

WESTWOOD SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Westwood, Massachusetts

MEETING – BUILDING PROJECT FORUM MINUTES

October 13, 2020

Attendance and Call to Order

The meeting, held remotely¹, was called to order at 7:00pm by Chair Carol Lewis. Also present were: Maya Plotkin, Vice Chairperson; Charles Donahue, Clerk; Anthony Mullin; and Amanda Phillips. Superintendent Emily Parks and Director of Student Services Abby Hanscom were present on behalf of the District. John Cianciarulo recorded the minutes.

Mrs. Lewis recognized the live stream of the meeting, which was provided for real-time, public access to the activities of the School Committee. Members of the public were able to view a live stream of the meeting via the Internet at www.westwood.k12.ma.us/live and via Westwood Media Center's platforms.

Discussion Items

Mrs. Lewis asked Vice Chair Maya Plotkin to facilitate the discussion items. Mrs. Plotkin recognized the other panelists:

- Rob Fitzgerald, Project Manager, Dore and Whittier, the project's architect
- Don Walter, Principal Architect, Dore and Whittier
- Tim Bonfatti, President, Compass Project Management, the project's manager
- Chin Lin, Project Manager, Compass Project Management

Elementary Schools Building Project Presentation

Design Approach

An update on the process and overview of the project timeline were reviewed.

- Community Input and Visioning
 - October 2019: Study Begins
 - March 2020: School Building Committee approves shortlist of options
 - June 2020: School Building Committee submits final option to Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA)
 - August 2020: MSBA approves final option
- Schematic Design
 - Present phase as of October 2020
 - Spring 2021: MSBA vote on MSBA funding; Town Meeting vote on funding for project
- Design Developments and Bid Documents
 - Remainder of 2021 through Spring 2022
- Construction
 - Spring 2022: Construction begins
 - Fall/Winter 2023: School opens

Mrs. Plotkin asked Rob Fitzgerald to review the existing conditions of the Hanlon School. Considerations included:

- No parent drop-off loop
- Bus loop is very short

¹ Remote meeting held in accordance with Executive Order of Massachusetts Governor, March 12, 2020

- Cars backing out into traffic on Gay Street
- Room for expansion; 30 acres of land to the west of the school

Community Context, Site, Building, Phasing, Schedule

The new school would be sited directly behind the existing Hanlon, having as little impact on the Shuttleworth property as necessary. Inspiration on the design is being drawn from the woodlands to form the concept of a “school in the woods.”

Site Plan

- Held visioning sessions with faculty/staff to get feedback on options. The result of those sessions point to the need for additional playing fields and community access.
 - Green space forms basis for community use

Education as Playful Learning Outdoor Learning Areas

- Learning Walk
 - Sensory discovery (smells, sights, etc.)
 - Connects outdoor learning
 - Signage to support curriculum
- Stump/Gathering Area
 - Three outdoor learning areas
 - Mix of group gathering and cave spaces
 - Different content focus (e.g., weather) at each area
 - Chalkboard/display

Mr. Fitzgerald then reviewed the floor plans. He highlighted the Media Center/STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Mathematics) porch, which includes the art, media, and STEM spaces which have direct access to the outdoors.

The construction phasing plan was then reviewed.

- Phase 1: Spring 2022
 - Construct fencing; separation from existing school
 - Construct new trail
- Phase 2: Spring 2022-Fall 2023
 - Construct new school
- Phase 3: Fall/Winter 2023
 - Move students into new building
- Phase 4: Fall/Winter 2023
 - Demolish existing school
 - Complete remaining fields, landscape, and roads

The existing school would remain in continuous operation throughout construction.

A Sustainability Subcommittee has been formed. They have been working closely with the design team and the full School Building Committee, studying a number of different elements.

To-date, the project is:

- Net-zero energy ready
- Fossil fuel-free (Using geothermal wells for heating and cooling)
- High performance ventilation system to meet COVID-response guidelines
- Super-insulated thermal envelope
- Targeting LEED Silver v.4

Materials palettes were reviewed, reflecting the “school in the woods” concept. Mr. Fitzgerald then shared 3D models, which were works in progress, conceptualizing the design of the building.

Next steps in the project include:

- October: Community presentation
- November: Submit Schematic Design package for cost estimates
- December: Receive cost estimates; School Building Committee vote on submission to MSBA
- Spring 2021: Town Meeting and ballot vote

Public Participation: Inspiration Board

The public was invited to participate in an exercise to provide input on the design of the school. They were invited to complete a Google Form, which was available until 9pm, which included images symbolizing things that would be included in the project.

Questions and Answers

Members of the public were able to ask questions via Zoom.

Joseph Jowdy asked about the location of kindergarten and first grade classrooms in the new school. Ms. Parks stated that other than kindergarten classrooms (which have larger bathrooms), all of the other grade-level classrooms are interchangeable.

Director of Student Services Abby Hanscom wanted to ensure the STEAM porch has a sufficient turning radius for accessibility.

A resident named Mark urged caution on the foot traffic flow in the corridors as they appear narrow. Mr. Fitzgerald responded that there is plenty of room throughout the building and throughout corridors for student travel.

Christina Martin is concerned about the current design and urged the design team to steer towards something timeless.

Robert Christopherson asked whether traffic congestion had been addressed. A general study was done last fall with a deeper study to take place in the next few weeks. While current vehicular traffic is certainly lower due to the pandemic, data from the first study will also be integrated. In an effort to mitigate traffic, driveways leading up to the building will allow cars off of Gay Street and onto the site, ensuring plenty of queueing space.

Kate W. asked about the location of the Extended Day Program in the school building.

Peter Schuler stated that he is concerned about the acreage. Mr. Fitzgerald responded that the typical size for schools is twenty acres. He asked if the fields will have lights. They will not. Mr. Schuler then asked about fencing. Mrs. Plotkin responded that the design team is discussing the use of natural features to serve as quasi-fencing.

Sandra Castaldini asked whether an outdoor basketball court will be planned. It will. She then asked if the Preschool would move to the new building. Ms. Parks responded that there is currently no plan to relocate the Preschool to the Hanlon.

Polly Attridge is concerned about the large size of the building. She would like to know about the plans for Deerfield and potentially moving the 11v11 soccer field there. Mrs. Plotkin responded that the size is dictated by enrollment. The School Committee will look at Deerfield to determine whether there is any need for that building. The town has a need for additional fields, which is why there are fields on this site.

Fran Fusco asked about the size of the lawn on the north side of the building. Mr. Fitzgerald responded that it is approximately 50 feet x 90 feet and is designed as an outdoor space for children to use for unstructured activities (not large enough for organized sports). She also asked whether there is adequate parking. Spaces have been calculated based off of the typical design for schools this size and also planned faculty count. She asked whether the windows will open. They will.

Al Fusco asked about security measures. Discussions have taken place with both Westwood Fire and Police. Additional meetings will take place in the coming weeks.

Kate W. asked how the floor plans support student safety. The Westwood Police have been included in some of the design decisions. She then asked about taking advantage of sunlight. Mr. Fitzgerald responded that the building is oriented to take advantage of sunlight. The roof will be solar panel-ready. The Sustainability Subcommittee is reviewing and making recommendations related to renewable energy.

Jim Giurleo would like an opportunity to walkthrough the project. Westwood Media Center has offered to work with the district to provide ongoing construction updates.

Amanda D. asked about the area in the back of the gymnasium. Mr. Fitzgerald stated that it includes office space for physical education teachers, a receiving area, mechanical space, and dumpster.

Fran Fusco asked why the two schools are not the same size. Peak enrollment for the combined Deerfield/Hanlon is 560 students; Sheehan is in the 300s.

Lucy Tshuka asked whether trees between Laura Lane and school would be cut down. Mr. Fitzgerald stated that they goal is to keep as many trees as possible.

Donna Morrison expressed concern about Lowell Woods being cleared. Mrs. Plotkin responded that Lowell Woods is not being touched. The Shuttleworth is a separate parcel of land that the Town purchased from Dedham in 1969 for school purposes.

Polly Attridge asked about radon and ledge and whether construction costs would be increased due to the topography. Initial tests on the site for soil evaluation have been conducted. Cost estimates will be reviewed once they have been submitted.

Fran Fusco would like to see a less modern design.

Amanda D. asked that the location of the bathrooms be identified.

Jim Giurleo is concerned about the location of the driveway in proximity to his own driveway. The school's driveway will be an increased distance from Laura Lane than it is currently.

Amanda asked if the parking for the Scout House would remain. Nothing on the Scout House property would be touched. Parking spaces are included.

Donna Morrison expressed concern for the endowment for Lowell Woods. Mrs. Plotkin again reiterated that the school would not be located on the Lowell Woods plot.

Peter Schuler asked if the design supports preserving natural landscape as an important site feature. The design attempts to take a surgical approach to the development of the site.

Polly Attridge asked if there would be blasting. Mr. Fitzgerald anticipates some blasting of ledge as the design develops further. It is anticipated that surveys for each home in the area will be conducted and all surrounding neighbors will be met with in advance to discuss specifics of the process.

Mary Kate Ferreira would like students to compose the signs that would be included on the walking trail.

Al Fusco asked why there are not equal enrollments at the Hanlon and Sheehan. There is no way to evenly spread the student population. The School Committee only wants to redistrict once.

Fran Fusco asked about student enrollment projections.

Jim Giurleo asked for additional clarification on driveways.

Fran Fusco stated that she is not a fan of the new look.

Christina Martin would like students to have input on the design of the school.

Fran Fusco asked if there would be netting or high fencing by the road for fields. Mr. Fitzgerald stated that this would likely not be necessary.

Ellen Rollings asked to use native plants and trees so as not to disrupt neighboring ecosystems.

Donna Morrison asked what can be done about the costs. Mrs. Plotkin stated that the Committee is focused on costs. They will carefully look at cost estimates and make decisions based on what feels important to the project.

Amanda D. hopes that a portion of the Deerfield and Hanlon schools' history is brought to the new building.

Pete Schuler is opposed to the project as it requires removal of trees and wildlife habitat.

Christina Martin feels that the design should blend.

A resident named Arthur asked why a large parking lot is needed.

Polly Attridge suggested removing fields to have less impact on the woods.

Fran Fusco noted that outdoor classroom space is only as good as how it is maintained.

Polly Attridge asked that the district keep the Deerfield School.

Adjournment

Mr. Mullin made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mrs. Phillips seconded.

Roll call vote:

Mrs. Lewis	Yes
Mrs. Plotkin	Yes
Mr. Donahue	Yes
Mr. Mullin	Yes
Mrs. Phillips	Yes

Result: 5-0-0 (Unanimous)

The meeting adjourned at 8:34pm.

Documents/Exhibits Used at Meeting

- Slideshow presentation drafted by Dore and Whittier, dated October 13, 2020
- Google form for resident feedback: "Westwood – Hanlon Exterior Inspiration Board"