

**Advisory Committee
Meeting Notes
August 23, 2022
Hingham Town Hall**

In Attendance: G. Danis, N. MacDonald, T. Sherwood, B. Black, D. Cooper, C. Kirk, A. McElaney, C. Tully, A. Macdonald, L. Kruzer, J. Griffin, Town Accountant S. Nickerson

Absent: K. Curley, J. Price, K. Dziergoski, S. Melia

Call meeting to order:

The meeting was called to order at 7:04pm, and Chair Danis read the following statement:

“This meeting is being held in person or remotely as an alternate means of public access pursuant to an Order issued by the Governor of Massachusetts dated March 12, 2020, Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law. You are hereby advised that this meeting and all communications during this meeting may be recorded by the Town of Hingham in accordance with the Open Meeting Law. If any participant wishes to record this meeting, please notify the Chairman at the start of the meeting in accordance with M.G.L. c. 30A, § 20(f) so that the Chair may inform all other participants of said recording.”

Questions from the public on items not on the agenda

None.

Approval of Minutes from August 2, 2022

Approved August 16, 2022 by roll-call vote.

STM Article A: Foster School: Hearing and discussion

Chair Danis read proposed Warrant Article A for Town Meeting. The Advisory Committee heard a presentation on August 2nd. Met again on August 9th to discuss questions and further thoughts. We will go around the table to ask further questions.

In attendance from the School Building Committee are Ray Estes, Michelle Ayer and Linda Hill; Dr. Adams, Superintendent for HPS, Aisha Nelson Oppong, HPS Director of Business and Support Services; and Gene Raymond, Architect from Raymond Design Associates for the project.

The Advisory Committee engaged in a Question & Answer discussion with the School Building Committee.

How do the MSBA exclusions on this building project compare to other comparable projects that have been built either in Hingham or other areas?

- There are a number of documents that cover ineligible costs. MSBA has a number of ineligible costs for reimbursements and many of those have to do with caps on costs. For example, \$360/sq ft. Construction costs right now are impacting projects everywhere. We have more significant site work costs because of the site we are dealing with – 39 acres and only 7 acres able to be developed. In the last 5 years, only 30 schools have been built and only 5 have had to spend as much on the site. Other

categories that are commonly over the cap are FFE (furniture fixtures and equipment) and Technology – which are capped at \$1200 per student. Those costs are driven by the educational program. We have a 1:1 initiative where each child has access to a Chrome book – enough technology for all students to use – this is an area which is commonly over the cap. There are other spaces that are particular to our district, that other districts may not have. Our administration has chosen to house the MetCo director here because there is no current office for that position. Multi-purpose space will be used by the Field Science class, but will also house KIA and other programs. This is not reimbursable. There is some administration that will exceed the guidelines. The gymnasium will exceed the cap due to sidelines being built out to provide more space with bleacher accommodation. As a means for understanding, the caps on construction costs are artificially low -and MSBA knows that. This allows the MSBA to spread more financing across the Commonwealth and support more communities. The big chunk of the ineligible 1,650 square feet is the multi-purpose room for training as well as KIA.

The price tag for Foster is a large number. What was the process behind how we got to that number. What have been the options that were explored? Is one of the big drivers of cost the fact that we are moving the school on the site? Building it into the hill? And the concern about the flood plain?

- There are over-arching themes that are driving costs. We started with a space summary during schematic design about what the building will include. The MSBA sets certain requirements. There are some areas where we have exceeded that. Our building has to be a certain size. The site we are working with has constraints like the wetlands, river front, and flood plain elevation.
- The site costs are 15-20% of the total project budget.
- The existing school is in the flood plain. We have to plan for that because scientists say it is a real possibility. If we built there, the school would have to be raised up very high. If we built it there, we would need swing space for the students and a whole host of other costs. If we purchased another site, that would not be reimbursable. They looked at other feasible sites and there is no other site in Town for Foster. We looked at 11 options at the Foster site including renovation plus 10 other options. The one that was chosen had the highest educational benefit and best opportunity to avail itself of the natural resources, and was the least costly.
- As far as digging into the hill, the size of the building is built for the educational program. We needed a certain amount of room on the site, for drop-off, to relocate the softball field, relocate the tennis courts, build the playground area, the bus routes – and with only 7 buildable acres, and all possible options needing to be raised to address future climate change, the ideal buildable site is to dig into the hill. Additionally, the fill from the hill can be re-used as part of the materials needed to raise the site.

The Town owns significant parcels of land, and why couldn't they be used?

- Bare Cove and Carlson, for example, are in the PRS district. There would have to be some redistricting to use that.

What is a cafetorium?

- It is a cafeteria and an auditorium. Elementary level does not allow for auditoriums.

Have you spoken with the MSBA specifically about the 10% drop in student enrollment since they studied it in 2019 – now that we have 400 instead of 500 students at Foster - to ask if other schools in the MSBA programs have also seen these kinds of drops – and did the MSBA make adjustments to their numbers?

- We have not spoken to the MSBA about the drop in enrollment. The number before Covid was about 490. We are at 410 for the upcoming school year. Those kids may return, but there are also many new families with young children moving to Town. The projected enrollment increases are from the MSBA over the next 10 years. Once they come up with a number, that is what you have to build to. We fully expect we will need to accommodate that many students. The MSBA do their own enrollment studies and they tell you how many pupils you are going to house. If you want to deviate from that, you need to spell that out at the beginning of the process. The Select Board asked about adding on to Plymouth River or East – the MSBA did not recommend that option. It's too late to make changes to that number. The MSBA is very judicious in the way they project numbers. The design enrollment is for an average, not a peak.

Back to the space issue – looking at the list of the ineligible items which exceeds MSBA guidelines. About 8,000 additional square feet. But if we look at Excel spreadsheet – column that says difference to MSBA guidelines – shows 20,900 is net sq feet. Another section that says non-programmed square feet. So a total of 63,000 square feet is space that is over and above the MSBA guidelines?

- 87,000 is the result of an algorithm. Is not precise to the project. So you plug in the number of pupils – and the formula spits out a generic program that is 87,265. It assumes a certain amount of square footage for Special Education programming. Hingham has a very robust SPED program. It says we should have 6 kindergartens, but we only have 5.
- The KIA program is being expanded at Foster. We are not in compliance with the SPED mandates for pre-school and we are expanding at Foster to include that component. Out of 126,000 sq feet – only 8,000 has been deemed non-reimbursable.

In looking at the new Chapman School in Weymouth – the cost per sq foot is substantially less than it was at East. It was big and built earlier, but what other reasons are there?

- The larger the school, the lower the cost per sq foot. There are certain costs that are just part of any building – like stairs, or a boiler room. The bidding climate for Chapman was very different. It was bid pre-Covid. The supply chain and labor costs have skyrocketed since then. And site costs can vary substantially. The current bidding climate and anticipated bids we are going to get are substantially higher. Within the past two years, the MSBA increased their per square foot reimbursement rate to \$360.

We are in a different process than schools that started their process earlier. But there are schools that are in the process. Do we have any sense of other schools that are being designed right now that have current bids to compare?

- Unfortunately, our site is more expensive – but would be good to see per square foot costs for other projects.

Are the mechanical systems the next biggest cost after the site work?

- Yes, they are very expensive. The School Building Committee looked at a geothermal, all-electric building which is a more expensive system. We do not want to burn fossil fuels and want to be sustainable. The geothermal system is more expensive in upfront costs, but will save thousands of dollars for the Town going forward.

Have you looked at operating costs for the building?

- The new school will be 76% larger than the existing school. But the combination of building an efficient new school and the current inefficient school – will save \$37,000 in utility costs.
- Current repair and maintenance is approx. \$26,000 less than the existing school. The geothermal is more costly upfront, but will save dollars over time.

With the geothermal, is there any additional federal funding available?

- We are not aware of any existing federal funding. MSBA has a glitch where if districts can find funding from another source, the MSBA reduces their funding.

Per pupil expenditures – any sense of where Hingham will fall on that chart? Taking into account the new building – is there an impact on PPE?

- Not sure there is a direct impact on per pupil expenditure.

Having watched the Zoom meeting for Conservation – and noted the HVAC number is \$11mm. The site work is about \$15mm. Where is the cost for doing the geothermal work embedded in the ground? In HVAC or site work?

- It is in the HVAC costs. It's in with the building costs. It's embedded in the \$11mm.

It is forward looking to have a heating / HVAC system like this. Are there any other schools that have implemented this system and any idea on the success of it?

- There are other schools that have done this and the MSBA is encouraging it. Westwood, Acton/Boxborough and Cambridge are some examples. Cambridge was unique 5 years ago, but it is becoming more and more part of the systems. In the last 6-8 months, the MSBA has held seminars on Net Zero to talk about opportunities.
- It would be great to articulate success stories from other districts.

Is there a tangible way to compare Foster to East School – which is 91,000 square feet and a higher population. What are the primary drivers for building it to 126,000 square feet?

- MSBA guidelines for space have changed. Design enrollment for East was 635. We are designing to the MSBA guidelines and have added space to meet district-wide guidelines that the administration wanted.

- Don't know the educational guidelines that were in place. At Foster, there are 3 music rooms that fit the guidelines. At East – there was only one. The Special Ed program that is in place today is different than it was at that time.
- Would be useful to be able to articulate the differences.

It seems like there is going to be a class for language learning, and a therapeutic classroom. Are out of district kids going to come to this school? Will we save any out-of-district tuitions by bringing those children back?

- Those programs are being built because we want to be able to offer them and haven't been able to offer them before. It is an operational question for the district whether or not we will bring kids from other schools. The decisions to build this are more programmatic than financial.
- For most out-of-district kids, their needs are met by those programs. Those programs help us develop relationships with families by better meeting the needs of those children. The growing populations require us to develop more programming to meet needs and keep more children in the district over time, which benefits everyone. We are not meeting the requirements for the Special Ed program at this time.

We need to understand why we are building it so much larger than it is now.

- You couldn't build Foster the way it is now – it is too small to meet MSBA guidelines. Statute requires schools to make their spaces available to the community. So the gym and other areas have been designed in a separate wing that will be accessible without allowing people to have access to the rest of the school. Sports teams, Boy Scouts, high school sports teams have banquets in gyms, cafeteriums, tennis courts, sports fields – every single school has shared spaces for the community to use.

Is there an estimate on additional operating costs – for things like SPED or additional music teachers?

- Only anticipated growth in operating costs could be in the SPED program. It is always more fiscally responsible to keep students in the district.
- Pre-K will have additional teachers – but that is covered by tuition. Except for SPED teachers – the district will have to pay for those.

In terms of tuition and fee-based programs – do those fees cover the total costs of the additional employees, or just salaries?

- Only salaries – but not benefits.

Is there a number for the additional operating costs for the staff?

- We did some analysis and the two areas we saw are SPED – which differs from year to year based on the number of students. Also, we could need an additional custodian. A SPED classroom would have a teacher, plus 1-2 paras depending on needs.

One of the questions was, “Why do I spend so much money on schools when I don't benefit from it personally?” In my own view, the best way to ensure success of people is through education. In the Town, from a selfish perspective – nothing succeeds like success. Good

schools that provide successful students – spread throughout the community. There is a certain cache to having reputations for excellent school systems.

- We've seen property values skyrocket over the last year – and young families move here for the schools. The reputation of our schools is still very strong. Property value increases improve the whole community.
- It's the Bob Ryan answer from East school – “Someone did this for us – we need to do it for the next generation.” It's incumbent on us as a community to pay it forward.

Hingham has a habit of being very thrifty in our projects. Given that we have a lot of capital projects coming down the pipeline that we will be asking the taxpayers to fund, do you have any concerns that we are 'overbuilding' this school?

- We are building to the education plan. Adding a handful of features that will enhance community use which will benefit the Town and be a net positive to the School Committee. We are designing exactly what we think we need.

Are there five sections for K-5 in the new plan? How many sections do we have currently?

- There are four and possibly three at each grade level.

If there are four for each grade, there is an extra classroom for each grade? How is that space being utilized?

- The five is required to meet the 605 pupils at 22 pupils per classroom. The School Committee has target class sizes. Class size is an important aspect that is being driven by MSBA.
- Grade 3 has 84 students, so there are four classrooms. The hope is that the enrollment will go up. The hope is that with a new building – enrollment will go up. We believe that the new school, like with East, will drive new enrollment.
- And, that will drive additional staffing needs.

This project is about the school building and not the operating costs. What I'm hearing, and we need to be transparent about this – we are going to save money on utilities. We will have some revenue generating programs that will cover salaries, but will have increased benefit costs. What I just heard – is that we have additional classrooms – which will require new teachers. I thought it was going to be minimally operationally impactful. We need to be very upfront about what the operational impacts are going to be.

- We know its minimal with the items we can quantify now. And if the students come, it's the obligation of the school to provide the education.

Does the MSBA always pick a fixed whole number of classrooms per grade? Do they move that number? Does the MSBA always round up?

- They set the 605 number, and then you divide it by the number of grades. If it ends up at 28 kids in a classroom, they add another classroom.

At Plymouth River – there would be number of classrooms shifted if there were a year where there were a higher number of kids in a certain grade, could the classrooms be used by other grades?

- Yes, except for kindergarten classrooms. Year to year, the administration makes decisions on how they use classrooms.

What if this didn't pass? ... Is there an effective way to quantify that?

- We walked Foster today and there are severe concerns. Our facilities director is afraid the building might not be usable. The amount of maintenance required to sustain that building is enormous.
- We would need a new boiler. It would require ventilation work. We would need to move kids out of that school. There could be a loss of school days – kids will be losing time in school? It would probably mean moving the kids into the other 3 schools or finding another school for the kids to use.
- The school has an amazing staff and community and we will get to the finish line, but we don't want to get to a scenario – where we need to redistrict the entire Foster elementary school population.
- The facts are that 10 years ago, we might have had an alternative – but we are not in a position to have any choices.

Is the Staff Audit finished?

- They are working on it.

Geothermal systems are being used in other schools? Is it completely sufficient or are other heating and cooling systems required?

- This is sufficient. They looked at supplemental systems to supplement the upfront costs but it voided the Net Zero commitment.

QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

Liza O'Reilly - Foster is an urgent recommendation. Addressing climate change is an urgent recommendation. This project is capturing the vision of those recommendations. It may be helpful to mention that in the comment – the community has been asking for this. The comment from the community is – this should have been done 20 years ago – why did it take so long? The Town had to make choices. In 2015 – the steam pipes were leaking and temperature swings were becoming extreme. In 2017, John Ferris said, "We really can't wait anymore." We went to the Select Board and asked them to open the Warrant to create a School Building Committee. Went to MSBA in 2017 and 2018 and did not get the approval from MSBA. The amount of time this has taken has brought us to this point and the higher costs.

Review and discussion: First draft of the comment on the proposed Public Safety Facility Building

- Expand the history of what is lacking in the existing stations.
- Discuss the potential growth of the stations and the new technologies, and the way that these services may change over time?
- Can we include the operating costs for the new building?
- What additional staff might be required because most of the site maintenance is done by the fire fighters.
- It might be good to note the low emission technology being incorporated into the building as much as is possible

- Is it too downstream to talk about the building disposition? This is under the purview of the Select Board.
- Make more explicit the funding, and make it very clear that this is debt financing and what that will mean to the budget and the tax payer.
- Brief paragraph outlining the process that the Town goes through to build a building. Site selection, OPM, schematic design documents, construction documents and the votes from the previous Town Meetings. A. McElaney will send an example.
- In describing the inadequacies of the current facilities – this has been a long project that has been looked at since 2015.
- The history matters, but we need to focus on ‘why now’ and ‘what it will solve.’ Maybe the history could be bullet points and then the paragraph could be the deficiencies that are present and will be solved. Demonstrate that there has been a thoughtful process to get here. Look at East School Warrant from Spring TM.
- Tangible examples like vehicle length and chemical exposure. Holding cells location. The evidence area. Hingham does not meet state standards.
- Why do we have to do both of these projects right now? Should we address that?

Liaison Reports

Chair Danis noted that we are about to end the “summer hiatus” and meeting schedules will follow certain routines. It is important that liaison members attend the meetings for their committees. Refer to Section 7.1 of the AdCom manual which spells out liaison expectations if you have questions.

Discussion of Advisory Committee housekeeping items

Next meeting is Tuesday, August 30th to hear and discuss a draft comment on STM Article C —the stabilization fund. We will have a presentation on the financing options for both the PSFB and Foster. And we will also review a first draft of the comment on Foster School. Next meeting in September will either be September 13th or 15th – this timing is based on meetings by both Conservation and the Planning Board with both building committees. Those meetings have been productive and are moving forward in their approval process.

The revised AdCom Warrant Article style guidelines have been distributed.

Matters not anticipated within 48 hours of meeting

None

Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 9:50pm by roll-call vote.

Documents Distributed for this Meeting:

AdCom Agenda August 23, 2022
Warrant Article Style Guidelines

Respectfully submitted,
Tina Sherwood, Secretary