

DEDHAM PUBLIC SCHOOLS
JOINT SCHOOL COMMITTEE &
SCHOOL BUILDING REHABILITATION COMMITTEE
MEETING

MINUTES

June 5, 2019

(Approved 9/4/2019)

MEMBERS OF THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE PRESENT:

Kevin Coughlin, Chair
Lisa Laprade, Vice-Chair
Steve Bilafer (also on SBRC)
Mayanne Briggs (also on SBRC)
Joshua Donati
Dr. Melissa Pearrow
Tracey White

MEMBERS OF THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE ABSENT:

None

MEMBERS OF THE SCHOOL BUILDING REHABILITATION COMMITTEE PRESENT:

Dave Roberts, Chair
Ron Hathaway, Vice-Chair
Steve Bilafer (Also on School Committee)
Mayanne Briggs (Also on School Committee)
Brendan Keogh
Mary Ellen McDonough
John Tocci

MEMBERS OF THE ADMINISTRATION PRESENT:

Michael Welch, Superintendent

Meeting Location: Dedham Middle School

Meeting commenced at 7:00 p.m.

Mr. Coughlin opened the meeting and stated that the only item on tonight's agenda is the School Facilities Master Plan.

Mr. Coughlin introduced the Chair of the School Building Rehabilitation Committee (SBRC) Dave Roberts. Mr. Roberts introduced the SBRC members.

Mr. Coughlin explained that no decisions would be made tonight. This meeting is to only gain community input.

School Facilities Master Plan Community Input Meeting

On May 21, 2018 at the 2018 Spring Annual Town Meeting, members voted to approve Article Eighteen, Appropriation to Fund Update of Long Term Facilities Master Plan of the Dedham Public Schools. After a competitive bidding process, the town's School Building Rehabilitation Committee and School Committee selected Symmes, Maini, McKee and Associates (SMMA) a firm with longstanding architecture, engineering, and site design expertise.

On December 11, 2018 SMMA presented its initial findings at a joint School Committee and SBRC meeting. SMMA's presentation can be found on the Dedham Public Schools' district website while the video of the meeting can be viewed in its entirety via Dedham TV's website.

As the Town has recently completed construction of the Dr. Thomas J. Curran Early Childhood Education Center, it is time to review the Greenlodge, Oakdale and Riverdale Elementary Schools and Dedham High School facilities which have not undergone major renovations or reconstruction in the past 30 years or more.

The goal of this meeting is to gather as much input from as possible from all potential stakeholders so that SMMA has the best information to arrive at recommendations for next steps in the improvement, renovation, or replacement of school facilities in Dedham.

The presentation is available on the district website. The report includes the history of the 2013 Master Plan, completed school projects (Middle School, Avery and ECEC) which are not included in this study, the multiple uses of the High School, the condition of the Capen School, MSBA 2016 School Survey Report, elements of educational facility effectiveness, condition and educational effectiveness of the Greenlodge, Oakdale and Riverdale Elementary schools, the MSBA Statement of Interest (SOI) process and priorities, and the process of the feasibility study.

Mr. Tocci asked whether the square footage of the building was directly related to anticipated enrollment. Mr. Pionelli stated it was.

Mr. Pionelli continued the explanation of the SOI process and SOI timeline, NESDEC enrollment projections, current school configuration by number of classrooms, and community engagement and input timeline.

Ms. McDonough asked why there would be a recommendation for fewer classrooms if the enrollment was going up slightly. Mr. Pionelli explained that the MSBA uses 23 students per classroom as its guideline.

Supt. Welch explained that tonight's community input meeting is only the first step in a very long process. He thanked the SBRC which is a voluntary board and the taxpayers of Dedham for investing in the schools. He asked the audience to please complete the feedback sheets provided for tonight's meeting. He explained the cost of the ECEC as well as the grant reimbursement funds from the MSBA. The new ECEC finished on time and is estimated to finish under budget. He also explained the boost in Kindergarten enrollment from 174 students in the last class at the Capen School to approximately 220 students registered for the 2019-2020 school year. He feels this increase is specifically related to building a state of the art early childhood facility.

Ms. Briggs asked about the MSBA guideline of 23 students per classroom, inquiring if it is a recommendation or requirement. Mr. Pionelli explained it as the MSBA design capacity of a school.

Mr. Hathaway asked if having three new schools built in the last several years will hurt Dedham's chances in the MSBA selection process. Mr. Pionelli did not feel it would affect the chances because the MSBA is looking at the condition of the facility.

Dr. Pearrow also stated her concern about the building requirement of 23 students per classroom.

Mr. Tocci asked how the process would work if the Town wanted to take on part of the funding to add on or vary from the MSBA design process. Mr. Pionelli stated this was not the norm but occasionally the MSBA will allow it.

Mr. Donati asked if the Town could build multiple school facilities at once. Mr. Pionelli stated it would be highly unlikely using MSBA grants. It could be done using Town funds.

Mr. Bilafer asked if enrollments at different schools were taken into consideration. Mr. Pionelli explained that elementary schools do not have a size requirement based on enrollment at other schools although the MSBA could ask the Town to consider different options.

Public Comment

Lindsey Looney, 168 Ames Street, asked if more than one school could be renovated at the same time. Mr. Pionelli explained that schools that qualify for MSBA accelerated repairs need to meet the educationally feasible requirements. Accelerated repairs include roof, boiler and windows. Large renovations are outside of this scope.

Megan Priest, 37 Aspen Court, asked if the goal of the School Committee and SBRC is to qualify for an MSBA grant, would it be for individual schools and how can the community help. Mr. Pionelli and Mr. Coughlin stated that the right now it is very important to get community input in order to complete an SOI.

Supt. Welch elaborated, stating that the committees need to figure out the community's wants and needs with the three elementary schools. It is also important to understand that town resources and priorities need to be taken into consideration. The decisions made now will affect generations down the line. The group needs to make educationally and fiscally responsible decisions.

Jessica Erickson, 196 Riverside Drive, had several questions regarding growth of the ECEC migrating to the elementary level, school choice, and equity with over- and under-enrolled schools.

Supt. Welch explained the difficulty of tracking enrollment trends. Dedham has a uniqueness of neighborhood schools that the NESDEC (New England School Development Council) does not take into consideration. He explained that Dedham does not participate in the state's School Choice program. Intra district school choice is not an option. Children must attend the school in the district where they live. There are some specific situations which require students to be allowed to attend a different elementary school.

Mr. Pionelli explained how the MSBA looks at enrollment numbers in October to account for summer move-ins and exits.

Ms. McDonough commented on the long-range plans for Dedham. She explained how many of the schools were updated in the 1970's and three elementary schools have closed in Dedham. She wants to make sure that moving forward money is spent appropriately.

Amy O'Brien, 43 Marlboro Street, said she didn't understand the redistricting that had taken place in the past. Ms. Briggs explained that every time you submit an SOI you have to draw lines to show population. At that time there was a need to redistrict the Avery School area. However, she stated she did not know why some of the Riverdale district was redistricted to Oakdale.

Courtney Sheehan, 478 East Street, asked if Dedham would ever redistrict to get funding for a larger project. Supt Welch stated that nothing is off the table and all options will be looked at. He explained that the building of the Avery School has eliminated certain options.

Mr. Bilafer stated that the size of the school doesn't matter at the time of the SOI, it is the condition of the school that is of importance. He asked if the size of the school came into play during the feasibility phase. Mr. Poinelli stated that it did. The MSBA may ask the district to explore different options.

Rebecca Hammond, 98 Wentworth Street, inquired if Dedham would ever move forward building a new school without funding from the State. Mr. Coughlin explained this would require input from the Town. A new school would fall in line behind completion of the Town Hall and Police and Fire Stations. It would also require a Proposition 2.5% override or debt exclusion.

Supt. Welch explained that Watertown is currently building three schools without MSBA funding. However, it is fiscally much more expensive.

Ms. Hammond asked what happens to the 10 million dollars that is reverted to the Town from the ECEC project. Mr. Roberts explained the money goes back to the Robyn Reyes Fund.

Lindsay Loporto, 148 Crane Street, asked for the best way to submit thoughts or questions if someone could not be here this evening. Mr. Coughlin stated to email him.

Ms. Loporto asked if any studies have been done on the benefits of neighborhood schools. Mr. Pionelli stated there were none that he was aware of. Ms. Loporto stated she felt Riverdale is a strong community and removing the school would be taking the heart away from the community.

Supt. Welch explained that neighborhood schools mirror the demographic and socioeconomic status of the neighborhood. Neighborhood schools are not always equitable. He stated that the Committee needs to look at the long-range benefits to the entire town.

Jim Sullivan, 299 Riverdale Drive, stated that Robin Reyes Fund has money marked for the next school.

Mona Saltamacchia, 42 Pine Hill Road, asked what the criteria are for a school to close. She is concerned because Riverdale has the smallest number of students. Mr. Coughlin stated he doesn't feel like that is the direction the Committee is going in. Supt. Welch stated that conversations and input need to be gathered before any decisions are made. It is clear that the Oakdale School, being ranked a 3 by the MSBA, is in need of replacement.

Mark Blazejewski, 220 Adams Street, asked if the MSBA has a cap on funding. Mr. Pionelli explained funding is based on the percentage of the sales tax.

Ms. Sheehan asked if the SOI does not get accepted for a particular school, will that same school be considered in the future. Mr. Pionelli explained that an SOI for the same school can be resubmitted the following year.

Resident (did not provide name) asked about the status of the High School. Supt. Welch explained the High School has maintenance issues and the district will continue to do renovations on it. A new High School would not be as large as the current building. He also explained how an SOI for 2020 would not

result in a completed new school until 2027. The next school after that would not be completed until 2030.

The Committee concluded by explaining that there needs to be a comprehensive look at the capital projects for all the schools. The master plan should be a map for the next couple of decades. It is important to get word out to the community, so appropriate decisions can be made educationally and financially.

Mr. Coughlin thanked the audience members for their input this evening.

Ms. Briggs motioned to adjourn the School Committee meeting of June 5, 2019, Dr. Pearrow second; the Committee voted 7-0 in favor.

Ms. Briggs motioned to adjourn the SBRC meeting of June 5, 2019, Mr. Bilafer second; the Committee voted 7-0 in favor.

Meeting concluded at 9:00 P.M.