

**Town of Brookline  
Advisory Committee Minutes**

Sean Lynn-Jones, Chair

**Date:** September 13, 2016

**Present:** Carla Benka, Clifford M. Brown, Carol Caro, Lea Cohen, Dennis Doughty, Harry Friedman, Janet Gelbart, David-Marc Goldstein, Neil Gordon, Angela Hyatt, Alisa G. Jonas, Janice S. Kahn, Steve Kanes, Bobbie Knable, David Lescohier, Fred Levitan, Robert Liao, Pamela Lodish, Sean Lynn-Jones, Shaari S. Mittel, Mariah Nobrega, Michael Sandman, Lee L. Selwyn, Stanley L. Spiegel, Charles Swartz, Christine Westphal

**Absent:** Amy Hummell, John Doggett, Kelly A. Hardebeck, Sytske Humphrey

---

The meeting was called to order at 7:30 PM.

**1. Update on the status of the buffered Beacon Street bicycle lane from Marion Street to Westbourne Terrace**

Capital Subcommittee chair Carla Benka gave an update on the status of the buffered Beacon Street bike lane. We had hoped to have bike lanes up on a trial basis. We appropriated the funds to install and remove if necessary. The State has not appropriated the funds and it doesn't seem like this will happen by October 1 and it is unclear when it actually will happen.

Some buck passing going on at State level. There have been lots of back and forth of emails, then summer came, and no action. Everyone is overworked, it seems and nothing is moving. Hope to have lanes on the ground by late fall. Transportation Board didn't meet in August so no plan yet on how they evaluate the buffered bike lanes to determine if they are a success or not.

**2. Update on site selection for a 9th elementary school and the next steps in the planning and design process (School Committee members)**

School Committee Members Susan Wolf Ditkoff, Chair and David Pollak, Vice-Chair, provided the Advisory Committee with an update on site selection and next steps in planning and design for the 9<sup>th</sup> elementary school. There were three potential sites for a 9<sup>th</sup> K-8 school considered by Jonathan Levy Associates, the architects retained. They considered siting the school on the grounds of Baker School on Beverly Road, at the old Baldwin School on Heath Street, and at the site currently occupied by Stop & Shop on Harvard Street (the Village site). Eight of the original sites are no longer being considered after the School Committee and Board of Selectman voted to exclude them. A table comparing the pros and cons for each site was distributed at the meeting. This and other information is available here <http://www.brooklinema.gov/DocumentCenter/View/10140> and here <http://www.brooklinema.gov/1286/9th-Elementary-School-Study>

The criteria used are based on the architects' own views but looking to the respective boards and to the public for input regarding additional criteria and rankings.

Ms. Wolf Ditkoff and Mr. Pollak gave an update on the 9<sup>th</sup> elementary school and answered questions.

Q: Regarding Stop and Shop – what does the expansion mean? How many owners would you be dealing with? This seems extremely complicated and many layered. Are there any potentially hazardous materials?

A: Stop and Shop was a furniture factory, there were firearms there at some point – you can fix this. The issues we face are more about imminent domain, public private partnership, how do you structure partnership, etc.

Q: Had there been any assessment of these 3 or 4 sites in terms of redistricting impact?

A: Growth is in North and South Brookline so a school in either area will have an impact. There really isn't one site that is optimal conceptually. When we looked at maps for Baldwin during the B Space process, they were based on so many assumptions, there has been growth and if they were to be redone today Baldwin wouldn't look so bad. What is complicated is that we have unstable short-term information: where kids live now and dwellings change.

So we are trying to draw maps based on faulty, shifting information and basing decisions on this?

Many members expressed concerns about making decisions based on maps that are more illustrative rather than informative.

Q: Thinking back to Civic Moxie, wasn't there an attempt to do some maps? How different did they look from the maps from B Space?

A: Yes, they are on the Town website.

Q: But will we get newer ones? How many different projects do you add to them?

A: This will be sorted as there will be a Feasibility Study after Site Selection, test fits for an 800 student school to determine which site is most viable.

There has been Community conversations about moving away from expand in place, focusing on building one school that will address the capacity need town-wide. What we do know is that we are a couple hundred kids too many at two places and then more growth expected. Confident if we build all capacity in one side of town that it would be a burden and it will happen in either case. There would be very little difference between Baker and Baldwin relative to the impact on North Brookline– drawbacks around that point need to be balanced and we have to move forward.

Maps and redistricting were discussed further.

Q: If we have one big school, will neighborhood walkable schools have to be sacrificed? Is it possible to build North Brookline Village School and do an expansion at Baker?

A: Still need to pick one of these sites. During feasibility we can look into some of these more nuanced questions.

## **Comments**

Baker is looking like a winner pragmatically based on color (in the distributed chart) but it is the architect's opinion on first pass through. Both Baldwin and Village sites are traffic intense which tends to make them less walkable than they might be otherwise. If we can't keep some sort of grocery store open at the Stop and Shop site, there will be no community support.

Commitment to keep a grocery store but Selectman cannot guarantee that the store will stay.

Rumor that Stop and Shop is not going to renew their lease. Does anyone know this to be true and not true? A year or two before their lease is up.

If we don't rush into this and take a longer view, the Village site seems to look like a more moderate option. The cost of heating – more efficient to heat a school higher than one that is more spread out unless you can take advantage of newer energy technologies. More children bussed at Baker than any other school. Has the most land around it. Upper and lower school to keep a sense of community – there is a precedent in Brookline for doing this. In a discussion about the Baldwin, there are some preservation restrictions.

Cost is another issue – is the Village School twice as better?

Most housing is north of Route 9. Baker with a smaller school would work well.

If we put 1600 kids in Baker site and did 3 or 4 academies you would end up with 8-9 kindergartens, 8-9 1<sup>st</sup> grades, etc. No one on the School Committee said this was a good idea. Four academies are equivalent to four small schools.

Baker relieves nothing on Pierce. Look at a site for a school first then deal with ancillary things. Don't keep pushing the timeline out with complexity.

Would you do something different if you knew you were building a 10<sup>th</sup> school?

How do we operate knowing how to truly solve the problem? Well, it takes a school in North and South Brookline to solve the problem but we aren't going to do that.

Do something in one side of town and then add on elsewhere. No one is realistically thinking we will get the 10<sup>th</sup> school.

It is important to take a moment to think about the overall magnitude of debt exclusion. \$3.5 million dollars debt service that gives you about \$17.5 to \$21 million in annual debt service costs. Doesn't include a 10<sup>th</sup> school, it doesn't include add-ons.

Love having schools walkable. Baldwin - in that neighborhood many people send their kids to private school. Still wish we could get an estimate to see where kids can walk to. Hammond Street is a disaster now. South Brookline is too massive to have two schools. Oak Hill and Brown are two schools in Newton that function very well. I see benefits to have two sets of 8<sup>th</sup> graders nearby. Provides an opportunity to do something creative with that grade to expand their horizons. Concern is 1600 is too massive. Are there models anywhere else that have a similar situation?

Referring back to comments regarding complexity of the deal at the Village School and how it is problematic given eminent domain and legal issues, etc. there are models for that. We are discussing air rights over a parking lot. To say complexity is an impediment is fine, I but hope that it a substantial barrier to serious consideration of the site.

Q: At any point did you look into Pine Manor land? Needs money and has been selling off property.

A: Pine Manor was of keen interest to a number of people, but Pine Manor is not interested in selling – conversations took place late winter and late spring. It was architect’s belief that you wouldn’t buy land at Pine Manor when you already own Baldwin unless there were other strategic considerations for the Town.

**Comments continued:**

The tax impact on the Town and residents if Stop and Shop is taken over was discussed as well as misconceptions of same. The Town would lose revenue from Stop and Shop if it is taken off the tax rolls. However, there would be no property tax impact for the Town as a whole but individuals taxes may go up. Also, may lose opportunity for new growth at the site.

Suggest tapping into someone expert about what would it take to redevelop the Stop and Shop site – complex situation and can’t image the town would want to deal with in a public / private partnership.

Town is more than doubling our tax burden. Are we pricing ourselves and others out of coming to live here, affording to live here? \$50 million debt service you paid for Village could be used for other things – road repairs, a new fire station, equipment. Village site is a non-starter for economic reasons as well as the complexity of getting anything done there.

When we open the 9<sup>th</sup> school we will reduce enrollment at Pierce which will be a huge benefit to the Pierce community and will continue a rebalancing of communities.

School Committee member Barbara Scotto stated that as we look at these new schools, we need to think about how many children who are coming from public housing are in any one place, how many with particular disabilities are in any one place. Anything we can do to make sure that none of our schools are labelled as one type of school or another is important. The children buy into that label so we need to be very careful about this.

Discomfort with proximity of Pierce and the Village. Having those schools so close has repercussions we may not want.

Possibility of 2 high schools, one a magnet school. In the K-8 is there something analogous that would make things better or worse.

Value of neighborhood assignment K-8 schools vs those that draw kids across districts. A non-neighborhood assignment school would draw people from all areas. You could fill the school voluntarily. Forcing a magnet school to a particular capacity, people didn’t like this pedagogically.

Regarding the chart, there is no weight to any of the criteria. It needs a whole other set of values assigned to it to make it useful. We need an opportunity to think more holistically about how the town as developed, see Stop and Shop site not at its highest and best use. It will eventually be something else soon. While it might be uncomfortable for some time I hope it stays in the mix.

See this as not just a School problem but a Town problem. What to do with that whole stretch of street? Walgreens, Stop and Shop, etc.

We have so many owners in the mix but if it is already hard what is a little more stress? Also to the point that a new school would solve overcrowding at Pierce, Civic Moxie suggested that during time of construction the new school would not solve existing overcrowding because the population will have changed again by the time construction is done. Are people sensitive to the money? People who really do care are going to care about the price difference. If the extra money could be better spent – perhaps enhance the renovation at Pierce...try to figure out a way to create value for people who care about schools and who care about money. Look at different ways to sell it: money spent on renovation vs. money spent on capacity, easing overcrowding vs. renovations, etc. Selling to North Brookline would have to be about overcrowding.

Will there be another override study committee that looks at how much money to raise – go ahead and do larger debt exclusion and look at expenditures. Perhaps this is a question for the Board of Selectman.

I look at this chart not so much as something that needs to be weighted but shows lots of red flags, some that may be insurmountable. And you need to make the best choice to answer the problem in front of you now and plan for long term.

Baker site has four light reds and the only one that could be a deal breaker is the wetlands concern. You don't have to be clairvoyant to see where we are going and it is Baker. At some point have to believe that enrollment won't go up and up and up, also believe that people won't want to pay taxes.

People are paying their taxes for 12 years while they have their kids in the schools and it is a good deal, less than sending them to private school. Then selling their property at a premium and getting out. Brookline is shifting. Education for kids 20 years or so from now may not be so facilities based. New schools should have a sense of repurposing for another community use. Meet pedagogical needs of today but anticipate how kids will be educated in the future. Build a flexible solution so we are not stuck with nine under-enrolled buildings.

Hope education changes but also hope kids and adults remain in relationship but hard to image where technology replaces pedagogy.

Override Study Committee attempted to provide legitimate economic tradeoff on how money could be spent whether raising taxes, cutting services, etc. Continue to have on a permanent basis roughly 500 non-resident students in the system which is equivalent to \$100-120 million dollars capital spending and debt service. Voters have a right to decide whether they want to continue this practice. Only 11 % of

registered voters voted for the override. Believe there should be more responsibility for considering alternatives, including this issue of non-resident students.

---

Upon a **MOTION** made and seconded to adjourn, and voted unanimously, the meeting was adjourned at 9:35pm.

**Documents Presented:**

- Email from Jonathan Davis TMM Pct 10 regarding the Village school site
- Brookline 9<sup>th</sup> Elementary School Site Selection – two 11x17 graphics that shows all the site concepts and the site evaluation matrix