

School Building Advisory Committee
Hartwell Multipurpose Room
July 10, 2013

Minutes

Members present: Douglas Adams, Loretta Arthur, Vincent Cannistraro, Timothy Christenfeld, Steven Perlmutter, Maggy Pietropaolo, Peter Sugar, Gary Taylor

The meeting was called to order at 7:18 p.m.

Doug Adams presented a detailed analysis of the site constraints and of the existing conditions at the Ballfield campus.

One important conclusion of this analysis is that there are only 25 usable acres for a school project on the campus: it is “a very tight site.”

The second important point is that the current school building presents a “condition of challenging stasis”: From one end of the building to the other, there are alternating weak and sound sections. The kindergarten classrooms, the link section, and the classrooms around the Brooks auditorium are all in reasonably good shape, while the intervening sections in Smith (1948 structure) and Brooks (infill classroom area) are not. Further, there are three clear categories of space that do not exist in the existing facility: breakout rooms grade-level meeting spaces, and a cafeteria.

An upgrade of just the two weakest links in the existing building would cost at least \$16 million – two sections of 20,000 square feet each, at a baseline renovation rate of \$325 per square foot.

The Committee then discussed the understanding that, based on the current assessed value of the school, at approximately \$21 million, any renovation that exceeds \$7 million will trigger all the code and compliance issues (which will then drastically increase the cost and complexity of the project). One possible ‘pathway is to undertake a renovation that costs less than \$7 million – we need to ask what we could get for that amount of money. Some feel, though, that it is unthinkable not to build to code. Why would the town of Lincoln want to invest in a building that does not address issues of accessibility, that does not have a comprehensive sprinkler system?

The committee, and the School Committee, also need to ask whether we can fit the educational program that we need into the existing building.

The members also discussed whether we are at risk of investing in a building that is responsive to the current fads in education but that will not be responsive to the educational needs as they are understood ten or twenty years down the road. One educational development of the last twenty years, which is very likely to persist, and which the current building poorly accommodates, is an increased emphasis on individualized instruction.

The committee reviewed the minutes from the June 27, 2013 meeting. Peter Sugar moved that the committee approve the minutes. Maggy Pietropaolo seconded. The committee approved without objection.

There followed a discussion of the Committee’s objectives and of the meaning of ‘pathway.’ The charge is to generate viable building ideas for the School Committee to pursue, based on the needs laid out in the Statement of Interest submitted to the MSBA in May of this year.

There were questions about how the SBAC might proceed in an organized fashion, and about the extent to which the Committee should take into account funding issues as it investigates pathways. There was a disagreement about whether it is preferable to think about building priorities in the abstract or in the context of a specific plan. There was also a disagreement about whether the Committee should start with the identification of the pathways that it will discuss in detail in its final report, or whether it should start with a detailed discussion of the needs and then allow the pathways to emerge from that discussion.

The Committee then started its discussion of the educational needs of the schools. Becky McFall offered a list of priorities, in descending order of importance:

First, it is hard to separate physical needs from educational needs, since a number of systems dysfunctions have a negative effect on student learning. The dysfunctions include the absence of reliable climate control, poor lighting, and poor air quality. The top priority has to be the upgrade of the basic systems that are failing or non-existent.

Second, the school should have at least one classroom at each grade level that can provide an effective learning environment for children with a specific special need. That is, each grade level should have one classroom that is permanently equipped for children with hearing deficits, and one classroom that is equipped for children with restricted mobility. These may not be the same classroom (that is, a single room might not be equipped to handle all special needs). On the other hand, the same room might be used to address a particular student's needs in multiple years if assignment of classrooms to grades could be shuffled.

Third, the school should have separate spaces attached to the classrooms, and fully visible from the classrooms, that allow for small-group or individual instruction.

Fourth, the school needs a cafeteria (which could and should be equipped as a multi-use space). A separate cafeteria would free the gyms for their proper uses, would allow for greater efficiency in serving the children (allowing them more time for eating and recess), and would allow the school to create educational and nutritional cooperative arrangements with local food producers.

Fifth, the Brooks gym should be attached to the main building.

Sixth, the school needs more collaborative spaces. Classrooms could be grouped more effectively to share resources. There could be more spaces for grade-level meetings – spaces that are larger than a classroom, smaller than the auditorium.

Seventh, there could be more spaces that could accommodate teacher meetings and other small-group activities.

There were questions about the importance of the library, about whether there are existing spaces that could be reduced, and about whether the art and music programs also need more or different spaces.

The next meeting will be on July 17, 2013, at 7:00 p.m., in the Hartwell Multipurpose Room.

Gary Taylor moved to adjourn the meeting. Vincent Cannistraro seconded the motion. There were no objections.