

**Dedham Public Schools  
School Committee and  
School Building Rehabilitation Committee  
Joint Meeting  
September 28, 2022**

MEMBERS OF THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE PRESENT:

Victor Hebert  
Mayanne Briggs  
Joshua Donati  
Christopher Polito  
Cailen McCormick  
Tracey White  
Tara Duncan (student member)

MEMBERS OF THE ADMINISTRATION PRESENT:

Michael J. Welch, Superintendent  
Matthew Wells, Assistant Superintendent of Business and Finance  
Sara Erickson, Communications Director  
Denise Moroney, Director of Facilities

MEMBERS OF THE SCHOOL BUILDING REHABILITATION COMMITTEE (SBRC) PRESENT:

John Tocci, Chair  
Steve Bilafer, Vice-chair  
Mayanne Briggs  
Victor Hebert  
John Heffernan  
Michael Welch

MEMBERS OF VERTEX (OWNER'S PROJECT MANAGER (OPM)) PRESENT:

Bryan Jarvis, Project Director  
Steve Theran, Sr. Project Manager  
Anissa Ellis, Project Manager

Meeting Location:

Dedham Middle School Auditorium

School Committee Joint Meeting commenced at 7:00 p.m.

Open Meeting

Victor Hebert, Vice-chair of the School Committee opened the joint meeting in place of Dr. Melissa Pearrow, who had another engagement.

## Pledge of Allegiance

John Tocci, Chair of the SBRC, opened the meeting for the SBRC.

## Oakdale Elementary Building Project

A video showing the current conditions of the Oakdale School was displayed on the screen. Mr. Tocci said the video will be shown again at the end of the joint meeting.

John Tocci introduced members of the School Committee, SBRC and Vertex Associates who were present at the meeting.

Mr. Tocci said that the video was developed by the School Department and submitted to the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA). Since MSBA's inception in 2004, the MSBA has invited Dedham into the process three times. MSBA supplied funding for the new construction of the Dedham Middle School, Early Childhood Education Center (ECEC) and Avery School. The MSBA covered \$10M of the \$30M costs for the ECEC and the building was delivered on time and for one million under budget. In 2016, MSBA ranked the physical plant condition of every school in Dedham, and Oakdale was named the most in need of rehabilitation.

The main Oakdale building was built in 1902 and it's the oldest active structure still in use in Dedham. Riverdale was built in 1920. From 1959 to 2007 no new schools were constructed in Dedham. Dedham's Master Plan from 2015-2020, also identified the Oakdale School as the most in need of rehabilitation. The Master Plan also called for a comprehensive rebuild or replacement of Greenlodge and Riverdale Schools. In Fall 2021, Town Meeting approved funds for the feasibility phase of the Oakdale Building Project process. The feasibility process will involve the community, school and government in determining the priorities for addressing conditions at the Oakdale School. The goal is to determine the most educationally appropriate and economical solution. Vertex was chosen in the Spring 2022 as the Owner's Project Manager (OPM) after a competitive process. Vertex has experience in neighboring town school construction and is working on the new Dedham Public Safety Building.

Most important deficiencies in Oakdale building:

- Obsolete electrical system
- HVAC deficiencies
- Under sized classrooms
- No cafeteria
- No independent auditorium
- No science labs
- Wood stairs
- Outdoor metal fire escape and inadequate fire suppression elements
- Inaccessibility for handicapped

### Deliverables deadlines

- November 2022 -- Design firm selection
- March 2023 -- Preliminary Design Plan (analysis of existing conditions, consideration of sites and analysis of options)
- July 2023 -- preferred schematic report (detailed analysis of enrollment, preferred solution).  
December 2023 -- Schematic design (traffic, environmental, accessibility)
- Spring 2024 -- Vote on chosen project
- Spring 2025 -- Start of construction.

### Enrollment options offered by MSBA

MSBA prefers not to fund small elementary schools. If we go with a single school for Oakdale, they will fund for only 235 students so school consolidation needs to be considered. Enrollment at Oakdale is currently 249, Greenlodge is 261, Riverdale is 172. Scenarios offered by MSBA for consolidation include Oakdale/Greenlodge for 550 students or Oakdale/Riverdale for 450 students.

### Evaluation options being considered:

- Educational goals
- Least disruptive
- Community use
- Costs
- Impact on neighborhoods.

There is a dedicated website with information about the project, including the Master Plan at [www.Dedham.k12.ma.us/oakdaleproject](http://www.Dedham.k12.ma.us/oakdaleproject).

### PUBLIC COMMENTS

Justin Humphreys, Town Meeting member, pct. 6. asked about the MSBA reimbursement rate.

Supt. Welch replied that, based on his experiences with the ECEC, the 50% reimbursable rate advertised by the MSBA actually funds only about 30 to 33% of costs. The ECEC came in at \$30M and the MSBA reimbursed Dedham at \$10.5M. The 50% reimbursable rate is not always based on actual, total costs because there is often site-specific work that is not included in the reimbursement calculation.

Justin Humphreys asked that since, after MSBA reimbursement, the Town would be paying an estimated \$40 to \$60M for the new facility, has the Town ever considered a plan that did not involve MSBA funding?

Supt. Welch replied that, from his perspective, the \$40 to \$60M amount would not be enough to cover the repair of three elementary schools for 700 students. Welch said that Dedham does not have the commercial tax base, that towns like Watertown have to finance such a large project.

John Heffernan, Finance Committee representative to the SBRC, replied that the committee wants to first attempt to get funding from MSBA, and then if that doesn't succeed, a second plan will be evaluated. Bryce Jarvis, Vertex representative, said the MSBA plan includes an estimate of the costs of renovating Oakdale, so Dedham will have this comparison to use when making the final decision.

Steve Bilafer, SBRC member, explained that the Master Plan process looked at the possibilities of renovations, but they found that there are a lot of issues you can't address with renovations, including classroom size. Tocci said the Master Plan didn't look in depth at finances or funding sources. The Oakdale Building Project plans to do an in depth exploration of the finances of a number of different scenarios.

Danielle DeLuca, Town Meeting member, pct. 5, said she is involved with the Mass. Safe Routes to School program. She asked if walkability rate will be included in the project criteria? She has learned from her research that Oakdale School has the highest number of walking students and Greenlodge and Riverdale have less walking students. Consolidation of two schools would impact walkability in a negative way. She thinks that walkability should be a factor considered when analyzing the location of the new school. She also suggested that the SBRC reach out to the Safe Routes to School Program for more information about incorporating walkability into the criteria they will be using for building location. Tocci confirmed that walkability will be considered in the analyses. He stressed the importance of residents coming to the public meetings about the Oakdale Project to express their concerns and ideas.

Jim Maher, Town Meeting, pct.5, asked if they are talking about combining two or three schools.

Tocci replied that the MSBA provided three options:

- Stand alone Oakdale school
- Combined Greenlodge/Oakdale
- Combined Riverdale/Oakdale

He said that the location of the schools and how we build them is our decision.

Maher asked if Greenlodge and Oakdale are the only sites being considered for the new building? Tocci said the process is open and no decisions have been made.

Maher asked if anyone has considered tearing down the Capen School and building a new school at that site or considered a mega school on other available property in Dedham? Tocci

said they will be looking at building on available lots but building one mega school is probably not going to be funded by the MSBA.

Brian Keaney, 183 Grand Ave., said that even though he has two young children, he voted against the ECEC. He said Dedham has 7 schools when other towns our size have 5 schools and we are paying more per student. He likes the neighborhood schools but he would have wanted to put the ECEC at Oakdale, Riverdale or Greenlodge because it would mean that Oakdale may have to be closed. He said when he asked Supt. Welch in an email in 2016, about closing Oakdale in the near future, Supt. Welch said they don't anticipate closing any schools, but they did anticipate the MSBA funding a 300-student school. Keaney wants to know whether closing an elementary school is a real option?

Welch confirmed that this is a real option. We have to decide where we go as a community and the options laid out by MSBA imply a degree of incentive to consolidate. Supt. Welch said we need to figure out the next 50 years of Dedham Public Schools.

Tocci said that the School Committee and the SBRC are invested in the process and the Town has invested money in the feasibility study. ECEC location was analyzed before they built on the old Dexter School site.

Rebecca Gates, Town Meeting member, pct. 7, said that her three children enjoyed walking to school. She feels that 450 students in one school is too much. She also feels that consolidating schools may lead to less parent involvement. She asked what if the combined schools don't work out after they have been built, can we change the configuration with Town money?

Supt. Welch said if the Town uses MSBA resources and then wants to build other schools with their own money, or change the configuration, that is still possible.

Micah Heath Flynn, Town Meeting member, pct. 6, asked how long it would take to build one building. Bryan Jarvis, the Vertex representative, said there is a five-year window for finalization of this project and we would have to wait until the Oakdale Project is completed before we can submit another statement of interest so another school build could not be started for 8 years from now.

Tocci said it is unique that we have been invited into the MSBA program four times. We don't know about the future of the MSBA due to state finances. Jarvis said that we are not guaranteed the MSBA funding. There were 70 applicants for this go around and only 14 were funded.

Micah Heath Flynn asked when sustainability elements come up for discussion in the analysis? Jarvis said right now they are undertaking high level design issues. Once the Town Meeting

approves the project, he anticipates discussion about the details of the types of systems we build for renewable and zero energy goals. And he said, reimbursable vs. non-reimbursable costs have to be considered during this discussion.

Steve Relyea, 740 East St. asked if the MSBA has to agree with the decision made by the Town or can they overrule our decision?

Mr. Jarvis replied that the MSBA will have input into the option but as long as the municipality seems like they have used viable research with strong justification, the MSBA will go along with the Town's decision.

Steve Relyea also asked if the MSBA will fund a school that is smaller than the current project enrollment?

Jarvis said that the MSBA has an enrollment analysis process for enrollment. They are predicting a lower enrollment for Oakdale in the next five years. But if Dedham feels that is incorrect they will change it early on.

Mr. Welch said Oakdale is 250 students and Riverdale is 175 students and that equals less than 450, but MSBA will support more than the current enrollment totals. However, they will support less than the current enrollment numbers for a single Oakdale School. There are incentives built into the MSBA calculations for consolidation of schools. Consolidating two schools will allow us to create greater capacity later on and would force us to restructure configuration of the elementary schools.

Jim Maher, 22 Sherman Rd. asked if the COVID spike was going to be factored into the analysis? He has observed an increase of children in young families in Dedham. How will this be factored into our plans? He said that there is now concern that there isn't enough room for the preschool students at the ECEC because of increasing numbers. Welch agreed with him, the pandemic changes our analysis. Welch said they already had to take over a kindergarten class for preschoolers at the ECEC. He said that under MSBA rules, Dedham doesn't make the decision about the number of the students for which a school is designed. The MSBA will probably not take into consideration COVID spikes in birth rates. The usual projections only look at rates five years after. Welch agreed that "if you build it, they will come," but future enrollment trends are not included in the MSBA calculations.

Mark Reilly, pct. 7, Town Meeting member, asked about the role of each participating body in the Oakdale project process. Who has a say in final decision making?

John Tocci said that the overarching agenda of the SBRC is to incorporate real time sharing of information with all stakeholders. SBRC owns the process of the school construction, and the

School Committee decides enrollment and configuration. Welch replied that educational programming is under the purview of the School Committee and the Select Board and Town meeting decide the appropriation of funds after review by the Finance Committee.

Victor Hebert, said that at the bequest of MSBA, the SBRC is a cross section of Town representatives and the whole process is a multi team approach.

Tocci redisplayed the slide that outlines the membership of the SBRC, School Committee and Town and School Administration involved in the process. He said the plan is to include an integration of efforts to achieve successful communication among all participants and stakeholders.

Hebert affirmed that the SBRC and School Committee represent and reflect the wishes of the community. He said that committee members are here to answer any questions or concerns raised by residents.

***Motion was made to adjourn the SBRC and approved by a quorum of members.***

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*Submitted by*

*Virginia Quinn*

*Recording Secretary*