

CITY OF NEWTON

IN BOARD OF ALDERMAN

PUBLIC FACILITIES COMMITTEE REPORT

TUESDAY, JUNE 27, 2006

Present: Ald. Schnipper (Chairman), Weisbuch, Albright, Gentile, Yates, Mansfield and Lappin

Absent: Ald. Salvucci

Also present: Ald. Baker, Burg, Coletti, Danberg, Hess-Mahan, Johnson, Linsky, Parker, Samuelson and Sangiolo

City Personnel: Nick Parnell (Commissioner of Public Buildings), Ouida Young (Associate City Solicitor), Michael Kruse (Director of Planning), Robert Rooney (Commissioner of Public Works), Heidi Black (School Department), Sandy Pooler (Chief Budget Officer) and Shawna Sullivan (Committee Clerk)

School Committee members: Dori Zaleznik and Ann Larner

#224-06 DESIGN REVIEW COMMITTEE petition pursuant to Sec. 5-58 for site plan approval of the new Newton North High School.

ACTION: **HELD 7-0**

NOTE: The discussion began with a brief report on expansion possibilities of the proposed building if the need for more classrooms arises. It is possible to expand the school in two areas without taking any space from the athletic fields or the parking. Six classrooms can be placed at the rear of the school behind the stadium and four additional classrooms can be added by the theater. It has been suggested that structural supports for the possible additions be added to the plan for the building. The building has been planned for occupancy of 85%, which means 15% of the classrooms will be empty or being used for meetings.

Ald. Mansfield asked if the building footprint is the same as the old school in terms of square footage. The total square footage is 399,140' and is overall the same. Ald. Mansfield then asked if the footprint is still 175,000' and the response was that overall the area is very similar. Ald. Mansfield inquired if the building has grown. The architects responded that they have tweaked certain areas, worked on keeping the area down and have refined the building area. Ald. Schnipper requested absolute figures on the square footage, footprint and area of the building for the meeting of July 19, 2006.

The discussion turned to the issue of whether there should be a basement in the school for storage and mechanics. There is a significant cost to adding a basement of about \$150 per square foot. The cost of putting the mechanics in the basement is approximately \$2.3 million. Mr. Pooler stated that the State is not looking favorably at the addition of basements. Perhaps the cost can be justified by the savings in life-cycle costs by having the mechanics in the basement instead of exposed to the elements on the roof of the building. Ald. Mansfield inquired whether the \$150 per square foot is for shell space or equipment, such as lighting. The \$150 figure is for raw space. Ald. Albright pointed out that the mechanicals on the roof could create noise

pollution and it would seem to be more efficient to place the mechanicals in the basement. She also asked what the cost difference would be in the mechanicals if they were placed in the basement. The equipment is more expensive, however; the architects could not provide exact figures. The Committee requested a spreadsheet showing the costs including mechanical and space costs for the next meeting. Ald. Gentile suggested considering a 20 to 30,000 square foot basement for storage and possible future use. The architects responded that the cost would still be approximately \$150 per square foot.

Commissioner Parnell stated that the Design Review Committee is still looking at the possible mechanics for the building and they have yet to determine which types of mechanics to use. He suggested that the Committee's discussion and request for cost of mechanics might be premature. There may still be savings on the mechanics that cannot be determined at this point. Ald. Gentile pointed out that he is not suggesting putting the mechanics in the basement but just providing storage space. The Chair pointed out that the Committee can condition the site plan approval requiring the mechanics to come back to the Board for discussion. She also asked Ouida Young if the addition of a basement would trigger the site plan approval process again. Ms. Young stated that it would depend on how the Board writes the conditions for the site plan approval. They can leave the door open for a change to the plan. Ald. Sangiolo requested that someone from the Design Review Committee be present for the next discussion of the basement. Ald. Albright suggested that at the next meeting the Committee review all of the plans with the architects. The suggestion met with support from the Committee. Ald. Yates asked if the current Newton North High School has a basement for mechanicals or storage space. Commissioner Parnell stated that the current basement is strictly for mechanicals. Ms. Black stated that storage space is increased in the proposed high school. She also pointed out that there would be a locker room in the basement of the gymnasium portion of the school. Ald. Weisbuch asked if there is a cost differential in putting the locker room below grade. The architects stated that there was not much of a cost difference. Ms. Black also explained if the locker room is moved it will increase the footprint of the school.

The Landscape Architect began a presentation of the landscaping along the Hull Street portion of the site. There is a commitment to protect the large trees by the stadium. Should the trees not survive the construction they will be replaced with similar large trees. There is a lot of additional landscaping along Hull Street. Most of the vegetation around the tennis courts will remain. There will need to be an area next to the existing stadium cleared of vegetation and trees for the gymnasium. However, it will be possible to preserve some of the trees. Ald. Baker asked if the footpath from Hull Street is covered. The landscape architect will investigate and let the Committee know if it is covered. Ald. Gentile asked how close the proposed gym is located to Hull Street and what the view from Hull Street will be. The gym will be located 40 to 50' from Hull Street. There will be evergreen and deciduous trees planted along a relatively uniform slope creating a canopy to screen the school from Hull Street. Ald. Johnson asked if it would be possible to model the view of the school from Hull Street with computer software. The architects responded that it is possible and they will prepare that for next meeting. Ald. Weisbuch wondered whether the backfill from the demolition of the stadium would be stored on site. The Landscape Architect stated that it would be used to elevate the building. The lights around the existing courts are quite old and are about 50 to 60' above the ground. The lights can

be brought down low enough for the trees to cut down on the illumination. Ald. Mansfield asked if the architects could model the illumination. The architects agreed to work it into the computer model. Ald. Albright asked for clarification of the actual building materials. The architects see it as a building with a significant amount of brick.

The Chair explained that the plan with the decreased width at the Trowbridge entrance is now called Option 5A, as there were two 4A Options after the entrance was changed and it seemed simplest to rename one to avoid confusion.

Ald. Gentile asked to discuss the Elm Road design. Bill Lyons from Traffic Solutions presented the Elm Road plan. Where there is proposed to be parking on both sides of Elm Road, the Fire Department would like a 36' width. The width is not based on any transportation engineering requirements. The need to put parking back on Elm Road to replace parking that was taken from other places on the site resulted in a 32' wide road where it is one-way. Where Elm Road becomes two-way, it becomes 36' wide because there is parking on both sides and travel lanes on both sides. One of the complaints regarding Elm Road is that it is more of a throughway than it is a driveway. Ald. Gentile asked if one of the options that can be considered is to allow parking on one side in order to reduce the width of the roadway, which will have the tradeoff of losing some spaces. Ald. Gentile asked how many spaces are projected along the one-way end of Elm Road and if the width were to be reduced, how many parking spaces would be lost. There will be a loss of 40 parking spaces. There are 335 parking spaces on site and 152 parking spaces located around the perimeter of the site. The spaces located on the one-way section are nighttime only parking. Only busses and service vehicles will enter from the Lowell Avenue side. Ald. Gentile asked what type of traffic calming methods are proposed to slow traffic on Elm Road. There is a neck-down proposed after the drop-off/pick-up loop, where the street becomes a one-way and there is a bend in the alignment of the road, which forces people to slow to at least twenty miles per hour. There is a possibility of adding raised crosswalks, however, they are not proposed in the plan but are easily incorporated. Mr. Lyons will suggest possible placements of raised crosswalks at the next meeting. Ald. Weisbuch asked how safe the pick-up loop is with busses entering a portion of the loop to exit Elm Road. Mr. Lyons responded that the rules of road would dictate that the bus has the right of way and there will be plenty of signage. Ald. Parker voiced his concern regarding backup on Walnut Street due to cars entering Elm Road. He suggested shifting some of the traffic to Lowell Avenue. Mr. Lyons responded that there is the same existing backup on Walnut Street today. He explained that the City needs to manage that queue. One of the things that the Design Review Committee worked hard to balance was where to develop access to the site. This plan is the balance that the Design Review Committee struck. Ald. Parker asked for a plan shifting some of the traffic onto Lowell Avenue for the next meeting. Ald. Samuelson is concerned about the width of Elm Road. It does not need to be quite as wide as is being proposed. Mr. Lyons reiterated that the Fire Department has requested that the road be 36' wide due to the parking on both sides. Ald. Samuelson questioned why the Fire Department requires more width than what is standard. Mr. Lyons stated that he would be comfortable with a 24' roadway.

Ald. Samuelson is dismayed that the school is being designed to invite hundreds of cars onto the site for drop-off of students. Ald. Albright suggested building a drop-off on Lowell

Avenue. Mr. Lyons pointed out that there is a lay-by area on Lowell Avenue with bump outs that could suit that purpose; however, there would be a loss of about thirteen parking spaces. Mr. Lyons stated that he believes that parents will still drop off students on Lowell Avenue, Hull Street and Walnut Street in an informal way. Ald. Baker stated that there is an accommodation difficulty where you have off-site drop-offs. This is due in part because you will have people stopping on Walnut Street creating additional difficulties to already present traffic difficulties. It is important to have a place where people can pull in safely and get out again. It is not that the drop-offs are not going to happen; the question is where they are going to happen. I think it is important that they happen as much as possible in a controlled rather than uncontrolled condition. The second thing is that we are all concerned about Elm Road and various iterations; it has to function first on the intents on how it serves the school and the community. If there are specific things that we can do in terms of landscaping and arrangements around the edges to assist the buffering, it is important to keep that in mind. Again, it is important to remember that you are still trying to design this to work predominantly as a school and a school that works inside a community setting. It is a very difficult balance to strike but we do have to remember that is part of why we are trying to do all of these different things. Taking parking away in one place means it has to go somewhere else. We all hear people come before us from the surrounding neighborhood saying there is not enough parking to take care of Newton North, please give us some relief. Here we are trying to solve that problem and it is important to keep the neighborhood context in mind in a very broad sense, not just the immediate edge but how it is going to work comprehensively. Ald. Albright pointed out that we will never be able to accommodate all of the cars at the high school, even for theater events alone.

Ald. Gentile asked Mr. Lyons if when he stated he was comfortable with a 24' width on Elm Road at the Lowell Avenue end, it included parking on both sides. Mr. Lyons responded that he is comfortable with a 24' wide roadway with six foot parking lanes on either side with a restriction for no heavy vehicles parking leaving a 12' wide travel lane. Ald. Gentile pointed out that the more narrow Elm Road is the greater the opportunity for buffering for the houses that are closest to the site. Ald. Gentile has spoken with the Fire Chief, who clearly stated the width needs to be 36', if there is parking on both sides of the street. However, Ald. Gentile neglected to ask if the 36' width applied to one-way streets and he would like to have that clarified with the Fire Chief. If we can reduce the roadway width to approximately 30', it would be helpful. Ald. Mansfield stated that the majority of our local streets are 24' and the majority of those streets have parking on both sides. The Board has placed restrictions for no parking on one side on streets where there is heavy parking. To Ald. Mansfield's knowledge, the Fire Department has never complained about getting through those streets. It is hard to buy designing something here that is much wider than what we have throughout the City. Ald. Gentile responded that it is his belief that the Fire Department would state that talking about residential neighborhoods and a large school is very different, there are different standards, and that is why they are looking for a wider roadway. Mr. Lyons has debated the width of streets with various Fire Departments. Generally, what the Fire Department is looking for is if a car breaks down in a traffic lane can the fire apparatus get around it, which is what their rationale is. Mr. Lyons does not necessarily agree with that rationale because at the end of day, you have to balance many things and sometimes that falls of on the other side of the balance equation. The Fire Department does not view life as a balancing act; they view it as a rigid standard. They are in the business of

protecting people from fires. Ald. Mansfield was surprised that the traffic engineer thought that Elm Road would not pose an attractive site for speeding if it were designed at 36' wide around a high school, particularly when there are no cars parked there. Ald. Mansfield asked if angle parking or any other form of parking besides parallel parking had been considered. Mr. Lyons responded that the parallel parking would keep the speed down. He would not recommend angle parking here because a vehicle would have to back out into traffic and would create congestion. The angle parking would be an impediment to getting people off the site efficiently.

Ald. Samuelson asked how many school buses, pedestrians and bicycles would enter the site daily. Mr. Lyons stated that he was asked to design to accommodate 11 busses and 8 special needs vans. As far as bicycles and pedestrians, they have yet to be counted. The number of bicycles racks and width of sidewalks will be determined as the project moves forward. Ald. Samuelson felt that the first focus should be making the school a campus that invites pedestrian traffic, bicycles and school busses and discourages the parents from dropping students off. She asked if it was school policy to invite parents to drop-off students at the front door of the school. Ald. Schnipper thought that the School Department does not encourage drop-off but is responding to the number of parents who drop students off. Mr. Lyons explained that no one ever requested a front door drop-off. The direction that was given was to design it as functionally equivalent of what is there today. Dori Zaleznik stated that it is not the policy of the School Committee to encourage drop-off. The proposed school is smaller; therefore, it is presumable that there will be less drop-off. It was pointed out that the School Department cannot control what parents do. It is clear that parents drop children off at the school or very close to the school. The primary interest is to reduce the impact of traffic flow on the neighborhood. Ald. Samuelson raised her concern regarding the cost of a police officer at the Elm Road entrance. Ald. Schnipper stated that it is possible to put a traffic light at Elm Road on Walnut Street instead of a police officer. Ald. Baker disagreed with Ald. Samuelson. It is important to have a front door drop-off area. The entrance needs to be designed for everybody. It is important for night use to have a safe place to drop people off. The reality is that people are going to be dropping people off and we need a safe area for that. Ald. Albright felt that one option to prevent traffic problems is not to allow people to go into the site. She felt that it was more appropriate to have the drop-off on the main roads. Ald. Samuelson clarified that she is not against having an area at the front of the school; she is only suggesting that parents are not invited onto the site to drop-off students. Mr. Lyons stated that we have to acknowledge the fact that there are upwards 250 parents doing a significant amount of drop-off on Walnut Street that does create friction for main line traffic. It is not as if the traffic is going to move at the same speed if there is a line of traffic dropping-off on the right. It creates its own form of congestion, whether it is equal, less or more Mr. Lyons cannot tell. The other point he would make is bringing the parents onto the site to turn around does prevent them from going around the block. Ald. Weisbuch asked how many cars Elm Road could accommodate for drop-off. Mr. Lyons explained that they do not all come at once and not all of the 250 cars dropping-off will drop-off at Elm Road. Ald. Yates suggested a right turn only at each of the entrances and exits onto Walnut Street. He feels that it will make it more efficient and safer. Mr. Lyons pointed out that you are than adding a significant amount of traffic volume to Hull Street. Ald. Mansfield felt that if we create a better drop-off area more people will drop-off students. It seems that it would be better to design drop-off areas on Lowell Avenue, as there is less traffic. He does not think

door-to-door service is necessary. Ald. Parker stated that if there were no access at Elm Road, people would probably use the Trowbridge entrance.

Ald. Sangiolo asked where the lights would be if one was added at Elm Road. Mr. Lyons explained that the thought was to remove the signal at Cabot and put that signal at Otis Street. This would create a gating system, allowing the vehicles exiting Cabot to queue on Walnut Street, while traffic from Elm Road was coming out. Ald. Albright stated that the Cabot School worked very hard to have the traffic signal at Cabot Street put in and probably will not be pleased if it is removed. Ald. Schnipper pointed out that this is only an option not necessarily, what is going to happen.

Ald. Gentile pointed out that no matter how well the area around Walnut and Elm Street is designed there will always be congestion. There has always been some level of congestion. He feels that it would be a big mistake to remove the Elm Road drop-off. There are times when the weather is horrendous and it is good to have a close drop-off. He also believes it is very unsafe to drop children off on Walnut Street. The school often has night activities and it is important to have a drop-off at the entrance for safety. We are not going to be able to solve every little problem. We need to design the best way possible, you establish a policy that makes the most sense and if you have to adjust the design or policy in the future, you do. Ald. Baker stated that we are in the site plan approval process, which the Board can negotiate some changes but we are talking about is the lay out of the building, the paved surfaces, siting of the entrances and exits and siting of the athletic fields. The Committee needs to get to some level of comfort with some version of the design in order to move the process forward, so the designers can come back with the next level of design. The Committee is worrying about a level of detail, which cannot be solved at this point. He would urge the Committee to make provisional decisions on areas of the site plan. The Chair hopes that the Committee can begin to make some decisions and she would urge Committee members to think about what they are comfortable with and can be moved along. Ald. Yates has not received responses to some of the issues he has raised, such as comments on Mr. Zukerman's letter and the number of children who live along the MBTA bus route. He also requested the Athletic Department's recommendation for the athletic fields, the cost differential between depressing the stadium and building where the current stadium is and he has yet to receive anything.

Ald. Gentile thinks that people have been given the wrong impression that the fields ended up the way they are because some athlete got sun in their eyes, which is not quite the way that the siting of the fields occurred. In all of the options that have been considered besides Option 2 a substantial amount of work to the field was required. The site work was going to destroy the field and it would all have to be rebuilt. It made sense to orientate the fields the way that is preferred and that is north-south.

Ald. Schnipper clarified that if Option 5A were to be approved there will be accommodations to Trowbridge Avenue such as speed tables, do not enter except for residents; there are many different types of things that can be done to limit the access to Trowbridge Avenue. Ald. Albright asked if it would include a no left turn restriction. Ald. Schnipper responded that if there is a traffic light located at the intersection there is no reason not to allow a

left turn. Ald. Schnipper presented Option 5B, which would put the ceremonial entrance between Clyde and Trowbridge. The move would give an additional 118' of sight distance coming from the southerly direction on Walnut Street. With this option, the soccer field will need to be shifted and there is a loss of twenty-three parking spots. The loss of the parking will possibly increase the number of parking at the ceremonial entrance to 60 spaces. Also with this option, there is no break in traffic on Walnut Street for the people entering Walnut Street from Trowbridge Avenue. In addition, the two main entries are very close together and will create more congestion.

Ald. Schnipper suggested leaving the plans in the Clerk's Office in order for Aldermen to review them before the next discussion. Ald. Baker suggested that Aldermen feed their questions to the City Clerk/Clerk of the Board to be consolidated and addressed. He would urge the Committee to look at the physical building and the site of the building. There are a number of issues that are around the edges about how the educational program works, which are perfectly appropriate to discuss as part of the funding process but ultimately the Public Facilities Committee has to reach a decision on a site plan and recommend it to the Board. Ald. Yates moved hold on the item, which carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Sydra Schnipper, Chair