

WESTWOOD SCHOOL COMMITTEE  
Westwood, Massachusetts

**MEETING MINUTES**  
**March 18, 2021**

**Attendance and Call to Order**

The meeting, held remotely<sup>1</sup>, was called to order at 7:00pm by Chairperson Carol Lewis. Also present were: Maya Plotkin, Vice Chairperson; Charles Donahue, Clerk; Anthony Mullin; and Amanda Phillips. Superintendent Emily Parks; Assistant Superintendent Allison Borchers; Director of Business and Finance Lemma Jn-baptiste; and Director of Student Services Abigail Hanscom were present on behalf of the district. John Cianciarulo recorded the minutes.

Also present were Tim Bonfatti and Chin Lin of Compass Project Management, the Owner's project management company; and Don Walter and Rob Fitzgerald of Dore and Whittier, the project's architectural firm.

Mrs. Lewis also 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](http://www.westwood.k12.ma.us/live). Westwood Media Center also recorded the meeting for later broadcast on its platforms.

**Discussion Item**

Westwood School Building Project

Superintendent Emily Parks and School Building Committee Chairperson and School Committee Vice Chairperson Maya Plotkin presented.

*A School for the Community*

- High-quality education space for students
- Playing fields
- Large gymnasium
- Additional performance space
- Retain access to Lowell Wood
- Walkable for families
- Includes traffic mitigation plan

*A Bit of History*

- In the late 1990s, the community completed an addition and some renovations at Thurston Middle School.
- Both the Martha Jones and Downey schools were fully renovated in the early 2000s.
- The town completed construction on the current Westwood High School (and the Preschool facility) in 2005.

*2015 Master Plan/Capital Needs Study*

- Commissioned by the School Committee
- Examined the educational facilities in the district
- Identified those schools in most need of capital repair or replacement

*Hanon, Deerfield, and Sheehan are in Need of Modernization*

- Hanlon Elementary School was built in 1951
- Deerfield Elementary School was built in 1953
- Sheehan Elementary School was built in 1948

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

- All three schools experience space deficiencies in their educational programs, particularly special education, art, and music.
- Each school needs significant upgrades, including HVAC, plumbing, electrical, exterior windows, and accessibility. Hanlon needs a roof replacement.
- Hanlon and Deerfield are overcrowded; they have temporary modular classrooms.
- Hanlon was determined to be in the most need of the three schools.

A video produced by Westwood Media Center was shown, which highlighted some of the issues at the Hanlon and Deerfield schools. These issues included:

- Hanlon School
  - Breakout spaces include hallways and repurposed closets
  - Special education rooms are in small, converted offices
  - Library is a small, old, converted classroom
  - Science materials are stored outside of classrooms because of limited space
  - Pipes are deteriorating, causing frequent steam leaks
  - Small main office is the gateway to the Principal's office, nurse's station, and faculty workroom
  - School Psychologist and Speech Therapist are in subdivided space with limited confidentiality
  - The backstage of the gym is a swing space used for art classes and music classes and is not handicap accessible
  - On days where music and art classes coincide, a temporary music classroom is setup in the gymnasium
  - The art cleanup room is a small, converted bathroom
  - An aging ceiling grid collapsed, causing school to close recently for two days
- Deerfield School
  - FOCUS Program/Special Education rooms are small
  - Only one "standard" sized kindergarten classroom
  - Art room is in a converted locker room and has limited handicap accessibility
  - Small gymnasium used for larger scale assemblies and presentations
  - Cafeteria is small and is also used as a swing space for music classrooms
  - Learning Center is a cut-through to the staff room
  - Psychologist's office used to be a closet, offering students limited confidentiality
  - Library used to be a classroom
  - Modular classrooms added in 1995 have required several recent repairs, including a mold abatement and roof replacement this year

#### *Just this School Year*

- Ceiling collapse in a classroom at Hanlon which required school closure.
- Roof replacement and mold abatement on Deerfield modular classrooms required certain classes to relocate within the school.

After assessing the state of the building through the Master Plan, the School Committee pursued partnering with the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA), a quasi-independent public authority that partners with Massachusetts communities to provide financial support to address aging school buildings.

- Westwood submitted a Statement of Interest for Hanlon in 2017.
- Westwood was accepted into the MSBA's program in December 2017 on its first submission.

- Subsequently met with the MSBA to ask them to expand their investment to “solve” for multiple schools.
- Residents appropriated funds to conduct a Feasibility Study in May 2018.
- The MSBA voted Westwood into the Feasibility Study in February 2019 and the School Building Committee was formed thereafter.

#### *Repair or Replace?*

The district engaged in a two-year feasibility study. As part of the study, in partnership with the MSBA, options were studied:

- Hanlon only (315 students)
  - Renovation
  - Addition/renovation
  - New construction
- Hanlon and Deerfield (560 students)
  - Addition/renovation
  - New construction
- Hanlon and Sheehan (685 students)
  - Addition/renovation
  - New construction

#### *Back and Forth Communication*

Since December 2018:

- Letters to residents
- School tours
- 55 open, public meetings dedicated to the building project
  - 13 community forums
  - 24 School Building Committee meetings
  - 18 School Building Committee Subcommittee meetings
- Newspaper articles
- Letters to the Editor
- Westwood Media Center video updates

#### *Evaluation Criteria -- Developing the Criteria*

- Education: How well does the option meet the education goals of Westwood?
- Community: To what extent does the option provide benefits to the community, such as sports fields, community space, and gym space?
- Site: How well does the option:
  - Maximize on-site parking,
  - Allow for efficient drop-off circulation,
  - Provide access to parking for sports fields?
- Sustainability: How well does the option align with the sustainability goals of the town?
- Traffic: What is the impact of the project to the traffic in the neighborhood and the town?
- Logistics/Construction Impact:
  - What is the impact of the students on the project site during construction?
  - How difficult is the phasing and logistics?
- Cost: How do costs compare in relation to cost per student?

An evaluation matrix was built on this criteria and used to assess each of the project’s options. Through that process, the School Building Committee narrowed the fifteen options to seven short-list options. This included the base repair, as required by the MSBA, and six others.

With the short-list options, granular evaluation criteria needed to be developed. This included education, site, town impact, security / sustainability / construction impact, and cost.

#### *Elementary School Zones*

The impact to the community was examined. During the Feasibility Study, a redistricting consultant was tasked with:

- How best to redistrict for a Hanlon-Deerfield consolidation?
- How best to redistrict for a Hanlon-Sheehan consolidation at Hanlon?
- How best to redistrict for a Hanlon-Sheehan consolidation at Sheehan?

The option recommended by the consultant was also the least disruptive to the community: consolidate the Hanlon and Deerfield districts with 560 students on the Hanlon site.

#### *Recommended Option*

- “Option 7”
  - New construction
  - Hanlon/Deerfield consolidation (560 students)
  - Located at Hanlon site
  - Informal design name: “Tree”

The School Building Committee voted to move forward with this option. The design team has been engaged in the process for this choice.

Renderings of the proposed new school were shown.

#### *Project Cost*

The project cost is a calculation of the construction cost and the soft cost.

- Construction cost...\$70,380,680 (Target: \$70,381,157)
- Total soft cost...\$17,439,706 (Target: \$17,800,000)
  - Owner’s Project Manager...\$2,495,116
  - Architect and Engineer Fees...\$7,979,290
  - Furniture, fixtures, equipment, and technology...\$1,800,000
  - Permitting, testing, enhanced commissioning, moving, legal, and other costs...\$946,300
  - Project contingency (construction 5% and soft cost)...\$4,219,000 (Calculated as a percentage of construction cost)
- Total project cost...\$87,820,386 (Target: \$88,181,157; \$330,771 below target)

#### *Cost Comparison--Similar Projects*

- Westwood / Hanlon-Deerfield Elementary
  - Construction start: 2022
  - \$622/sf
  - New construction, Net-zero ready, Geothermal, No PV panels
- Medfield / Dale Elementary
  - Construction start: 2022
  - \$614/sf
  - New construction, Geothermal alternate, No PV panels
- Westborough / Fales Elementary
  - Construction start: 2020
  - \$652/sf

- New construction, Net-zero ready, Geothermal with PV panels
- Wellesley / Hunnewell Elementary and Upham Elementary
  - Construction start: 2022 and 2023
  - Hunnewell is \$604/sf; Upham \$650sf±
  - New construction, Net-zero ready, No geothermal, With PV panels
- Ashland / Mindess Elementary
  - Construction start: 2021
  - New construction, Net-zero ready, Geothermal, With PV panels

*Maximizing the MSBA's Investment*

- Base rate...35.42%
- Maintenance incentive...+1.93% (2% max)
- Green incentive...+2.00%
- Total...39.35%

*MSBA Reimbursement Calculation*

The reimbursement is calculated by deducting excluded costs from the total project cost and multiplying by the town's reimbursement rate.

*MSBA Program Caps*

- Construction cost
  - Cap: \$333/sf
  - Actual: \$622/sf
  - Excluded cost: approximately \$19M
- Site costs
  - Cap: 8% of construction costs
  - Excluded cost: approximately \$6.7M
- Furniture, Equipment, and Technology
  - Cap: \$2,4000/student
  - Actual: \$3,293/student
  - Excluded cost: \$1.8M
- Architect fee
  - Cap: 10% of construction costs
  - Actual: Project is below
- Soft costs
  - Cap: 20%
  - Actual: Project is below
- OPM Fee
  - Cap: 3.5%
  - Actual: Project is below

The last time that the construction costs aligned with the MSBA allowable reimbursement was 2011.

*MSBA Program Exclusions*

The MSBA allows spaces for specific functions at specific square footage.

- Gym
  - MSBA allowance: 6,000sf
  - Hanlon-Deerfield project: 12,000sf
  - Excluded: 6,000sf

- Extended Learning Areas
  - MSBA allowance: 2,800sf
  - Hanlon-Deerfield project: 6,800sf
  - Excluded: 4,000sf
- Extended Day Office and Mother's Room
  - MSBA allowance: 0sf
  - Hanlon-Deerfield project: 650sf
  - Excluded: 650sf
- Staff Workroom
  - MSBA allowance: 670sf
  - Hanlon-Deerfield project: 1,120sf
  - Excluded: 450sf
- Grossing multiplier
  - Excluded: 5,696sf
- Total: 16,796sf

*Eligible Cost for Reimbursement*

- Project Cost...\$87,820,386
- Excluded Construction Cost...-\$37,042,322
- Excluded Soft Cost...-\$3,653,725
- Total Eligible Cost...\$47,124,339 (Subject to MSBA audit)

*MSBA Maximum Reimbursement*

- Total Eligible Project cost...\$47,124,339
- Reimbursement Rate...x39.35%
- Maximum Total Facilities Grant...\$18,543,427 (Subject to MSBA audit)

*Town Share*

- Total Project Cost...\$87,820,386
- Maximum Total Facilities Grant...-\$18,543,427 (Subject to MSBA audit)
- Town Share...\$69,276,959
- Effective Reimbursement Rate...21.12%

*School Department's Override History*

- 2008: Override to meet operational budget needs
- 2002: Debt exclusion to construct new Westwood High School (opened in 2005)
- 2000: Debt exclusion to renovate Martha Jones School
- 1999: Debt exclusion to renovate Downey School
- 1997: Debt exclusion to renovate Thurston Middle School

*Debt Estimates*

- Estimated Total Project Cost...\$87,820,386
- MSBA Estimated Effective Reimbursement at 21.12%...(\$18,543,427)
- Town Estimated Cost...\$69,276,959

A bond would be issued at 30-year level debt service payment.

- Annual Interest and Principal Debt Service at 4% / 30 years
  - Total cost...\$121,203,049
  - Annual average cost...\$4,040,101
- Cost per \$100k of home value
  - Total cost...\$2,146

- Average annual cost...\$72
- Cost per Department of Revenue average home (FY'21 value of \$837,300) (FY'21 tax bill \$12,375)
  - Total cost...\$17,970
  - Average annual cost...\$599

The current \$44M 20-year High School bond, reimbursed at 59% by the MSBA, will be completed in FY'23. At the time of the last debt payment, the \$406k currently raised in taxes would service an approximate \$7M, 4%, 30-year bond.

*Cost Comparisons*

Why not just fix Hanlon?

- Only addresses the facility needs of one school
- Current building won't accommodate future growth
- Does not fix challenges of small school population in Hanlon and Deerfield
- Is the least cost-effective option
  
- New Hanlon-Deerfield (560 students)
  - Estimated project cost: \$87.8M
  - Cost per student: \$157k
- New Hanlon only (315 students)
  - Estimated project cost: \$59.5M
  - Cost per student: \$189k
- Addition/Renovation for Hanlon (315 students)
  - Estimated project cost: \$61.7M
  - Cost per student: \$196k

*There is No "Do Nothing" Option*

- The proposed project is the district's and the Town's solution to address the needs at Hanlon and Deerfield
- The facilities and building systems have reached the end of their useful life.
- Without this project, the building deficiencies will still have to be addressed.
  - Hanlon
    - Base repair cost: \$25M
    - Assessed value of building: \$4.79M
  - Deerfield
    - Base repair cost: \$16.7M
    - Assessed value of building: \$5.6M
- Base repair only brings the building up to code with no modernization for current educational needs or community benefits
- Capital repairs or replacement project costs that exceed certain parameters trigger requirements to bring the building up to code
- Keeping these buildings "on life support" eats into ability to maintain other school buildings

*Hanlon-Deerfield Project Schedule*

- Town Vote – May 2021 for bridge funding
  - Design documents worked on
- Town Votes – October/November 2021
  - Bid documents worked on
- Start Construction – July 2022

- Phases 1 and 2 of building and site construction
- Phase 3 – Move-in February 2024
- Phase 4 – Site construction
- Project Completion – August 2024

#### *Bridge Funding*

- Design Development (Summer 2021-Fall 2021)
  - Compass...\$120k (Six months at \$20k per month)
  - Compass' fee for cost estimating...\$17k
  - Dore and Whittier design development basic services...\$1,232,260
  - Dore and Whittier extra services...\$86k
  - Total Design Development Fees...\$1,455,260

The bridge funding does not add to the project cost; it is an upfront portion of the total project cost. This borrowing would not impact residents' taxes in FY'22.

#### *What About Sheehan?*

A potential timeline was presented.

- February 2020: School Committee allocated \$30k for high-level design study of "remainder school"
- June 2020: School Committee designated the \$30k for Sheehan design study
- Spring 2021: Begin review of design study results and project options, engage community, determine project to move forward (e.g., renovation, new build, etc.)
- Spring 2023: Town vote for funding for design through bidding
- Fall 2024: Town vote for funding for full project
- September 2026: Occupancy (2 ½ years after Hanlon-Deerfield)

#### **Questions and Answers**

Residents were invited to participate in the forum via Zoom.

Peter Massari of Hillview Road asked about comparable schools and escalated construction costs.

Andrew Marcoux of Spellman Road asked what would happen with the Deerfield School.

Jared Jones of Adams Street asked about the potential eligibility for partnering with the MSBA on the Sheehan project.

Michael Kraft of Coach Lane asked about potentially paralleling Gay Street sidewalk construction and pedestrian access at the Hanlon-Deerfield School. He also asked about the construction impact on Lowell Woods.

Peter Schuler of Gay Street asked about the landscaping costs and whether the district would consider lighting the two new fields for recreational use.

Megan Brenk of Briar Lane asked how the Sheehan project would affect taxes.

Kayla Klosi of Beacon Street spoke as a member of the Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety Committee asked about bicycle racks. As a resident, she asked about the ratio of special education students to general education students at the elementary-level.



Bill McLaughlin expressed concern about the Sheehan project and the town's priorities with other capital projects.

Claire Galkowski of Dover Road asked why there is no roof-mounted solar on the project.

Liam LaCroix of Dover Road, a Thurston Middle School student, asked about the useful life of the new school.

Andrew Marcoux asked about size comparisons of the Deerfield-Hanlon School to the High School. He also asked about potential environmental issues related to the use of Shuttleworth land.

Paul Tucceri of Fisher Street asked about entry doors, the cost of project management, and the impact of the projects on taxpayers.

Tom DiCicco of Thatcher Street asked about project cost containment.

### **Adjournment**

**MOTION made by Maya Plotkin to adjourn the meeting. Seconded by Charles Donahue.**

Roll-call vote:

Carol Lewis: Yes  
Maya Plotkin: Yes  
Charles Donahue: Yes  
Anthony Mullin: Yes  
Amanda Phillips: Yes

**Result: 5-0-0 – Approved**

The meeting adjourned at 8:49pm.

### **Documents/Exhibits Used at Meeting**

- Community Forum slideshow presentation, dated March 18, 2021