

**Remarks made by Neil Wishinsky for the Board of Selectmen in favor of the Joint Motion on the 9<sup>th</sup> Elementary School at Baldwin.**

**Brookline Town Meeting, May 23, 2017**

What Mr. Pollak has just walked us through is, in many ways, a simple and sensible three-part project.

1. An existing public school is replaced with a larger state-of-the-art building to meet today's needs;
2. An existing Recreation facility receives significant upgrades;
3. And an existing parking lot is enlarged and improved to serve both programs.

Our intent is to create a win-win; a win for the schools and a win for our parks and recreation infrastructure. This is a once in a generation opportunity. As a result of this project, not only will the Town's children be attending a state of the art school but more Brookline families will enjoy our parkland and recreation facilities.

I have heard some suggestions that we change direction and revisit Expand in Place. We have been using Expand in Place to accommodate an additional 1,500 students and carve out 55 new classrooms in our existing schools. While the strategy has been successful...it can only go so far. We have run out of space. The students are here, more are coming. We need another complete school.

I acknowledge that this site has its challenges. Some, the building committee is tackling. Those include traffic, parking and site circulation.

Other challenges are legal, and include land use restrictions. We have known about Article 97 protections for the Soule Recreation Center and have been working with the Parks and Open Space Department, the Recreation Department and the Parks and Recreation Commission to work through those issues. We have engaged a landscape architect to conduct peer review of the plans to help in this effort.

Additionally, a case argued in April before the Supreme Judicial Court could affect how some of the land at the rear of the Baldwin site is treated under Article 97. That is the Smith v. Westfield case. We expect a decision by this summer. Within the past few weeks we also received a copy of an email from an employee of the National Park Service alleging that the area protected by the acceptance of a small federal grant in the 70's is larger than we reasonably thought.

The motion before you allocates \$100,000 to continue feasibility study and respond to the challenges. Additionally, the Board of Selectmen is agreeing to bring the project back to a Special Town Meeting after the Westfield case is decided and the Board conducts a careful analysis of the legal landscape after the decision. We have engaged outside counsel to assist with the analysis. Joining us will be the School Committee and an Ad hoc subcommittee of the Advisory Committee. Much of the work involves litigation strategy and will be conducted in executive session.

This motion avoids what was shaping up to be a divisive fight over the Baldwin site while the legal issues are unsettled, and gives us a bit more time to study.

We have been trying to find a site to build a school for many years. If we have learned nothing else during this search, it is that there is no perfect site for a new school in this town. All the sites studied had advantages and disadvantages. All the sites had organized opposition. There is no easy answer. There is no perfect site.

In the end, it is our obligation to educate the Town's children. The Brookline Public Schools are at the heart of who we are as a community. The excellence of our school system is a primary reason many of us moved here and why many of us are sitting in this room. The school space crisis is threatening the system and needs a solution. We are also aware of our obligations as stewards of the Town's park and recreation lands. We must find the right balance.

Through all of this, we remain committed to the Baldwin site. The site has been a school site for generations. If after our analysis, we continue to believe that the project should be green lighted, we intend to quickly call a Special Town Meeting, off cycle, if necessary, with a budget amendment to release the remaining \$1.4 million for schematic design and move forward. Quick action will be necessary to keep the project on track.

Yes, we have challenges and we need to acknowledge them. And once we are clear that it makes good sense to move forward, we need to come together as a community and invest in the success of this important and ambitious project.

The Board of Selectmen urges Favorable action on the consensus motion.