

WESTWOOD SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Westwood, Massachusetts

MEETING MINUTES

December 9, 2019

Attendance and Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 7:01pm in the Cafeteria at Thurston Middle School by Chair Anthony Mullin. Also present were: Josepha Jowdy, Vice Chairperson; Carol Lewis, Clerk; Charles Donahue; and Maya Plotkin. Superintendent Emily Parks, Assistant Superintendent Allison Borchers, and Director of Business and Finance Lemma Jn-baptiste were present on behalf of the District. John Cianciarulo recorded the minutes.

Call to Order

Mr. Mullin called the meeting to order. Westwood Media Center was on-site to record the meeting.

Discussion Items

Elementary Schools Building Project Update

Mr. Mullin recognized Jason Boone, Educational Planner at Dore and Whittier, the project's design firm. He shared the objectives for the evening: Report out education and facilities progress to date; and to explore how education and facilities have generally changed over time.

Mr. Boone began his presentation by sharing the meeting agenda and then outlining the timeline of the building project.

Mr. Mullin then opened the meeting up for questions. A resident of Gay Street asked how feedback from prior community meetings was being incorporated. Mr. Boone responded that it, along with feedback from all other visioning sessions, is being digested and will be folded into the options development stage. Mr. Mullin also responded that all feedback from the fall forums was shared with those on the mailing list and also posted on the building project website. The feedback/questions received were incorporated into the frequently asked questions that were subsequently developed and published.

To-date, sessions held include principal interviews and educational walk-throughs; a faculty and staff visioning workshop, and principals' workshops. Mr. Boone then presented on the recent faculty/staff visioning workshop held during the all-day in-service. Elementary faculty and staff shared their vision of education in Westwood and how a new facility would support that.

Mr. Mullin again opened the meeting up for questions. A resident of Greenacre Road asked how these visioning sessions would have an effect on elementary schools not involved in the building project. Ms. Parks responded, reiterating that it is important to have a vision for elementary education across the district, with teaching and learning aligned across all elementary schools. This underscores the importance of the all-day in-service held for all elementary faculty, not just from those schools involved in the project. Teachers were grouped in a mix across buildings and grade-levels. From this input, a building can be designed specifically to that vision. She added that there may be some things that come from this process that could be expanded to the other elementary schools. Mr. Boone reiterated this point, stating that some things like furniture and reconfigured breakout spaces could be incorporated at the other elementary schools.

A resident of Wentworth Street asked if there was any data supporting increased educational outcomes stemming from a new school building. Mr. Boone responded, stating that there have been two studies on

well-designed facilities, with a focus on daylighting. The study revealed that standardized tests and attendance rates increased by as much as 20% in newly-designed buildings versus older buildings. Another study in 2018 indicated that the year-to-year learning outcomes, in places where students were housed in facilities that were aligned with the educational mission versus not, was a difference of 16%. Therefore, there is a tangible impact on facilities that are designed for all students.

A resident of Dover Road asked if there has been any thought on reconfiguring the elementary grade configuration from kindergarten through grade 5 to a kindergarten through grade 2; and grades 3 through 5 model. Ms. Parks responded that Westwood had been a K-2/3-5 elementary configuration in the past. And while there has been some thought about reconfiguring in terms of this project, it was decided not to as it would be less disruptive by maintaining the current model.

A resident of Highview Street asked about the plan for the schools that will not be involved in the project. Ms. Parks responded that the answer has not yet been determined as the community is in the initial stages of the feasibility study. This precise question was brought up in the community forums earlier in the fall and ensure that the District and the School Committee has a plan to address. This is being thought about right now. At the time of Town Meeting next year, there shall be a timeline and plan for addressing the remaining building.

Mr. Donahue asked about the implications and design for recreation department and youth sport use due to the potential project. He also asked about environmental learning and leveraging Hale Reservation as a resource for elementary curriculum. Mr. Mullin responded that gymnasium and field design will be part of the conversation when it comes to the design of the building. He also responded that the District will continue to leverage its relationship with Hale.

Mr. Boone responded about the gymnasium, stating that the Massachusetts School Building Authority has specific guidelines about gyms. At the elementary level, they permit a 6,000 square foot gym which is large enough for a high school competition court and appropriate runoff space, but no bleachers. Anything built that exceeds that guideline will not be eligible for reimbursement. The Town could pay the overage that is in excess of the reimbursement. Typically any playing fields located on the site are subsequently rebuilt (i.e., replicating fields on the site of the existing structure).

Mr. Boone continued the presentation by posing a question to residents present at the meeting, asking how education has changed over the years. The group responded: student/teacher ratios, groups/teams, technology, specialists, and special education. He then shared historical images that depict predictions of education in the future. This was followed by images of current-era school facilities that showcase flexible spaces, choices for students, and sensory spaces that are very different from the predictions. He concluded the segment by summarizing how education has changed over the past fifty years:

- Learning how to learn
- Individualized student learning choices
- Highlighting connectedness between disciplines
- Offering authentic learning experiences

Mr. Mullin opened the meeting for questions again. There were none.

Mr. Boone continued his presentation by sharing photographs and diagrams of various facilities and how they are designed to support the experience of students. Residents asked questions throughout.

A resident of Gay Street asked if staffing needs change based upon the design of a facility that includes breakout spaces. Sarah Cronin, Hanlon School Principal, responded, stating that teachers already

facilitate instruction in a workshop format and that there are already multiple educators in-and-out of classrooms throughout the day.

A resident asked about whether sound is an issue in these spaces. Mr. Boone responded that there are things like carpeting and soft furniture that help with the acoustics.

Another resident asked if accessibility was considered for some of the breakout spaces. Mr. Boone responded that it is, and identified a ramped breakout space in one of the photos.

Another resident asked if there was any study done after a building is constructed to determine whether spaces are being used as they are designed. Mr. Boone responded that it varies from district to district and from architect to architect about whether post-occupancy evaluations are completed. He stressed that a flexible design is important so that there are options. Ms. Parks replied that there is a team of educators from Westwood that will be touring recently-built elementary schools on Tuesday, where they will be asking the host schools these questions.

Mr. Mullin then formally opened the meeting for any questions.

A resident asked if it is easier to be more energy-efficient with these larger, open spaces. Mr. Boone responded that, in ceiling height for example, there is no difference. The acoustic panels depicted in one photo are at the same height as where a ceiling would be placed.

Another resident asked about cost differences between a new versus traditional space. Mr. Boone responded that anytime square footage is added, there is an additional cost. The MSBA has made provisions for breakout spaces to be partially reimbursed. The resident clarified, asking what the cost of a basic space would be versus that of one with additional features. Mr. Boone responded that he did not know.

Chin Lin, Senior Project Manager at Compass Project Management, was recognized. He explained a way to think about it: You are still going to be buying furniture; whether movable or stationary; the delta is not enough – for the time-being – to be concerned. What drives the difference is if, for example, you want a larger gym. A cost estimate comparison will be prepared for submission to the MSBA in March.

Ms. Plotkin explained that the purpose of these community forums is to showcase how education has changed and how the design of a new facility will support that. She reiterated that the School Committee is cost-conscious and sensitive to the fact that these are taxpayer dollars being spent.

Discussion Regarding Educational Plan

Mr. Boone asked residents in attendance to explore images of elementary schools posted in the back of the cafeteria and respond:

- I like... (A positive comment about something that the project should explore.)
- I wish... (A visionary comment about something the project should consider.)
- I wonder... (A commend requesting additional information or exploration.)

Responses will be compiled and shared following the meeting.

At the conclusion of the exercise, Mr. Boone reconvened the group and shared next steps. These include a duplicate public forum on December 12, developing options throughout December and January,

preparing cost estimates and evaluating options in February, identifying a short list and submitting a preliminary design program to the MSBA in March, and identifying a preferred solution in the summer.

Before entertaining a motion to adjourn, Mr. Mullin reminded residents about the building project website, reiterating that the School Committee and the District continue to share as much information as possible with residents.

Adjournment

Mrs. Jowdy motioned to adjourn. Mrs. Lewis seconded. Vote: 5-0-0.

Result: Approved (Unanimous)

The meeting adjourned at 8:23pm.

List of Documents and Exhibits Used at Meeting:

- December 9, 2019 Public Forum slideshow presentation by Dore and Whitter
- Various images of elementary school facilities