HAMILTON-WENHAM
REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

Abutters Meeting – Tuesday, December 10, 2024 – Meeting Notes

Thank you to everyone for participating in last night's SD presentation of the proposed new Cutler Elementary School to the abutters of the existing Cutler ES site.

The meeting was well attended by the community providing helpful insight from those who spoke.

For the record, the following people represented their respective organization as follows:

- Hamilton-Wenham Regional School District – Eric Tracy, Superintendent (Owner)
- PMA Consultants – Kevin Nigro, Project Executive, and Nicholas Masse, Project Manager (Owner's Project Manager)
- JCJ Architecture – James E. LaPosta, Jr, FAIA, Principal, Douglas K. Roberts, AIA, Principal, Alicia Caritano, AIA, Project Manager, and Peter Morgan, Project Designer (Designer)
- GPI – Rebecca Brown, PE (Traffic Consultant to JCJ)

The following comments were received:

- Concerns with parent vehicle queuing and vehicle management on-site and vehicle queuing on Asbury Street "*that will paralyze the neighborhood*".
- "*Renovate, restore and maintain*" the existing small schools ... this is not a new building problem, this is a maintenance problem ... the District can't maintain their buildings.
- People move to Hamilton and Wenham for the benefits of small towns that provide small schools for their children ... small schools provide better education.
- Projects of this scale never come in on time or on budget ... the proposed $150.0M project will become a $200.0M project after change orders.
- Two surveys, one grass roots and one by the School Committee, returned results that the voters of Hamilton and Wenham are overwhelmingly against this project ... why is the District continuing to spend resources to promote a project that the two communities don't want?
- Building a new school will destroy the fabric of an existing peaceful neighborhood.
- Keep a good thing going by preserving the existing three small schools.
- Copies of the August 15, 2024 letter prepared by The Halks Firm addressing water table concerns were distributed to attendees prior to the start of the meeting. Points of the letter were highlighted including the request for copies of select documentation under the Freedom of Information Act. The speaker acknowledged receiving a timely, two-page response letter from the District; however, the letter did not satisfactorily address their concerns. The parties to the letter plan to file a Superior Court complaint to receive the documentation requested in the August 15th letter. It was clarified that the reports are available on the project's website.
- A retired teacher commented on a number of items:
    - The lack of outdoor play space for the students;
    - Lamented the new building will forever block her sunrises;
    - Expressed concerns about potential blasting;
    - Expressed concerns with the pollution generated by buses and cars which is in conflict with the Town's commitment to be net zero carbon by 2040.

- Concerns were raised with the "humongous stair" citing that the speaker's children didn't see a stair until they went to high school ... the stair as represented was too high and "scary".
- Clarification was provided that the proposed plan will maintain Buker ES for the District's PK-K programs and, in keeping with the regional agreement, maintain at least one school in Wenham.
- The proposed new elementary school is the size of the current high school ... the project won't fit on the site.
- The proposed new school is estimated to cost three times the recently completed Manchester Memorial ES ... why?
- The speaker spoke with a teacher in a Gloucester school with 460 students that the teacher reported was "unmanageable".
- *Water, water, water* ... why propose a building on a site that has a known history of water issues?
- Additional students suggests additional foot traffic to/from the school yet no plan to widen the existing Asbury Street sidewalk ... the team clarified the majority of additional students will be arriving to/from the site via bus; the anticipated number of walkers remains largely unchanged with the consolidated school.
- Perimeter landscape planting have not been finalized; this will occur in future project phases.
- Three story building? ... were solar wind impacts to the Asbury Street neighbors studied? ... it was clarified the proposed building is composed of one and two story elements integrated into the topography allowing for two ground floors.
- Traffic impact of a landscape truck that parks along Asbury Street in front of the school and utility work that blocks access from Cunningham Street is a big enforcement concern as are 740 cars with some traveling at "90 MPH" along Asbury Street ... it was clarified the anticipated trip generation of the new school will be 150 – 200 cars not all are new to the school. In addition, it was clarified that the traffic report includes a road capacity analysis of Asbury Street.
- Clarified the play fields do not have lights. The District anticipates the fields (Little League baseball and U8 soccer) will be used afterhours/weekends by the community. Field usage restrictions were requested to "*preserve the integrity of the quiet neighborhood*."
- The terms *misinformation* and *equity* were being misused ... clarified "right sizing school" meant maintaining the 19 students/classroom and the aggregate number of classrooms for the existing three schools and the consolidation allows right sizing of staff for the Special Education programs.
- Why was the preferred solution being presented as a *fait accompli*? ... clarified the District is following MSBA's prescriptive process that required evaluating Town owned properties in Hamilton and Wenham that met the programmatic requirements generated through the visioning process (24 total), explored sixteen (16) design options that include code upgrades, addition/renovation and new construction for multiple grade configurations on the Cutler ES and Winthrop ES sites. After evaluation, it was determined the proposed design was the most appropriate educationally and cost-effective for the District for the next 50 years.
- Issue MBTA 3A is a SEPARATE issue from the school project and does not affect the MSBA grant ... it was reported that the Town of Hamilton proposes to exclude the Winthrop ES site from consideration for the MBTA 3A issue ... it was challenged whether or not the Town can exclude the Winthrop site as it is located within 2 miles of the train station required by state law.
- The April 5th votes were clarified to include:
    - Approval to extend the existing 30-year lease to 50 years required by MSBA – in Hamilton ONLY.
    - Approval of the proposed school scope and budget via a 2/3's vote in Hamilton and Wenham.

- The April 10th vote will request approval for debt exclusion via a 51% vote in Hamilton and Wenham.
- Contingency plan in the event of a NO vote? ... clarified MSBA will not permit multiple additional votes that occurred with the middle school.
- There was a brief discussion of how the MSBA reimbursement rate actual vs. effective is calculated accounting for eligible and ineligible costs.