

Name of Committee: Brookline School Population and Capacity Exploration (B-SPACE)

Meeting Date: March 27, 2013

Time: 6:00 p.m.

Meeting Location: Town Hall,
School Committee Room

Committee Members - present marked with "x"

Betsy DeWitt	x	Philip Kramer	x
Alan Morse	x	Bill Lupini	x
George Cole	x	Michael Sandman	x
Katherine Craven		Rebecca Stone	x
Lisa Crossley	x	Fred Wang	
Ken Goldstein	x	Neil Wishinsky	x
Mel Kleckner			x

Staff Present: Peter Rowe, Deputy Superintendent of Schools; Jennifer Fischer-Mueller, Deputy Superintendent of Schools; Sean Cronin, Deputy Town Administrator.

Topic: Approval of minutes

Minutes of the 2/2/13 and 3/11/13 meetings approved.

Topic: Public Hearings Location

Co-Chair Alan Morse announced that the location of the Public Hearings has been moved to the Selectmen's Hearing Room on the 6th Floor of Town Hall.

Topic: Financing and Timing of School Projects

Deputy Town Administrator Sean Cronin made a PowerPoint presentation to the Committee. It is included at the end of these minutes. Highlights of the presentation include the following:

- The Town's Fiscal Policies (CIP, Reserves, Use of Free Cash, Unfunded Liabilities) guide financial planning. They have been developed and modified over the past two decades, with the most recent update being by the Fiscal Policy Review Committee in 2011. Due in large part to the policies, the Town has been able to recapture and retain its Aaa bond rating.
- The CIP Funding Policy calls for 6% of the prior year's net revenue to be dedicated to the CIP. Then Free Cash is used to increase that level to 7.5%. Based on this policy, total CIP funding is estimated at \$15.92M in FY15, increasing to \$18.04M in FY19.
- The 6% Policy acts as both a ceiling and a floor in terms of total CIP commitment from on-going revenue. It also acts as a firewall between Operating and Capital. The amount of "cash-financed" CIP available depends on how

much debt will be used to finance projects. More debt means less available for cash-financed projects, which tend to be the small- to mid-sized projects.

- The 6% Policy yields \$12.17M for the CIP in FY14, increasing to \$14.44M in FY19.
- The Debt Management Plan is at the core of the development of the CIP. It determines the split between debt-financed CIP and revenue-financed CIP. The more debt is used to finance projects, the less cash there is to finance projects.
- After the Debt Management Plan is set, the split between debt-financed and cash-financed CIP is determined. For FY's 14-17, the cash-financed portion is approx. \$3M-\$4M. It drops off significantly in FY18 to \$740K due to debt service for the Devotion School coming on line.
- The CIP can "afford" approx. \$8M of debt in FY18. That figure is the level of debt service that \$740K would support. However, taking on \$8M in debt requires the deferral of a number of projects in each year of the CIP. In addition to deferrals, some "annual CIP" items would be eliminated for a year.
- The answer to the question "Is a new school affordable" is no, since no new school could be constructed for \$8M. Therefore, a Debt Exclusion Override would be necessary.
- The Town cannot afford both a new school and 60% of a \$90M Devotion School project without a Debt Exclusion Override.
- One concept discussed at the last B-SPACE Cmte meeting was an 8th / 9th Grade School building, with the Old Lincoln serving as a "transition" space while a 8th / 9th Grade School was built. To accomplish this, there could be a Debt Exclusion Override for the Devotion School Project, which would then free-up the financing capacity for a new school. From a timing perspective, it would make sense to have a Debt Exclusion Override for Devotion rather than for a new school since funding for Devotion will be before Town Meeting prior to any funding request for a new 8/9 School. Under this scenario, a Debt Exclusion Override question would be put on the ballot for the May, 2014 annual town election.
- There is a strong relationship between the Operating budget and the CIP. Operating funds would be required to run the Old Lincoln School as a "transition" space. Absent any changes to educational policy and/or to employee contracts, a General Override would likely be required.
- As discussed at the Committee's last meeting, an Override for operating the Old Lincoln School could lend itself to a discussion of seeking additional operating monies to relieve the budget pressures the Schools are under due primarily to the increased enrollment levels of the past few years. If an 8/9 School was ultimately constructed, the revenue from the General Override for operating the Old Lincoln School could be then be reallocated to the operating needs of the new school once it was open. Under this scenario, there would be both a Debt Exclusion Override question and a General Override question on the ballot in May, 2014 (assuming the Town is ready to seek funding for the Devotion School project by then).
- If the Old Lincoln School is not opened until SY15-16 (FY16), then additional monies for operating the building would not be required, pushing off the need to seek a General Override for that purpose.

Selectman Goldstein asked if it was possible to have a Debt Exclusion Override for a part of project rather than for all it. Deputy TA Cronin responded that you could do that. Selectman Goldstein also asked how much each \$1M in new taxes via an Override would cost the average taxpayer. Deputy TA Cronin responded that he would get that information for the Committee.

Michael Sandman asked if it was possible to have a General Override in the Spring of 2014 for FY15 that would include funding to operate the Old Lincoln School even if that facility was not going to be open in FY15. Town Administrator Mel Kleckner responded that the State Department of Revenue (DOR) would have to answer that question. He is prepared to ask DOR that and any other similar questions.

School Committee member Susan Ditkoff reminded the Committee that the final debt service payment for the New Lincoln School is being made in FY13. Therefore, that additional amount of taxes will not be added to tax bills in FY14 and beyond.

TA Kleckner explained to the Committee even though the CIP can “afford” \$8M in additional debt, he would not recommend that the Town get to that point. If it did, there would be no cash-financed portion of the 6% CIP Policy, thereby impacting a number of smaller projects.

School Committee member Rebecca Stone asked if, based on this presentation, any options discussed at the last Committee meeting are off the table. Superintendent Lupini suggested that is a good segue into the next agenda item.

Topic: Discussion of New School Concept Options

Superintendent Lupini reviewed the “givens” used to craft the options for new school concepts:

- If the new school is not to be a K-8 structure, there must be evidence that the model to be implemented will bring significant academic and social advantages to our students.
- The model to be implemented must take pressure off the growth at all K-8 elementary schools.
- Old Lincoln School does not appear to be a permanent solution, although there are models where it would/could be viewed as such.
- Given the overall financial implications, “combined” solutions (elementary and high school) must be strongly considered. However, even if these ideas are not favored, the selected strategies must address both the elementary and high school enrollment issues.
- The model to be implemented must include an allowance for anticipated new residential developments. Moreover, models that can flexibly respond to unknown future fluctuations in student population (provided that they must deal with the known K-12 numbers) are preferred.
- In 2017-2018, the Brookline High School population increases to approximately 2,136 students. Depending on the recommendations that put forward in the

Concept Study, this may be the first year that the number of students may not be accommodated on the present BHS campus.

- In 2017-2018, the 8th grade population will be 651 students. At this point, the entire 8th grade population could not be accommodated at OLS.
- The models available could be impacted by the time frame for implementation. For example, only certain models could be put in place for 2014-2015.

Superintendent Lupini then reviewed the models up for discussion:

1. 8th Grade Transition School (8/9 School)

Model Assumptions:

- The eventual plan, preferably ready for implementation in 2017-2018, would be for a grade 8/9 school (which would require the identification of potential locations for a school of 1,000 to 1,200 students);
- The model assumes that all 8th grade students would be moved to the OLS for the 2014-2015 school year;
- We believe that this is the only model that would be implementable and would accomplish goals associated with the “next school” if we are faced with a September 2014 start date;
- The model would require a close examination of the licenses held by our current 6th, 7th and 8th grade teachers;
- All other elementary schools would be reconfigured as K-7 (or PK-7);
- It is probable that grades 6 and 7 would be taught in the configuration currently used for grades 6, 7 and 8;
- Our concerns for the 8th grade transition school include the nature of a one grade school and transitions, particularly for certain of our special education populations; and
- A significant advantage of the 8/9 school is that it alleviates space problems at both the elementary and high school (something that no other plan appears to do in such a cost effective manner)

Teaching and Learning:

- School built around the developmental needs of 8th grade students to maximize intellectual and social engagement;
- Teaching teams create a more personalized school experience: home school teams (e.g., Devotion Team), curriculum concept team (e.g., STEM), or mixed teams (e.g., Team 8a);
- Schedule built around a longer school day and longer school year, providing, for example, access to BHS Unified Arts facilities, time for interest clubs (math, performing arts, Destination Imagination), community service/service learning, and time for extension and intervention;
- As a single grade school, opportunity for on-going professional collaboration across common curriculum is maximized

Plan:

- 2013-2014

- ✓ Principal hired for the 8th grade transition school (funding to come from the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) budget for elementary space);
 - ✓ Building renovations take place at Old Lincoln School in preparation for September, 2014 opening;
 - ✓ Vice Principal hired on or about January 1st to assist in curriculum planning, hiring/transfer of appropriate staff, parent and student communication, etc.;
 - ✓ Staff hiring and professional learning to take place prior to April 1, 2014 in preparation for opening;
 - ✓ Results of the Brookline High School Concept Study will be available.
- 2014-2015
 - ✓ 8th grade transition school opens with approximately 549 students;
 - ✓ Brookline High School population increases from approximately 1,781 to 1,856 students;
 - ✓ By June 2015, we will identify potential location(s) for the grade 8/9 school;
 - 2015-2016
 - ✓ 8th grade transition school enrolls approximately 517 students;
 - ✓ Brookline High School population increases to approximately 1,926 students;
 - ✓ Devotion School project begins;
 - 2016-2017
 - ✓ 8th grade transition school enrolls approximately 574 students;
 - ✓ Brookline High School population increases to approximately 2,008 students;
 - ✓ Devotion School project enters its second year
 - 2017-2018
 - ✓ 8th grade transition school enrolls approximately 651 students (at this point, the entire 8th grade population would not fit and we would need to look at other strategies);
 - ✓ The Brookline High School population increases to approximately 2,136 students (depending on the recommendations of the Concept Study, this number of students may not work at the present BHS campus);
 - ✓ The Devotion School project enters its third (and final) year (completion in June, 2018);
 - 2018-2019
 - ✓ 8th grade transition school enrolls approximately 539 students
 - ✓ The Brookline High School population increases to approximately 2,296 students;

Neil Wishinsky asked if the 8/9 option could be accomplished within the needed timeline. Board of Selectmen Chairwoman DeWitt answered that it could based on a timeline she reviewed with staff of the Town's Building Department. The key question to this option is "where is the available site?"

Michael Sandman asked if the need is to have the facility open in Sept 2017 or Sept 2018. Superintendent Lupini answered Sept 2017.

2. K-8 School

- Could be ready in CY14/15 with redistricting if the attendance lines were drawn now. Those students would need to be identified and put into the Old Lincoln School while a new K-8 facility is constructed.
- While being used, Old Lincoln should be a K-8. While it could be phased in (leaving the younger grades at their existing school and moving the older grades to Old Lincoln), it would better to do it at one time and make it a K-8 school.
- The students would be at Old Lincoln until SY17-18.
- The Old Lincoln is needed in SY17-18 to serve as another High School building to help with the space crunch that will hit that facility.
- A “solution” would then be built for the High School. This could mean renovations/additions at the High School and/or using the Old Lincoln School as part of the solution.
- Because of the physical limitations of OLS, this option may not solve the two problems (K-8 and High School) as fully as does the 8-9 school proposal.

School Committee Chairman Alan Morse asked if under this model, are material improvements to the High School still necessary. The answer was yes. Unlike the 8/9 School model, which addresses the elementary school and High School needs, the new K-8 school addresses just the elementary school issue. Selectman Goldstein asked if HMFH would still be needed to undertake the High School Concept Study if the 8/9 model was chosen. Superintendent Lupini responded that HMFH would still be retained since some ideas they are reviewing now could be converted into the 8/9 option.

School Committee member Stone expressed her concern with needing to redistrict the entire town under this option. She is also concerned with any “grandfathering”. Superintendent Lupini stated that grandfathering could not take place; all students would have to be part of it. School Committee member Stone noted that it is a very difficult situation where you have some students who would have to leave their school.

3. “Super-Elementary” School

- This option creates a school split between two campuses: the Old Lincoln School and another elementary school.
- Major changes to attendance areas would be required and there would have to be redistricting.
- May not be ready for the 14/15 school year.
- Would be even more difficult than the new K-8 school option.
- The Old Lincoln School becomes part of a permanent solution.
- There are programmatic concerns because it would be the only school split between two buildings.

Philip Kramer noted that this would involve moving students from their current school. He also stated that questions of equity come into play. School Committee member Stone noted that it might seem as an inequity because it would be the only two-building

school. School Committee Vice Chair Susan Wolf Ditkoff responded to that notion, comparing it to how the Pierce is the only open classroom building in the system.

Neil Wishinsky introduced another option: two or three super schools for 7-8 grades. Superintendent Lupini responded that it is an option. Philip Kramer stated that it would work better because 7th and 8th grade students do not need to be bussed. Michael Sandman noted that this option would tie up Old Lincoln permanently and there would still be a problem at the High School.

Michael Sandman stated his belief that since the 8/9 model solves two problems (K-8 and High School), it must also be a less expensive model.

School Committee member Stone explained that the idea of presenting something that the entire community will be excited about is important for any override discussion. She asked if there are any opportunities with the 8/9 model that would bring improvement. Superintendent Lupini responded that having K-7 schools changes the nature of the 6th grade. It might also allow for returning the pre-K classes back to the school buildings.

The Committee had a discussion regarding the siting of a new school. Superintendent Lupini noted that for an 8/9 school, location is less important than for a new K-8 school since the new K-8 option would require redistricting and setting attendance area quickly.

School Committee Chairman Morse asked if the option ultimately chosen would impact the need to have staff on board to assist with the planning for the building. Superintendent Lupini responded that under any model, there is a need to have the principal on board a year early to help plan for the new facility.

Michael Sandman explained that the issue the Committee is grappling with has a 20-year horizon, so redistricting, as painful as it might be, could be the best way to go. Philip Kramer added that the 8/9 model provided flexibility if school population starts to decline.

George Cole asked if tonight's discussion could be interpreted as being committed to a new school. The Committee felt the answer to that is yes. He questioned that since the size of the problem is 150 students, which he explained came from subtracting the class size (650) from the capacity at Old Lincoln (500). He believes there must be a compelling story to convince residents a new building is needed. He asked if it would be better to solve the problem incrementally. Michael Sandman responded that you can only do that to a point. Superintendent Lupini added that there is a question of whether the MSBA would fund "Heath-like" solutions without a longer-term solution. Selectmen Goldstein stated his belief that the Old Lincoln is not the answer to the problem. He would not want his children to spend their school years in that building. Neil Wishinsky reminded the Committee that only 17% of households send children to Brookline public schools. Therefore, the other 83% will need to be convinced that it is worth an increase in taxes for a new school.

Topic: Planning for the Public Hearing

School Committee Chair Morse suggested that the “givens” discussed earlier be sent out to the community so that residents can comment on them at the public hearing. He also wants the options to be available so questions could be asked in addition to the standard 3-5 minute comments made at public hearings. Michael Sandman said it is important to have a give and take rather than just have the Committee listen to a couple of hours of 3-5 minute comments. Neil Wishinsky suggested posing questions that the Committee is interesting in hearing answers to in advance. Lisa Crossley recommended all materials be posted to the website. School Committee member Stone said that the public hearings serve as a public outlet; residents need to be allowed to ask questions even if the printed materials may have answered it.

Michael Sandman suggested having a short handout available that explains what the problem is.

Neil Wishinsky said there is a need to reach beyond the school community. All agreed that other groups (e.g., Town Meeting Members) need to be informed and invited.

School Committee member Stone will prepare draft documents regarding the “givens” and options and ask for Committee feedback. The Committee discussed if the three options reviewed tonight are the options that would be provided to the public. It was agreed that the options reviewed tonight will be the “Top 3”, followed by other options that have been discussed and not dismissed.

Committee adjourned at 8:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sean Cronin
Deputy Town Administrator