction and addition/renovation at Hardy.

PSR OPTIONS FOR STUDY – HARDY

Mr. Pitkin reviewed the Hardy site topography, including a full-story drop from the front to the back, then rising up again as it reaches Route 9. In addition, there is a ridge line along the back field area, as well as high groundwater in that area, with general concern for soil quality and how that might impact a foundation system. He noted that the site has an unusual shape, and that the setbacks, particularly near the end of Hardy Rd lead to significant “pinch points” on the site. He noted the question of providing access for entry to or exit from the site via Route 9. He reported that BETA Group thinks that it would be a straightforward process to apply for permission, but that those questions will ultimately be answered during the permitting process.

Mr. Pitkin reviewed Option 7a, which would be new construction in the middle of the site, removing the existing building. In response to a question from Mr. Roberti, Mr. Pitkin reported that the square footage of all of the options is around 80,000, which is larger than the Hunnewell project due to the needs of the Skills program. Ms. Freiman asked about the layout of grade level classrooms within the proposal. In response to a question from Ms. Sawitsky, Mr. Pitkin noted that the design is targeting approximately 100 parking spaces on site, based on needs described by staff. Mr. Pitkin described options for queueing during pickup.

Mr. Pitkin reviewed one possibility for Option 7b, involving new construction oriented 90 degrees from Option 7a. He described challenges related to the topology cross slope and impact on the playing fields. He then reviewed a variation of Option 7b which includes a bend in the building to better fit the site.

Mr. Pitkin reviewed Option 7c, which would be new construction with a wing of the building bending into the area of the three properties recently acquired by the town. Because of the grade change, this option would likely include two stories in the area of the three properties and three stories in the rest of the building, which has an impact on the organization of classrooms within the building.

Mr. Pitkin reviewed Option 7d, which would be new construction built on the same footprint as the existing school. He described options for building design driven by the change in elevation in that area. He reviewed options for circulation and queueing.

Finally, Mr. Pitkin reviewed Option 4, which would be an addition/renovation, removing all but the original 1923/1925 portions of the existing building. The layout would be similar to Option 7d, with questions about what elements to place in the existing structure and which to place in the new portion. Mr. Gagosian asked whether options that included three stories would require zoning relief. Mr. Pitkin indicated that it would.

Mr. Pitkin summarized issues related to the Hardy options:

- The site is very constrained, particularly at the center.
- Weston Road relief will required some version of thru-site access.
- Avoid the southern portion of the site.
- Topography has an impact either on the building or the surrounding fields.
- Access from four sides is possible.

Mr. Hassanein asked about the general approach to massing at the two sites. Mr. Pitkin noted the clear input received by the educators for a compact design.

Mr. Kelley asked if there were proposals for swing space for the options that would require it. He speculated that a “mod farm” might be involved, and asked if siting modulars on the back side of the site would have an impact on the effort to preserve trees there. Mr. Pitkin reported that they had successfully performed a general “test fit” for modular classrooms, similar to what had been studied for the Sprague site. He noted that there were many other questions related to swing space on site that would have to be answered.

PSR OPTIONS FOR STUDY – UPHAM

Mr. Pitkin described the impact of the topology of the site and the requirement for ledge removal. He noted that they would not recommend building on the footprint of the existing building.

Mr. Pitkin reviewed Option 6a, which would be new construction centered on the site. It would maintain the baseball field at the back of the site, and make use of the existing Duke St parking lot. In the front of the site, the Lowell Rd entrance would be straightened to reach the building set farther back in the site, looping around a terraced playing field in the front of the site. He described various circulation options for the site.

Mr. Pitkin reviewed Option 6b, which he described as a variation of Option 6a, rotating the building almost 90 degrees and placing it slightly farther back on the site.

Mr. Pitkin summarized issues related to the Upham options:

- Blasting required, potentially in two phases.
- Thru-site access not required but use of the Dukes Rd parking lot would be beneficial.
- Avoid the edges of the site.
- Phase 2 work would require regrading up to 222' level.
- Access from four sides is possible.

Mr. Roberti asked what “phase 1” and “phase 2” meant. Mr. Pitkin described that phase 1 involves building the new school and phase 2 involves demolition of the existing building and completing site work.

Mr. Ulfelder asked if the majority of ledge removal can be completed during the summer months while school is out. Mr. Pitkin expressed his belief that it could be done in the summer, but would confirm. Mr. Roberti asked about the nature of the ledge and its removal. Mr. Ulfelder asked if information on comparative costs of site work would be available before the SBC makes a recommendation of where to build. Mr. D’Amico reported that final options for review will include cost estimates, including for site work. Ms. Olney asked what the nature of the ledge is at Hardy and if there needs to be blasting at that location. Mr. Pitkin said there is no hint of ledge based on the geotechnical borings.

Ms. Sawitsky asked if the cul-de-sac on Hardy Road could be eliminated. Mr. Pitkin said that the setback was driven by the site line. Ms. Jop said elongating the street would impact the setback further into the site. She suggested extending the right of way further into the site, which would possibly make the setback issue worse. Mr. Soliva asked if pass-through options through site would help. Ms. Jop said yes, but thought that seeking zoning relief is probably the best option. There was further discussion of circulation and pass-through options at both Hardy and Upham.

Ms. Olney asked whether blasting would happen while the existing building is present and potentially occupied. Mr. Pitkin indicated that the blasting would be targeted for a summer, when students are not present. Mr. Hassanein described his professional experience with blasting and predicted that people would be surprised at the limited impact. Mr. Soliva echoed that belief.

Ms. Martin brought up local resources that would benefit children and families around the school and suggested consideration of proximity to parklands and natural resources and recreation. Mr. Soliva noted that the Northeast Collaborative for High Performance Schools (NE-CHPS) standard provides points for access to common resources.

SITE SELECTION CRITERIA

Mr. Pitkin reviewed proposed criteria to be used to select between the two sites, including: Educational Plan, Site Amenities, Walkability/Bikability, Impacts to Natural Habitats, Traffic, and Cost. Ms. Sullivan Woods asked if there is a safety item on the selection criteria when looking at the two sites. Ms. Gray noted the list of criteria list is quite long and expected that some items would be set aside with the understanding that there is not a significant difference between the two sites.

Ms. Sawitsky asked if traffic data would be available before making a decision. Mr. Pitkin confirmed that data will be provided for making those decisions.

PLAYING FIELDS TASK FORCE UPDATE

Ms. Gray welcomed Laurance Stuntz and Ainsley Martin from the Playing Fields Task Force to discuss field usage.

Mr. Stuntz reported on the playing field need in town, including significant growth in participation in sports that use rectangular fields. He noted that various town sports organizations currently spend approximately \$150,000 per year renting field space because not enough municipal space is available. He described the use of current fields at Hardy and Upham. He expressed concern at the potential impact of construction of a new school at either site, whether during construction or permanently. He stated a request that rectangular fields be considered and included in future site planning. Mr. King asked whether declining school enrollment would reduce the demand for field space. Mr. Stuntz noted that demand has increased while enrollment has declined. Mr. Hassanein asked if there was a preference for grass or turf fields. Mr. Stuntz described some of the considerations related to the two.

HISTORICAL COMMISSION UPDATE

Ms. Gray welcomed Elizabeth Shlala and Emily Maitin of the Wellesley Historical Commission. Ms. Shlala described the mission of the Historical Commission and briefly summarized the history of the original Hardy School. She encouraged the preservation of the original structure, as proposed in Option 4 and potentially in other options where the existing structure could be maintained. Ms. Shlala stated that preservation of the building would have pedagogical benefits as well as benefits related to preserving the town's history and culture.

Dr. Lussier noted the extensive efforts of incorporating historical elements of the old high school into the new building.

SCHEDULE

Mr. D'Amico reviewed the SBC's upcoming meeting schedule.

ADJOURNMENT

At approximately 8:40PM upon a motion by Mr. Ulfelder and seconded by Mr. King, the School Building Committee voted unanimously to adjourn.

At approximately 8:40PM upon a motion by Mr. Kelley and seconded by Ms. Gray, the School Committee unanimously voted to adjourn.

Respectfully submitted,

Matt Kelley
Secretary

DOCUMENTS AND EXHIBITS USED

- 11/14/19 Meeting Minutes
- FMD Conceptual Cost Memo for Three School
- SMMA Presentation of Current Options
- H/U Workplan
- Playing Fields Task Force Presentation
- Historical Commission Presentation
- MSBA Comment Responses