



NEIGHBORHOOD & LONG TERM PLANNING, PUBLIC FACILITIES, ARTS & CELEBRATION COMMITTEE

COMMITTEE MEETING

~ MINUTES ~

Wednesday, October 13, 2021

5:00 PM

Sullivan Chamber

Call to Order

Attendee Name	Present	Absent	Late	Arrived
Patricia Nolan	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Dennis J. Carlone	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Alanna Mallon	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Marc C. McGovern	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Quinton Zondervan	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

The Neighborhood & Long-Term Planning; Public Facilities, Arts and Celebrations Committee and the Housing Committee held a public hearing on Wednesday, October 13, 2021 at 5:00 p.m. to discuss the long-term plan for school buildings, including a systemwide summary of status of plans, update on current projects, any plans for future relocations, and projections for enrollment changes over time.

Present at the hearing were Councillor Nolan, Councillor Carlone, Vice Mayor Mallon, Councillor McGovern, Councillor Zondervan, Councillor Simmons, David Kale, Assistant City Manager for Fiscal Affairs, Ellen Semonoff, Assistant City Manager for Human Services, Taha Jennings, Budget Director, City of Cambridge, Jose Luis Rojas Villarreal, School Committee Member, Victoria Greer, Superintendent, Jim Maloney, Chief Operating Officer, Claire Spinner, Chief Financial Officer, Vedad Konjic, Executive Director of Facilities, Cambridge Public Schools (CPS), Brendon Roy, Construction Program Manager, Michael Scarlett, Aide to Mayor Siddiqui, Adrienne La Forte, Aide to Councillor Nolan, Naomie Stephen, Executive Assistant to the City Council, and Paula M. Crane, Deputy City Clerk.

Also present via Zoom were Alex Bowers and Matthew Schreiner.

Councillor Nolan convened the hearing and read the Call of the Meeting and the Governor’s Executive Order regarding remote participation. She asked for a Roll Call to indicate a quorum for the hearing.

The roll was called and resulted as follows:

PRESENT: Councillor Nolan, Vice Mayor Mallon, Councillor McGovern, Councillor Zondervan -4

ABSENT: Councillor Carlone -1

and a quorum was present, and the hearing was clearly audible to all participants.

Councillor Nolan stated that this is a follow-up to last year’s meeting of July 15, 2020 to discuss long-term plans for the school district. She noted that at that meeting, that there was a presentation from Newton (ATTACHMENT A) which presented a potential role model that Councillor Nolan felt that

Cambridge could follow. She said that she hoped that this meeting would cover that. She said that the expectation is that the School Department will go over the long-term plan and any summary including updates on projects. She introduced School Committee Member Rojas Villarreal.

Mr. Rojas Villarreal stated that there was a School Committee subcommittee meeting yesterday of the Buildings and Grounds that covered this topic. He said that the idea is that the RFP that was approved by the City Council would help the School Department update the previous plan and also re-think not just the construction of buildings, but the retrofitting of existing buildings.

David Kale stated that a brief update can be provided on the Tobin School. He introduced Brendon Roy who is the Project Manager. Mr. Kale added that all of the information on the project is on the Tobin School website including a catalog of questions and answers from the community and public sessions. Mr. Roy gave an overview of a PowerPoint presentation (ATTACHMENT B) which included meetings, community engagement, and project schedule.

There were no questions from the members of the Committee regarding the Tobin project.

Councillor Nolan said that she was sent a few questions in advance of today's hearing. She said that there was a question regarding entrance from the Vassal Lane side of the building. She said that three people asked her about the fences and useable space. They asked whether the open space will be available to the community. Mr. Roy said that there are two main entrances, one for the parking garage underneath the building and the entrance for the bus loop that is on-grade to the west side of the site. He said that there is no road per se that travels around the building and no road off of Concord Avenue except for a fire lane. Councillor Nolan said that school buildings are used extensively after hours. Mr. Roy said that they consider the main entrance to be off Vassal Lane but there is another entrance towards the rear of the building where the cafeteria, auditorium, and gymnasium may be more easily accessed. He said that this comes down to a logistics item for the school and how they prefer to use them. He said that they create the options, and it is then up to the school how these entrances get accessed.

As it relates to useable space for open space, Mr. Roy said that there are some areas, specifically the tot lot for the preschool, that needs a fence secured all the way around, but the rest of the site is fairly open. There are some low-lying fences that are meant to be a guideline for the kids to stay within the boundaries. He said that the whole site is available to the public. Councillor Nolan requested that Mr. Roy's responses to her questions to be added to the website.

Councillor Nolan said that her hope was that the City of Cambridge would have a long-term plan similar to that of Newton. She said that Newton has a 20-year plan with every building, year by year. She said that they show a feasibility study and construction plan. She said that this is what she hoped and expected to review at this hearing. Mr. Kale said that the City is in the process of issuing the Scope of Services document to spend the million dollars that was appropriated by the City Council at their last meeting of FY21 to basically get an evaluation of our school buildings and determine what buildings may be expanded upon to deal with potential expanded enrollment in the future. He said that this will inform the bonding schedule and will be fit into the City's five-year bonding schedule that the City updates annually before we go out to market to issue bonds. He said that clearly the bonding schedule for the next few years will be predominantly issued with the Tobin School project. He said that the total project cost is \$250 million dollars. He said that some of the money has been borrowed but the majority will be borrowed over the next four years to coincide with the actual construction activities that will take place. In addition, the bonding schedule includes monies for the Fire Station Headquarters, the Harvard Square Kiosk and other open space projects. He explained that they annually look at what projects are before the City and if they are going to be bonded and then create a multi-year schedule. As it relates to the Newton model, Mr. Kale said that the City of Cambridge would be in a better position to do that once the City

gets its response to the Scope of Services document and the work is done to actually determine what are the needs of the buildings and what are the opportunities for expansion and how that fits into the City's bonding schedule. He noted that Cambridge is clearly different than Newton in the sense that Newton's recent school projects have been funded by the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) which is an annualized ask for the MSBA and if you get funding you can proceed, and if not, you need to move forward the following year and re-apply for funding. Mr. Kale explained that the King, King Open and Tobin Schools have been funded without MSBA funding. He said that with MSBA funding, there are some requirements that must be adhered to once funding is accepted. He said that in addition, the City has been able to not be in a position to ask for a debt exclusion which Newton has done in the past. He said that some of their planning has been good, but it also driven, in some ways, by those two factors. He said that once the results of the school feasibility study to determine how these things will be slotted in and how they will fit into the financial plan and bonding schedule plan.

Mr. Maloney introduced Dr. Victoria Greer, Superintendent of Schools, and School Committee Member Jose Rojas Villareal. Mr. Kale pointed out that absent of the completion of the feasibility study, the City has funded major capital expenses. The City has applied for a lot of major repair projects which allowed the City to do exterior improvements at Fletcher Maynard Academy, roof at Graham and Parks, Cambridgeport School window project. He said that the City annually allocates \$1.8 million in the bonding schedule for school repairs. He said that since FY18, the City has allocated almost \$18 million dollars in school improvement monies for various projects that Mr. Maloney submits to the Capital Budget Committee and off cycle projects with the MSBA for the major repair program. He said that the feasibility study will give a more informed information about where we are at for expansion and major system improvements.

Mr. Maloney thanked the City Council and the City Manager and his staff. He said that the Tobin School is the culmination of the capital piece of former Superintendent of Schools Dr. Young's innovation agenda. He said that he and City Manager Healy worked on the development of a major capital construction program which resulted in the King Putnam Avenue project, the King Open and now the Tobin campus. He said that the Innovation Agenda addressed three buildings and they wanted to ensure that they were in line with City planning so that when the Tobin project was done, the City could move on. He said that Councillor Nolan has spoken in the past about wanting a 10–20-year plan and this is exactly what will allow the City to look at 10 buildings. He said that it is a complete assessment that looked at every single City building. He said that this will look at capacity analysis, mechanical, plumbing and fire protection systems, building envelope, all internal finishes, and opportunities for expansion in existing buildings. He said that the goal is to have the study done in approximately one year. Dr. Greer added that this is very exciting as it is important to ensure that the City has the facilities that are responsive to the needs of students and the community.

Councillor Zondervan said that he is glad to see that there will be a comprehensive assessment of the school buildings. He asked how equity is being factored into the assessment and how it is being determined which schools will be updated next. Mr. Maloney said that each step that is taken is centered on equity, inclusion and belonging. He said that when the already chosen schools were done were chosen with that in mind. He said that the schools with the highest percentage of free and reduced students were the schools that were done first and centered on equity. Councillor Zondervan said that in the past it has been decided to tear down buildings and replace them. He asked if this will be looked at as part of the study as there are potential cost savings with not tearing down buildings. Mr. Maloney agreed. He said that they are focusing on projects where the building can be saved and renovations can be done in place which should result in lower costs and more schools being done rather than 1, 2, or 3 large projects being done at a time. He said that with the completion of the buildings first identified in the Innovation Agenda, they now have the four upper schools in buildings that are considered to be more than fully adequate to meet the middle school programs that are run. He said that the focus will be on pre-k to 5 buildings that

can hopefully be renovated rather than torn down. Councillor Zondervan asked about open space and if the study will include that consideration. Mr. Maloney said they are considering open space.

Councillor McGovern said that he has children that have gone to both new and old buildings. He said that a lot of the schools that are under chosen in the controlled choice system are schools that are in older buildings that do not have the glitz and glamour that the new buildings have. He said that as we are thinking about the buildings themselves, he would like to see the buildings that serve more higher risk and lower income populations as a way to get the upgrades to attract people to those schools. He said that looking at the future of the district and enrollment projections and building for the future is something that he is happy to hear will be taken into consideration. He said that as enrollment increases and as the upper schools continue to be strong, he said that we are seeing more students staying in the upper schools compared to previous years. He said that one of the points of the Innovation Agenda was to have the upper schools be relatively manageable sizes. He said there may be a need for a fifth upper school down the road. He said that this should be in the mix of the conversation. Regarding open space, he said that it will be tricky in terms of which schools can be built bigger due to the lots. He said that where we can build bigger buildings that allow more flexibility is something to think about. He thanked everyone for their hard work.

Councillor Carlone said that the schools, in many ways, are the hearts of the community. He said that we know we are going to universal pre-k. He said that some of the new schools had less classroom than we want now. He said that he has been told that school members in the past talked about a new school. He said that Alewife Quadrangle is the only place that could possibly happen and there is a deficit of open space planned in that area. He stated that he hopes that the City moves quickly on buying land or planning in a way for development to occur that a big track of land is left over as was done in the East Cambridge Riverfront Plan. He said that regarding open space, Cambridge only has 50% of the national average of open space. He said that areas like The Port only have 20% of the national average. He said that schools as a community center are the biggest investment we make in construction, and we plan for public entry points, but our schools can be expanded to be used more by the surrounding community. He said that he hopes that the expansions or renovation of the existing schools incorporate that as well. He stated that he hopes that the planning is expansive and looks at all the issues and needs. He said that in many ways, the schools have become the centers of community.

Councillor Nolan stated that she still encourages the City to look back at the Newton 20-year plan. She said that Newton's plan lays out what they think they are going to do. She said that there was an intensive EMG study of every school building in 2006. She said that they gave every school a rating. She said that in 2006 and 2016, the MSBA did a review of every school building condition and environment and an overall rating, and it would have been based on those that she would have hoped that she would like to see laid out on one page where the City is going. She said that it should be easy for the City to do this. She said that if we can save buildings by working on them now, that should free up dollars to take care of other buildings. She said that in Newton, some of their recent projects include building a school for 500 students with taking two houses by eminent domain and all of the projects are only taking two years construction. She said that she would like to understand how other districts do these projects with less disruption to students. If construction could be lessened to 2-3 years, it would be beneficial. She said that Watertown is building two new schools with net zero standards. She said that they are spending \$170 million dollars expected for 1175 students which is 40% less than the City of Cambridge is spending for 20% less students at the Tobin. She said that there have been plans over the years and she is interested to know when the City can expect a plan to tell residents. She said that based on projections, there will be several hundred more students due to the units at NorthPoint and Alewife. She asked for an updated enrollment report. Mr. Maloney said that he expects that the study will be done in about a year. He said that there will be a lot of discussion with all parties. He said that he concurs with Councillor Nolan and when it comes to building school buildings, others confer with the City of Cambridge. He said that the

process began two years ago but was deliberately put aside for pandemic recover and reopening of schools and not on this. He said that is the reason for delay. He said that an enrollment report will be sent. Mr. Maloney said that he has heard clearly that open space and equity are important pieces. Councillor Nolan said that early education and geographic spread are also important pieces.

Councillor Nolan said that she appreciates the work that is being done. She said that she will forward the information that she has received from other districts to all parties.

Councillor Zondervan said that regarding Watertown schools, they have been jealous of Cambridge and have wanted to learn from Cambridge what has been done. Mr. Kale noted that two schools that have been done in Cambridge are LEED Platinum and other school districts are building buildings that do not necessarily measure up to LEED Platinum. He said that the City takes LEED certification seriously.

Mr. Rojas Villareal stated his thanks and appreciation for the work that is being done and for pushing the School Department forward.

Councillor Carlone stated he has always enjoyed when the School administration and the City Council meet. He said that the City is proud of what has been achieved.

Vice Mayor Mallon made a motion to adjourn the hearing.

The roll was called and resulted as follows:

PRESENT: Councillor Nolan, Councillor Carlone, Vice Mayor Mallon, -5
Councillor McGovern, Councillor Zondervan

ABSENT: -0

and the hearing was adjourned at 6:00 p.m.

For the Committee,

Councillor Patricia Nolan, Chair
Neighborhood and Long-Term Planning, Public
Facilities, Arts and Celebrations Committee

Sundry communications were received from, regarding the NLTP Committee hearing on October 13, 2021.