

**Westwood Public Schools
Community Forum
Westwood Senior Center
Thursday, April 12, 2018
9:00am**

Present:

Carol Lewis, Chairperson
Charles Donahue, Clerk
Anthony Mullin, Committee Member
Josepha Jowdy, Committee Member

Emily Parks, Superintendent
Allison Borchers, Assistant Superintendent
Heath Petracca, Director of Business and Finance

**Meeting was called to order 9:02 am
Pledge of Allegiance**

Meeting was recorded by Westwood Media Center

Superintendent's Report (9:02am-9:26am)

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

Public Participation (9:26am-9:55am) approximately 20 attended

A resident asked how many votes are needed to get the warrant to pass. A 2/3rd majority is needed. Taxes do not go up with this borrowing. It is taken care of in the town's debt service.

The town meeting date has been changed to May 30th at the high school gym.

Resident asked if it gets approved at this town meeting, will a vote be taking place at a later date for a design of the project? Yes, the feasibility study is the design phase. When a final plan was recommended by the School Committee with the community's input, then it would come up again at town meeting for a vote to fund the recommended project.

Resident asked if this would be take 6-10 years? Yes.

Resident has heard a concern in the neighborhood with the building of the condos, will have children, and the possibility of taxes going up and they do not have children in the system and may vote down this warrant. The resident agrees that the quality of the school system affects the quality of the town even if you don't have children currently in the schools.

Resident has lived in Westwood for 40 plus years and has no children, being a teacher and now volunteers at the Martha Jones School. She stated that we need to educate our children, it is the most important thing for our children.

Resident asked about saving energy with the new renovations and whether this has been thought about currently. As part of this process, as the more efficient the building will be, the higher percentage of MSBA reimbursement is provided. Our current buildings are working in this direction with being more energy efficient.

The resident asked if the percentage of savings is currently known. Is it currently being tracked? This is important in the process for budgeting for this project. Yes, solar panels were installed at the high school this past year. Now we are starting the tracking process to see what is being saved and working within the budget knowing these savings.

Are you tracking the energy savings, not the monetary savings? Make sure that these new systems are working correctly to be as energy efficient as it can be.

Resident has three children who attend the Westwood Public Schools. How does the feasibility study work? Who serves on this committee? The MSBA has a select request of who needs to be on this committee (i.e., school committee, other town officials, community members, etc.). We would need to continue to engage in conversations with the community to develop a set of criteria as to what the community wants and needs. The School Committee makes the final decision.

Resident asked if the building is built in 1940s and 1950s, would you be able to make these energy efficient? Do you tear down, gut and start over? That is the question that will be answered when going forward with this study.

Resident asked are there as many students now than there were in the 1960s? This information is not known, but do know that same amount of students now as there were 10 years ago. It is now just dispersed at different schools now. These demographics will be looked at during this project. This was looked at when high school was built. At the time only 600 students and when

new building built it needed to have space for 1000 students. There is currently that number attending the high school.

Resident asked what happens if this is not passed? If this isn't passed. the school needs still have to be addressed. The option would be to wait a few years and reapply with the state again. This is not the best option.

Resident asked what other paths are being taken to get the word out about this project? How can we help to get the message out and how is the committee working on getting the word out? Community forums have been held, recorded and posted with Westwood Media Center, every 6 weeks some sort of publication has been submitted, visiting Fox Hill, etc. We need your help getting the word out to your friends to get this information out. Need to organize and come to the meeting on May 30th to vote for this warrant article. Comparing ourselves to other communities, they have built new elementary schools. Westwood needs to now focus on these needs as well. It will cost a lot more to get schools to where they need to be without the state funding. Need to look at this as a legacy for our town.

Communication is key and needs to be put in front of people. There is concern about taxes going up. Residents will pay more if this is done piecemeal instead of going forward with this project. Need to be sent out with short and direct information. The School Committee is always looking for an idea to get this information out to the community, get important pieces out in bullet points, proper value, etc.

A resident commented that property values will drop if the schools are not taken care of because it is the wonderful school system that drives the property value.

Resident suggested showing up at the soccer field and lacrosse fields to get the word out.

Adjournment

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

Adjournment 9:55am