

WESTWOOD SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Westwood, Massachusetts

MEETING MINUTES

October 29, 2025

Attendance and Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 6:30pm by Maya Plotkin. Also present were Dori Parmelee and JoAnna French. Superintendent Timothy Piwovar and Director of Finance and Operations Lemma Jn-baptiste were present on behalf of the district.

Roll-call:

Maya Plotkin: **Yes**

Dori Parmelee: **Yes**

JoAnna French: **Yes**

Alyssa Provazza recorded the minutes.

Facilities study presentation and discussion

Ms. Plotkin explained the format of the public forum and question-and-answer session.

Superintendent Piwovar presented the facilities master plan, which included: background on how the facilities study was conducted; an overview of existing conditions of the district's school buildings; an analysis of enrollment and capacity data; an overview of the six potential solutions identified and the estimated costs associated with each one; a summary of the key decision points and timeline.

Ms. Plotkin emphasized that for the capital improvements, those costs represent the sum total of recommendations by the study; they do not necessarily represent all of the improvements that would be done all at once. Ms. French emphasized that the Committee is truly committed to gathering community feedback on facilities planning.

Ms. Parmelee read questions submitted by webinar attendees.

Ms. Parmelee read a question asking if the district could provide a link to the capital improvement plan for the next 10 years. Supt. Piwovar provided a link to the facilities study page on the district website that directs people to that information.

Ms. Parmelee read a question about how the enrollment study works and whether the district can be confident about Sheehan being over-capacity. Supt. Piwovar clarified that there will be an additional enrollment study as part of the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) process. Supt. Piwovar stated that the studies show confidently that Sheehan and other buildings will be over capacity, and explained the options for addressing that issue.

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Supt. Piwowar read a question about whether the district had considered an all-grade-five school. Supt. Piwowar stated that the district did consider other options but determined that standalone grades in one building creates more transitions for students and was not comfortable with that impact.

Ms. Parmelee read a comment about the conditions at Thurston in which the commenter felt that Thurston should be the priority for a building project.

Ms. Parmelee read a question about the air handling equipment at Thurston and when it would be replaced. Supt. Piwowar explained how the district views long-term versus short-term facilities needs. Ms. Jn-baptiste stated that the facilities team has likely looked into this equipment since the time that this study was done.

Ms. Parmelee read a question about the funding and tax implications of all six solutions. Ms. Plotkin answered that a new building would be funded by a debt exclusion, similar to the funding of Pine Hill. Ms. Plotkin stated that the capital improvement plan would be funded through the capital funds that the district already has. Ms. Plotkin clarified that all of the solutions would increase taxes.

Ms. French added that the costs for the buildings indicated in the presentation do not include any reimbursement that the district would get from the MSBA.

Ms. Parmelee read a question about whether the district could organize open-house visits to Thurston and Sheehan. Ms. Plotkin answered that walk-throughs would likely happen once a proposed building project is accepted to the MSBA pipeline, if a project is accepted.

Ms. Parmelee read a question about the cost comparison between renovating and maintaining Thurston or building a new school building. Ms. Plotkin responded that it is too early to provide that information. Ms. Plotkin explained that if the district moves forward with a specific project, then the feasibility study would provide more reliable information about what renovations would be needed.

Ms. Parmelee read a question about the accessibility trigger for Thurston and how the threshold is determined. Supt. Piwowar explained that it is determined based on a formula set by the state based on the appraised value of the building.

Ms. Parmelee read a two-part question. The first question was about school enrollment projections compared with town population projections, and whether it made sense to wait a year to get better enrollment data. Ms. Plotkin responded that the current decision point is not whether or not the district needs a new school, but to prioritize which building needs the most attention. Ms. Plotkin also stated that facilities planning takes into account not only enrollment

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data but also the condition of existing facilities. Supt. Piwowar explained that enrollment is generally cyclical so the district relies on long-term trend forecasting from experts.

Ms. Parmelee read a question about the impact of federal funding on cost reimbursement. Supt. Piwowar stated that there is no direct flow of federal funds to the MSBA. Ms. Plotkin added that the district took some federal funding from specific programs for the Pine Hill project. Ms. French added that the funding for any project would be pretty far in the future so it is difficult to say what impacts there might be.

Ms. Parmelee read a comment suggesting that people visit the fire station to understand the conditions and commenting that FS1 is the most critical infrastructure in town. Ms. Plotkin and Ms. French agreed with the commenter that it is not an “either-or” proposition and that both needs must be addressed as a town comprehensively.

Ms. Parmelee read a question about Thurston capacity and a discrepancy between two reports from different time frames. Supt. Piwowar explained that the most recent study used information about school programming to make capacity calculations.

Ms. Parmelee read a question about why Sheehan and Martha Jones were options and what is happening with Deerfield use. Ms. Plotkin responded that the school department would be making a decision about Deerfield in the next couple months. Supt. Piwowar added that Martha Jones is included as an option because it has some liabilities that could require attention in the longer term. If Sheehan was identified as the priority option, the feasibility study would explore the possibility of combining Sheehan and Martha Jones as part of that option.

Ms. Parmelee read a question about the educational impact of changing the middle school to a grade 5-8 model. Supt. Piwowar explained that when districts make a grade configuration change as part of a building project – as opposed to a short-term budgeting issue – that provides a long on-ramp to determine the best way to deliver a successful educational experience in that building.

Ms. Parmelee read a question about whether an override would be needed at any point. Ms. Plotkin stated that the town has not had an override since 2008 for the schools and that the district works hard to build a budget that aims to avoid an override.

Ms. Parmelee read a question asking why the district is considering modulars and noting that redistricting makes more sense. The comment also raised population trends. Ms. Plotkin reiterated that enrollment is not the only factor in facilities planning and that the district is not yet in a position to make determinations around capacity. Ms. Jn-baptiste clarified that capacity issues at the elementary level can be solved by modulars and redistricting, whereas redistricting is not a solution available to Thurston.

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Ms. Parmelee read a question asking how many students attend private school and at which grade levels. Supt. Piwowar answered that there are about 200 students in private schools, and the town has slightly less than 3,000 students in Westwood Public Schools.

New Business

There was no new business.

Adjournment

MOTION made by Dori Parmelee to adjourn the meeting. Motion seconded by JoAnna French.

Roll-call vote:

Dorothy Parmelee: **Yes**

JoAnna French: **Yes**

Maya Plotkin: **Yes**

Result: 3-0-0 (Approved)

The meeting adjourned at 7:52pm.