

CITY OF NEWTON

IN BOARD OF ALDERMEN

SPECIAL NEWTON NORTH HIGH SCHOOL DESIGN  
ADVISORY COMMITTEE REPORT

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 28, 2005

Present from the Committee: Ald. Vance (chair), Aids. Sangiolo, Stewart, Schnipper, Gentile, and Johnson. Absent: Aids. Coletti, Salvucci, and Albright. Also present from the Board of Aldermen: Aids. Baker, Linsky, Danberg, and Parker. Present from the Administration: Building Commissioner Nick Parnell. Also present: from Gund Partnership: Graham Gund, John Prokos, and Dan Rutledge; from Dore & Whittier Architects: Don Walter; from Turner Construction Co.: Rob Jusola.

The meeting was called to order at 7:50 p.m. The Chair announced that the business of the evening was to hear reports from Building Commissioner Parnell and from representatives of the architectural design team of Gund Partnership and Dore & Whittier Architects that has been selected to provide the architectural design services for the new Newton North High School on the status of the design work and projected timeline for completing the project.

Nick Parnell reported that 13 applications had been submitted in response to the city's Request for Qualifications for providing the architectural services for the Newton North project. Of those 13 applicants four had been selected to make final presentations to the Designer Selection Committee in mid-July. Early in August the Mayor had selected the Gund/Dore & Whittier team for the project. He also reported that a final contract for the architectural services has not yet been signed but is still being worked on by the attorneys for the city and the architects. In response to a question Nick stated that the delay in finalizing the contract is not abnormal for a contract of this importance and complexity and that he is confident that a satisfactory contract will be finalized and executed shortly.

Nick also reported that the architects are developing a work plan for carrying out the project and that they anticipate that under that plan the project will be submitted to the Board of Aldermen for site plan approval sometime next spring. Nick also reported that the architects are working with the School Department to refine the educational specifications for the school. Nick assured the Board that the architects and the city administration are committed to keeping the Board fully informed of every step in the design and construction process.

Alderman Gentile requested that the meeting or meetings at which the Newton North project is to be discussed and considered by the Board's Public Facilities Committee be scheduled for nights when there are no other committee meetings so that all interested aldermen could attend. Alderman Baker responded that a principal reason for establishing the Special Newton North Committee and scheduling its meetings for nights when there are no other committee meetings was so that all interested aldermen would be able to attend the presentations with respect to the Newton North project. Alderman Stewart asked what the future of the

Special Newton North Committee is now that the architects have been selected and ongoing matters relating to aldermanic approvals needed for the project would be within the bailiwick of the Public Facilities Committee. Alderman Baker responded that the Special Committee was established to provide a vehicle for members of the Board to examine, and to express their concerns and ideas concerning, the project at times when no items concerning the project are before the Public Facilities Committee. He expects that that will continue to be a useful role for the Special Committee for awhile but that the time may come when the Special Committee is no longer needed.

Nick then introduced Graham Gund, John Prokos, and Dan Rutledge of Gund Partners; Don Walter of Dore & Whittier Architects; and Rob Jusola of Turner Construction Company. A handout was distributed (copy attached) that set forth the interview materials that the Gund/Dore team presented to the Designer Selection Committee in July. Graham Gund noted that Gund Partners and Dore & Whittier have designed many schools, including many high schools around the country. He pointed out that one of the schools designed by the Gund firm was the Lincoln School in Brookline, which received an award from the Boston Society of Architects as the most beautiful building in Massachusetts, the only school building to receive that award.

John Prokos of Gund Partners is to serve as the Principal in Charge for Gund Partners. He cited, as key issues in designing the project, responding to the neighbors' concerns about the impact of the siting of the building on their properties; designing a building that fully meets the educational program developed with the School Department; and developing a sustainable design that may qualify for LEED certification. He pointed out that in its interview materials for the Designer Selection Committee the Gund/Dore team had outlined several possible design options, including one that would place the building of nearly 400,000 square feet in the middle of the site. He noted that such an option would minimize the adverse impact on the single-family houses surrounding the site.

John Prokos stated that there is much work to be done in order to submit the request for site plan approval to the Board by next spring. He stated that the overall goal is to have the project completed and ready for students and faculty to move in by September of 2009. To do this he estimates that it will take a year and a half to design the building and then 24 to 30 months to construct the building. He anticipates that after the new building is completed the existing building will be taken down.

John stated that both firms in the design team will be involved at all phases of the design and construction of the project in what he anticipates will be a "seamless" relationship. He noted that the project will be carried out in five phases:

1. Development of the educational program
2. Development of the schematic design
3. Development of the detailed design
4. Preparation of the construction documents
5. Construction of the project

The design work in the first three phases will be done in the Gund offices and Dore's principal responsibility will be at the latter two phases.

Alderman Baker asked who would be the primary contact point on the architectural team, and John Prokos stated that he would be that person throughout the project. Alderman Baker then asked if the design team planned to use a space planner to work with the architects and school officials to translate the educational program into the spaces to be used for that program, as was done in the design of the new Suffolk Law School building. John replied that the design team includes Dr. Frank Locker, a renowned space planner with extensive experience in designing spaces for schools.

Alderman Gentile expressed concern over not having a detailed outline showing the specific times when various things will happen, such as neighborhood meetings and aldermanic approvals. Nick Parnell replied that the architects are already working on the detailed work plan for the project which will show all such information and that he will share that work plan with the Board as soon as it has been completed.

Alderman Johnson asked how the city and the architects would use the lessons of Newton South to address the HVAC system at the new Newton North. Nick Parnell responded that a key factor would be to use commissioning of the HVAC system at North during the design of the project. He reported that Rob Jusola of Turner Construction has spent much time at Newton South developing information on how better to design the North HVAC system, which information, showing the lessons learned at South, will be correlated with the early North commissioning process. A post-mortem examination at South will also be used to examine other aspects than the mechanicals of the HVAC system.

Alderman Parker urged that the architects maintain a continually updated web page on which all information pertaining to the project, including dates for public and aldermanic input, is shown in a readily accessible format. Nick Parnell said that this would be done and that this web page would be linked to the city's web site.

Alderman Baker asked how the architects planned to manage the problem of cost escalation of such critical materials as steel, which has experienced recent cost increases. John Prokos responded that this is a problem on every project and that a full analysis of costs, taking into account the inflation factor, will be done early in the project. Rob Jusola of Turner will be deeply involved in this cost analysis.

Alderman Stewart asked how the architects are thinking about the basic question of what will be the best building approach to meeting the changing needs of a public high school over many decades ahead. Graham Gund responded that it is always difficult to predict what will be regarded as optimal high school design in decades to come but that his team is trying to look out thirty years into the future and to design a building that will continue to be viable for 100 years. John Prokos opined that the present Newton North building is a "period piece" from the past that will certainly not be replicated. He said that a key factor in current design is the extensive use of natural light to illuminate classrooms and taking advantage of great advances in materials. The principal of the Lincoln School in Brookline, designed by Gund Partners, has reported that the

extensive use of natural light in that building, and other design factors, have been accompanied by better test results from the school's students.

Alderman Gentile asked for more information on plans to test the soil at Newton North, including information on who would be doing the testing. John Prokos replied that his team includes a technical consultant who will work with the city to do test borings at the locations on the site where the new building is to be located. Nick Parnell added that the city doesn't intend to look for problems by doing soil borings throughout the site but to do such borings only at places on the site where the new building is to be located. So at least a preliminary determination on that location must be made before test borings are done. Nick anticipates that it will take a few months to do the test borings.

Alderman Linsky asked about the architects' thoughts about the salvaging of materials from the existing building. John Prokos responded that much of that material can be recycled and sold by the city but that it could not be used in the new building since it will have to remain in the existing building until after completion of the new building has been completed.

Alderman Danberg asked whether all siting options for the new building are still on the table, and John Prokos responded that they are.

John Prokos reiterated the current thinking about the importance of natural light in school buildings and noted that sustainability in design of such buildings is tied to the use of natural light. Don Walter stated that in recent decades education has become more transparent, with a focus on taking it beyond the classrooms with greater use of collaborative spaces for students and faculty. Graham Gund added that a school's design must reflect the educational philosophy of the school committee and must respond to what the committee, as the client user, wants in a school building.

Alderman Schnipper asked whether the architects believe that reuse can be made of any part of the existing building. John Prokos responded that he understands that a study has been made of the issue but that he has not seen it. The architects will look at that issue but no final decision has yet been made. John stated that a key problem with the existing building is that its windows cannot be opened. John has a preference for windows that can be opened where desired.

Alderman Stewart asked why high schools are invariably built as a single massive building rather than as a number of smaller buildings distributed throughout the site. Graham Gund responded that the multiple-buildings model is usually employed at private schools where buildings are added over time for additional functions whereas public high schools are usually built all at once. He stated that the impact of large buildings can be ameliorated by the use of textures and colors. He noted that at the Newton North site every square foot is critical and that putting the needed building on that site will be a very tight fit. A goal of the architects will be to preserve as much of the outdoor athletic space as possible.

Alderman Baker invited the architects to visit the new Suffolk Law School building to see how it was designed to meet the educational needs of that school.

Alderman Gentile asked how the educational program for Newton North is being developed. He urged that the architects sit down with the Newton North people who will be using the new space to work with them on the matter. He noted that the Newton North athletic officials absolutely do not want an athletic facility like that at Newton South. John Prokos responded that much work has already been done on the educational program by the Newton School Department working with Newton North personnel and that the architects will conduct further work to verify that program. Newton North officials will sign off on the educational program, which will be completed over the next two months.

The chairman thanked Commissioner Parnell, the architects, and Rob Jusola for their time and presentations to the Committee and the other aldermen.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Verne Vance, Chair