

## LEXINGTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING

Tuesday, December 12, 2006  
Lexington Town Office Building  
1625 Massachusetts Avenue

**Present: Superintendent Paul Ash, School Committee Chair Tom Diaz, School Committee Members Helen Cohen, Tom Griffiths, Olga Gutttag and Ravi Sakhuja. Minutes taken by Leora Tec.**

**7:30 p.m. I. Call to Order and Welcome:**

### **II. Public Comment**

**Patrick Mehr** (most of his remarks had no audible portion): ...to conclude, my recommendation is as we redistrict we should minimize the number of elementary classrooms we have through: looping, admitting new METCO students only if there is room in classrooms, asking families within reason to move buildings. We are talking about hundreds of thousands of dollars.

**Katie Cutler** (representing 2 neighborhoods, Bridge to Fiske and Fiske to Harrington): Is redistricting now in the best long term interests of our students if a school may be closed in a few years? If so, we have concerns about shifting middle schools for 70 students. Olga Gutttag requested that we submit an alternative proposal. We want to keep the Fiske to Harrington neighborhood at Fiske and move the Bridge to Fiske neighborhood to Harrington instead. This is supported by 48/50 families in the two neighborhoods. Thank you.

**Jenny Richlin** (parent affected by redistricting): Why are we doing the redistricting now if we may be closing a school a few years from now? If we do it now, then the potential school closing should be taken into account.

**Paul Ash:** We do need to be careful and deliberate. This is an emotional process. It affects a lot of families and kids. In my view we can't wait. Right now the Bridge School is 71 students over capacity. Hastings is overcrowded as well. The new Fiske school will have 148 spaces if we don't redistrict. The Committee has not even deliberated on the issue of closing an elementary school yet. The plan we have seen estimates the first realistic opportunity for closing a school to be four years from now. I think that is way too long to keep children in an overcrowded school and have another school with excess capacity. It is the right thing for children to be in schools with adequate educational space.

**Jenny Richlin:** I appreciate your argument. The redistricting should take the potential school closing into account so that many of the same children don't get redistricted four years from now.

**Paul Ash:** It is not knowable what the district lines would look like if a school would close. We don't know which school, what order, etc...My recommendation is to redistrict the smallest number of kids possible to solve the immediate problem.

**7:40 p.m.     III. Superintendent's Report:**

A. Rob Adelson told me that the Mass School Building Authority approved our application for a low-interest loan. This means a savings for the taxpayers of 1.1million dollars. We were approved for a 1.8 million dollar loan.

B. I attended a meeting today with Mary Ellen Dunn and some principals at the secondary level of the Northeast Homeland Security Regional Advisory Council to begin training classes in STARS. This is a system of school threat assessments that coordinates the schools' response with the fire department and the police department and if necessary with other communities and state officials. Massachusetts has been at the forefront in this. We can systematize what we are doing inside the schools. Next week I will be meeting with the Police and Fire departments to begin the implementation process. We have systems in place already but they need to be refined.

**Tom Griffiths:** What kind of effort?

**Paul Ash:** A state grant to digitize floor plans. The principals will work with site councils or safety committees to make sure manuals are up-to-date. Protocols will have to be practiced. This will require time from staff and students.

**Olga Gutttag:** A high school teacher reported on a lockdown drill. I was impressed that the whole classroom was in lockdown position in under 30 seconds.

**7:45 p.m.     Members' Reports / Members' Concerns:**

**Ravi Sakhuja:** We need to have direct input (comments) to Paul Ash from all School Committee members. These comments are constructive for his future consideration to better his performance and not an indication of disapproval of his performance

**Tom Griffiths:** On the 4<sup>th</sup> and the 5<sup>th</sup> I met with Hank Manz' Scouts: They asked why did you raise school lunch prices? Why did you raise parking fees? And they had some recommendations for Paul Ash: They want a later start for school. They want half days combined into a collection of full days off that can be turned into a vacation, and they want to see uniform finals for each given class at LHS.

I attended the Stand for Children summit and found it fascinating.

**Olga Gutttag:** I am sorry about not being able to respond to all redistricting emails. We will respond to many of them tomorrow at the public hearing.

I attended the PBC meeting: The Fiske School is over 97% complete. The contractor is working on the punch list. Harrington's wells are functioning as they are supposed to. Both Fiske and Harrington can use geothermal or a gas fired system. We can switch between them easily. In the athletic fields at Fiske the sprinkler system will be installed by the town. David Finney gave a preview of today's presentation to the PBC and it was well-received.

**Tom Griffiths:** Flip of the switch shuts down the pumps so it's not an entirely trivial operation.

**Olga Gutttag:** I also attended the Board meeting for EDCO communities west of the city, where we did an informal survey of which systems were having unanticipated SPED increases. Everyone's hands went up. Everyone got a CD comparing EDCO districts along multiple axes. There will be a comparison made. Newton and Brookline did enrollment projections a few years ago and they were wrong.

The SPEDPAC presentation by Dr. Ellen Braaten was excellent.

There is a substantial security problem in the boys' locker room in the high school. There was a discussion about cameras at the doors. Is there a better solution than just locking up the locker rooms?

**8:00 p.m.     Discussion Items:**

1. Elementary and Central Office Facilities Master Plan, Part 2 (60 minutes)

**David Finney** (Design Partnership):

Mr. Finney reviewed his last presentation about enrollment predictions, 5 vs. 6 school option. The School Committee recommended that he go ahead with planning for 3 schools with a capacity for 450. David Finney discussed the cost implications of his proposed plan. For Bowman, Bridge and Estabrook the cost would be about 24.3 million dollars in current dollars. The renovation costs would range from 20.4 million to 22.5 million. Hastings: new 25.5 million and 23.3 million for an addition and renovation project.

(David Finney showed the options for the various schools). The Hastings site contains some complications because of sitting on an embankment and we would need to build substantial retaining walls.

Mr. Finney's recommendations are based on facilities and architectural issues. He suggests that the Hastings site is the least suitable for continued use as a school site. There are several reasons for this: it will cost more to rebuild or renovate, there is less open space for recreation, less parking and traffic patterns that have the separation that we would strive for and recommend.

New vs. renovation: we recommend a new building at each site rather than renovation. The cost differential is running between 10-22%. There are some disadvantages to additions and renovations. For all three sites there is limited amount of land and land use is optimized in the new schools. There is an advantage to new schools from an energy point of view because of envelope tightness and insulation. You can achieve a degree of zoning for community and after hours use in the new buildings that you can't in the existing buildings; you can run only part of a building. The new construction will allow for more environmentally sensitive site design. New Buildings would have smaller footprints. New buildings have a higher degree of efficiency. So overall the benefits of new buildings more than justify their costs. The overall schedule for the 3 school plan: it would be the beginning of FY11 before we could consider closing a school. The town could approve preliminary design, final design and then construction. It would make sense to go to Town Meeting in spring 2008. You could wait 2 years or 18 months between starting construction on each school.

Central administration: they have considered 3 options. The Old Harrington, Hastings and the White House are the options. The White House project was rejected due to costs. Hastings is an interesting option but it won't come out of service for 10 years as a school. Mr. Finney went over the plan for use of the Old Harrington for the Central Office using the model of a loose fit that uses more space, but is more economical (10-15% cheaper). The lower level of the Old Harrington could house School Facilities including a considerable amount of shop space and also supply space (the latter two might not be needed if a new DPW were to be built. If so, the bottom level would be available for another function).

He proposed a two phased implementation of the relocation of the Central Administration. Phase one would be a short term renovation not including the building envelope work or the major systems work necessary for a thirty-year life, though there would be selective renovation of the heating system. This would cost about 2.85 million dollars. Phase two work would be 6.875 million dollars. So the total is 9.725 million dollars in current dollars. Phase one is only for School Administration uses. Phase two is for the whole building but there are no frills, nor accommodations specific to any other users of the building.

Tom Diaz brought out the point that this plan would cost much less per square foot and you would get much more square footage (\$220 per foot fully renovated) than the White House renovation.

**Tom Diaz:** the main floor would be for Central Administration?

**David Finney:** Yes.

**Tom Diaz:** All costs are in 2007 dollars. Is there away to calculate the real cost?

**David Finney:** That is very hard to predict nowadays. Perhaps 7% a year.

**Tom Diaz:** The first school would cost just under 30 million dollars.

**Tom Diaz:** Just looking at dollars, is the new construction that much more energy efficient than renovated buildings?

**David Finney:** No, the renovated buildings would also be energy efficient; it may not justify the amount of money.

**David Finney:** It's hard to quantify the best reasons why I recommend new. There are safe and separate drop off areas, more playing fields...

**Tom Diaz:** Existing buildings abut wetlands. Will we have to go thru some re-permitting process?

**David Finney:** Yes. We will increase impervious surface.

**Tom Griffiths:** That there really be the kind of enrollment decline that is being projected is a concern. That affects the availability of swing space. Could Estabrook be its own swing space?

**David Finney:** Potentially yes, but there would be some problems. Other options are more portable classrooms. The capacities we are identifying for your schools are less than what you have now, you could reintroduce crowding for a narrow period of time.

**Tom Griffiths:** Old Harrington—the original phase one would not provide an upgrade in heating or cooling so there would be no air conditioning, correct?

**David Finney:** Correct, not until phase 2.

**Tom Griffiths:** The Senior Center needs 20-30K square feet. Are these compatible usages? Could a 20K square foot usage by another group be feasible?

**David Finney:** If school facilities and central supplies aren't located in this building, there are 19K square feet of net space left here.

**Olga Gutttag:** If we don't renovate the four existing schools our facilities department has to invest money in keeping these buildings going. I would like a report of the predicted cost of maintaining each of the existing schools in circulation. We ruled out the Estabrook site as a feasible site for a dual school so the only options are portable classrooms or the old Harrington.

If we are using the Old Harrington then why pour money into it to turn it into CO? We need a year until we have a better idea of what is happening with enrollment. Let's do just minimal cosmetic short-term changes. If the projections are right (i.e., enrollment drops) then I would advocate for your plan. Let's buy ourselves a year.

**Tom Diaz:** When do you want that report?

**Olga Gutttag:** Yesterday. Without that, it's hard to choose which plan to go with.

**Olga Gutttag:** Regarding renovation v. new: Regardless of the cost (up to 50% of new) I will never support another renovation. A huge amount of money goes into change orders. I don't want us to build an inferior building. A renovated building won't last as long as a new building. Also, new buildings are more environmentally friendly. We get better and more fields with new schools. The longer we wait to build the more likely we are to get reimbursed by the MSBA. We also learned from the PBC we may not get any money at all. The EDCO executive director put out a request for space for SPED. Collaboratives have to be housed somewhere. The excess capacity at Harrington might be used for that.

**Helen Cohen:** Which school gets closed? Is there reasoning around bus routes and what makes sense geographically or any other reasons?

**Paul Ash:** There may be. I suspect transportation routes will be one of the factors. The geography of the town does not suggest that any school is advantageous to close. I recommend that we forward Design Partnership's report to the PBC, they may have some insight that is town specific.

**Paul Ash:** I would like to get into the old Harrington in September.

**Ravi Sakhuja:** Why are we expanding the central office by 50%. Why not let someone else use the space?

**David Finney:** We still have the auditorium and downstairs for other uses.

**Paul Ash:** SPED is not in the White House. That is a serious problem. K-5 specialists are at Bowman and need to leave. It's important to have them be near Dr. Sarasin and Ms. Pilarski.

**Ravi Sakhuja:** What is the use of the space in Diamond?

**Joanne Hennessy:** Our building is at 95% capacity. We can use it for classrooms. The state specifies 85-90% for optimum.

**Tom Diaz:** There are 19K square feet for senior center?

**David Finney:** If facilities is out of there.

**Tom Griffiths:** Part of the senior center needs could be met through the auditorium; it could be shared with the schools.

**Olga Gutttag:** We might still need Harrington as swing space, we shouldn't give it up.

**There was a discussion about the amount of space needed for Central Administration, given that they will be housed with SPED and K-5 curriculum specialists as well.**

**Tom Griffiths:** The Selectmen would like to make plans for senior Center space at the end of this year and it doesn't sound like we can meet that regarding space at Harrington. I am wondering if we might want to release the White House for the senior center and I don't expect a vote on that tonight.

**Tom Diaz:** Let's take that up on the 19<sup>th</sup>.

**Ravi Sakhuja:** Let's think about what our needs are for the Central Office so we know what is left for Harrington.

**Olga Gutttag:** Since we are not certain when/if we'll close Hastings, it must continue to function as a community.

**Dawn McKenna:** A space utilization study was done years ago. I am going to offer to conduct one. The costs for renovation are not that different than the costs of the White House. The New Harrington is substantially bigger than the amount of square footage that is necessary. Why are we going to move central supply? Why are discussing the facilities piece? They never should have closed and gotten rid of Franklin School. Couldn't Bridge be a potential for swing space?

**Mark Andersen** (precinct 6): The disadvantage of Hastings is that it is close to 128, which is a public health detriment. What are the demolition costs? What would the bussing costs be based on different schools closing? Flexible vs. fixed walls? What if you built a new building for the Central Office?

**Patrick Mehr:** Why not rent space for the school admin building? We would get mileage if we provided space for the senior center and we should involve the capital expenditures committee.

**Tom Diaz:** We have looked for rental space; it was less available and more expensive than we thought. It makes sense as temporary.

**Tom Griffiths:** We thought we had interesting locations but there were build-out costs and accessibility issues.

**Dawn McKenna:** Previous space needs study felt that it was critical that the Town office building and school administration be close together. Perhaps in the DPW building that will be vacated.

**John Rosenberg:** Building wings could mean renovating to current standards the entire town hall complex. Two points: 1). Per square foot difference between the White House and the Old Harrington is \$500 so not comparable. 2). There's an asbestos problem in Estabrook

**David Finney:** \$330K for demolition and renovation

## 2. Administrative Procedures for K-5 Transfers (30 minutes)

**Paul Ash:** This is in response to Olga Gutttag's concern about parents who have children in out-of-neighborhood schools. There are a little over 100 children right now who are doing this not related to a special need. This procedure is consistent with the policy. (He read the first part of the document out loud and explained the reasoning behind it). Classes must be two below the SC recommended level. Applications must be made by May 15. Answers will be given on Aug 1. Parents must annually apply. Applications will be considered on a random basis. Principals (sending and receiving) can give a compelling educational issue and affect a transfer.

**The School Committee discussed the procedures, including their potential relation to reducing FTEs, bubble classes and redistricting. Paul Ash will ask principals why two over class size instead of one.**

**Annie McQuilken:** Students who are in open enrollment should be told as soon as possible to give them time to plan. The number should be the total recommended class size. This implies it will be random every year but it should only be random the first year. The kids who are already there should have preference over new kids.



**Paul Ash:** I see what you are saying. Redistricting has nothing to do with these transfer students.

**Annie McQuilken:** You could create a waiting list.

**Jill Hai:** We may already have classes with an overmax aide...

**Paul Ash:** That would be a no!

**Jill Hai:** There may be requests to go with the rest of the neighborhood if it was redistricted.

**Peg Carlson:** I like this policy. I don't think there should be a preference for out-of-neighborhood students. A person who used to go to a school and was redistricted out should have at least the same chance of getting in as someone who was out of neighborhood and going to that school.

**Katie Cutler:** Many 4<sup>th</sup> graders will want to stay in their school next year and their siblings will be somewhere else.

3. School Committee's Subcommittee on Operations (30 minutes)

**Discussion ensued about the proposed charter for the subcommittee. Ravi Sakhuja and Olga Guttag asked for more than one community representative to be on the committee, so that multiple community views can be represented. In addition, Olga Guttag was very concerned about the added workload for town professionals and SC members – especially during budget time. All agreed to include two community members, and Mr. Griffiths agreed to put out a call to the citizens to serve.**

**10:00 p.m.    Executive Session:**

The next meeting of the School Committee is scheduled for Tuesday, December 19, 2006, at 7:30 p.m. at Cary Hall, 1605 Massachusetts Avenue.