

**Westwood Public Schools
Community Forum
Hanlon School Gymnasium
Tuesday, March 20, 2018**

Present:

Carol Lewis, Chairperson
Anthony Mullin, Committee Member
Josepha Jowdy, Committee Member

Emily Parks, Superintendent
Heath Petracca, Director of Business and Finance

**Meeting was called to order 7:04pm
Pledge of Allegiance**

Meeting was recorded by Westwood Media Center

Discussion Items and Public Participation (7:04pm-8:30pm)

Potential elementary building project

Ms. Parks opened up the meeting. There have been a series of community events that have been held regarding the building project. She will share information and then open up the floor for questions and comments.

Westwood is known for its schools and for being a community that invests in its education. Three of the elementary school buildings are in need of modernization. Deerfield and Hanlon were built in 1950s and Sheehan was built in the 1940s.

What are we doing?

- Need to figure out how to address our school building needs. Doing nothing isn't an option. But we need to decide how to move forward.
- It makes sense to get funding from the State with the MSBA
- Westwood received significant State funding in the past for the high school, Martha Jones, and Downey.
- Westwood has been invited into the eligibility phase for our next project. Now we need to take the next step with the State this spring if we wish to continue in the funding process.

Hitting the "reset button"

Some work was done a couple of years ago to think about possible solutions to our building needs, but it was realized that we needed to do a better job engaging the community in the decision-making process as well as realizing that we wanted to work with MSBA and had to work within their prescribed process.

MSBA Process

- Recently, the district took initial steps towards receiving grants from the Mass. School Building Authority (Reimbursement around 31%-34% of the cost of the project)
- The MSBA voted to invite Westwood into its eligibility period (9 Months)
- During the eligibility period, the community is asked to approve borrowing to undertake a feasibility study.
- If funding is secured for the feasibility study, then the community has the opportunity to engage in a long process to identify all possible projects and determine the preferred option (30 months)

Deerfield School

- It was built in 1953
- This building was originally designed to be a bomb shelter
- Modular addition in 1995 brought total square footage to slightly more than 35,000 sq. ft.

Paul Hanlon School

- It was built in 1951
- A three room modular addition was put on in 2004
- The building is slightly less than 35,000 sq. ft.
- The buildings sits on approximately 36 acres of land

William Sheehan School

- This is the oldest and largest of the Town's elementary schools
- It was built in 1948
- An addition in the 1960s brought the total square footage to 50,000
- The building sits on approximately 4.27 acres of land

Tours of the three buildings have taken place

- While we continue to care for and maintain critical building systems, like HVAC and plumbing, they are old, inefficient and approaching the end of their useful life.
- Air quality and temperature problems caused by old, faulty HVAC systems have a negative impact on learning.
- The designs of these buildings were not built like the modern schools of today.
- Classroom sizes are not the standards for modern teaching standards. Today the standard classroom (grade 1-6) ranges from 950-1300 sq. ft. Kindergarten classrooms are 1,100-1,300 sq. ft. The majority of Hanlon's classrooms are 895 sq. ft. The Kindergarten classrooms are extremely small.
- At the Sheehan, classrooms in original 1948 portion of the building are 685 sq. ft. In the 1968 addition, they are 900 sq. ft. Kindergarten rooms are approximately 1,100 sq. ft. Approximately 90% of Sheehan's classrooms are undersized by today's standards.

- At the Deerfield, there are four classrooms that are approximately 800 sq. ft. The remaining rooms are 1,056 sq. ft. (within today's standards)

Pictures were displayed showing how space is carved out to make art rooms, library space, special education space in hallways as well as an example of an office space for the psychologist office and how it can only be accessed by entering the speech therapist's office. This is not ideal for these type of services.

The District is in the process of learning how to make fiscally responsible decisions to transform schools into modern places of learning that are ADA compliant, respectful of the needs of all students, and able to accommodate current and anticipated educational methodology.

Next steps

At Town Meeting, an article to approve borrowing an amount not to exceed \$1.75 Million to fund the feasibility study

The feasibility study is the process for:

- Determining as a community how we might address our school needs
- Deciding the community's preferred solution
- Getting the MSBA to work with us and provide funds for project

Important info

- Westwood has had successful projects with MSBA before. (High School, Downey, Martha Jones) and the State reimbursement was really important to funding the projects.
- If project ultimately goes forward, funding for feasibility study is eligible for MSBA reimbursement.
- The borrowing for this phase will be paid for as part of Town's debt service - no override, no impact on school budget

Ultimately if a project goes forward, it would be 6-10 years before renovated or newly-constructed schools open.

The process for deciding as a community what that project will be is still more than a year away. Right now the only question is whether or not to go forward with the feasibility process

Stay informed

- www.westwoodschoolbuilding.com
- Twitter: @westwood_ps
- Local newspapers, Town newsletter, Westwood Media Center

Ms. Lewis thanked all those who attended the meeting tonight (approximately 20) and opened up the floor for questions and comments.

A resident received the warrant articles from FinCom. The warrant for the school is referenced as the Hanlon School Project. Now that she has heard this presentation she understands why it is listed this way because of the explanation tonight. But the message isn't clear on the warrant

and needs to be made clear to the public that this just doesn't mean it is a plan for Hanlon. The Committee agrees and hopes that community members attending this meeting and the other planned meetings can get that message out to their neighbors and friends.

A resident that used to be a PTO president and very involved in their child's schools stated that it is pretty hard to project needs of the children who haven't been born yet. The resident asked how numbers are projected for the project. It is a challenge. What happens in the feasibility study that people who are experts with this will do a study and project the numbers. This occurred with the High School project and the numbers are pretty much in line today as had been projected.

A resident can see the challenges faced with the schools and agrees it does need to be addressed. The resident asked if during the MSBA eligibility phase can proposed renovations at three schools, building three new schools, or is it limited to one project? All options can be looked at during the feasibility study.

A resident asked at what point of the process after the feasibility study if then we decide to move forward how would the design be voted? Would it be at Town Meeting or is it a School Committee decision? The School Committee will make the final decision after they have heard from the town which plan to move forward with. There would be a school building committee appointed during this phase. There are certain town officials that are required to be a part of that school building committee. The Town Meeting is where it is decided and voted on to fund a project.

The resident also asked if we only eligible for the 1/3 funding? Yes.

A resident asked at the meetings a couple years ago weren't a lot of these studies already paid for? Yes, a master plan and space needs was submitted to MSBA and helped us get invited into the process. A lot of this process will be used, and it is very hopeful to keep the cost of the feasibility study down, hope it would be much less than \$1.75M. The District worked with MSBA and other communities to come up with a cost of \$1.75M. The Master plan cost \$150,000 a couple of years ago. The feasibility study will go a lot further/broader than the Master Plan.

Ms. Lewis wanted to mention that this presentation is located on the website. Please pass this along to neighbors and friends to be informed about all of this project.

A resident wanted to thank Ms. Parks for the presentation, it was very clear and helpful and is curious about the 6-10 years before anything is completed. How will the building maintenance be taken care of for these three schools during this time period? Mr. Petracca stated that maintaining buildings to remain safe and clean are the top priority. No major renovations will be done during this period. Try to fix things to keep costs down but will replace things if need be.

A resident asked if this feasibility study would look at what what would come of the buildings that aren't being used as schools anymore? That has to be part of the conversation. The District is working with the municipal side during all of this looking at all the building needs, it would hold off on other building needs and move the school department to the top of the priority list. Space needs are looked at. For example, the Deerfield school is in a great location being in the center of town.

A resident wanted to thank the committee for getting the communication out. The question was on the voting process. How does that work? At the voting process to vote for the funding of the final project, voters will know what the option will be and what the School Committee would make as the recommendation. Then the cost is determined. That is when the town votes for funding for the project.

A resident thought it would be beneficial if people could see that the School Committee has listened and knows and understands their concerns of wanting to keep neighborhood schools, their emotional attachment, all safety concerns and environmental concerns and have those listed out. Then the committee could list out what the needs are of the schools and the community can see that they have been heard and can then look at the project and hopefully the town will come together to back it.

A resident asked if deciding on the feasibility study funding what is the vote for next spring? This spring if voted to fund this study, then it goes for another 30 months to go through this process. Then at the end of that time is when a project will be put forward to fund by the town.

A resident asked if the feasibility study goes forward are we guaranteed the MSBA funding? Have asked them that question and virtually never has the funding never come through. The town will know when voting on the final project what the percent of reimbursement will be.

A resident asked about the middle school. Is that building a factor with this project? No it isn't apart of this project. The middle school is not forgotten, but felt the elementary schools are in more critical need.

A resident asked about taxes, if new buildings are built will there be a rise in taxes? Taxes won't go up to vote for the feasibility study because that money is coming from town debt. When it comes time to fund a big construction, Ms. Parks doesn't feel it will happen in the prop 2 1/2. The high school building will be paid off in a couple of years and should help with the funding. People would need to be informed as to what tax increases may be required if the full project is funded.

A resident wanted to respond about the tax question. When their children were going through school the cost per student was \$10,000 per year. The cost is \$260,000 for the 13 years of education. They currently pay \$10,000 for taxes, 1/2 goes to the school, 1/2 goes to the town. Practically paying pennies for your child's education.

A resident asked who else besides the required town officials would be a part of the school building committee, would residents be a part of this committee? Yes. How would those residents be selected to be on that committee? People would apply if interested in serving on this committee and the school committee would read all the applications and decide.

Adjournment

A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Ms. Jowdy. Seconded by Mr. Mullin

Adjournment 8:10pm