

JOHN R. PIERCE SCHOOL – BROOKLINE, MA	MEETING MINUTES APPROVED 10.21.21
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PIERCE SCHOOL BUILDING COMMITTEE		August 4, 2021
Location:		Online Zoom Meeting
Time:		3:00 PM
Name	Assoc.	Present
Bernard Greene	Voting Member – Committee Co-Chair, Select Board	Y
Helen Charlupski	Voting Member – Committee Co-Chair, School Committee	Y
Melvin Kleckner	Voting Member – Town Administrator	Y
Andy Liu	Voting Member – School Committee	Y
Dr. Linus Guillory	Voting Member – Superintendent of Schools	N
Charlie Simmons	Voting Member – Director of Public Buildings	Y
Daniel Bennett	Voting Member – Building Commissioner	Y
Lesley Ryan-Miller	Voting Member – Pierce School Principal	N
Carol Levin	Voting Member – Advisory Finance Committee	Y
Steve Heikin	Voting Member – Planning Board	Y
Ken Kaplan	Voting Member – Building Commission	Y
Aaron Williams	Voting Member – Pierce School Parent	Y
Nurit Zuker	Voting Member – Pierce School Parent	Y
Nancy O’Connor	Voting Member – Parks and Recreation Commission	Y
Sam Rippin	Voting Member – Assistant Superintendent of School Administration & Finance	N
Jamie Yadoff	Voting Member – Pierce School Principal	Y
Melissa Goff	Non-Voting Member – Deputy Town Administrator	N
Michelle Herman	Non-Voting Member – Deputy Superintendent	N
Tony Guigli	Non-Voting Member – Building Department Project Manager	Y
Matt Gillis	Non-Voting Member – School Department Director of Operations	Y
Jim Rogers	LEFTFIELD	Y
Lynn Stapleton	LEFTFIELD	Y
Jen Carlson	LEFTFIELD	Y
Matt Casey	LEFTFIELD	N
Will Spears	MDS Architects	Y
Amy Mackrell	MDS Architects	Y
Margaret Clarke	MDS Architects	Y
Vinicius Gorgati	Sasaki	Y
Carla Ceruzzi	Sasaki	Y
Kate Tooke	Sasaki	Y
Tamar Warburg	Sasaki	N
Deborah Rivers	Community Member	Y
Tima McLaren	Community Member	Y
Tal Kenet	Community Member	Y

The meeting was called to order at 3:00 PM.

Meeting Minutes from the June 14, 2021 School Building Committee meeting were unanimously approved by roll call vote contingent upon an update addressing an incomplete sentence. A member of the committee asked if the team has received the MSBA’s comments back on the Preliminary Design Program submission. Leftfield explained that typically, the MSBA turns comments

around in 2 to 3 weeks, and at this point it has been approximately 7 weeks. Leftfield has followed up with the MSBA, they expect comments back next week.

Miller Dyer Spears (MDS) presented a design update. MDS started with a layout of buildable areas on the existing Pierce site as well as the surface parking area and turnaround. The surface parking area is located over underground parking for Town Hall making alterations to the parking garage necessary to support any structure above it. Any improvements to the surface parking area and drop off loop would improve the approach to the school, but would not be appropriate space on which to build.

A member of the committee asked whether it is possible to incorporate the Health Department building and associated site. She asked if the Health Department functions could be moved into the Historic Pierce Primary building to allow the school project to incorporate the Health Department building and site for more buildable area. It was noted that the Health Dept building was recently renovated. It was also noted that if the Pierce Primary building is not used for the Pierce School project, the School Department would like to use the building for functions they currently lease space for. MDS explained that moving the building to the Health Dept building site would take the school further away from the Pierce Park and Playground, the Health Dept site is approximately a third of the size of the site of the existing school, and the program on the existing site is already a tight fit.

A member of the committee asked if there is any potential to use the basketball courts across the street. MDS explained that while there is a potential to put some of the program in that location, it does pull that program away from the main school building which would also lengthen the travel time for students which eats into learning time.

MDS reviewed the options shown in the Preliminary Design Program (PDP) submission. MDS noted that while Option 1, an option that keeps both unit A and unit B while building an addition to infill where C currently is, was explored in the PDP submission, it does not meet the school's programmatic needs or allow for the programmatic adjacencies identified in the Educational Program, so today's focus will be on the development of the other options.

In the PDP, the following options beyond just a full renovation were explored. Option 2b keeps unit A (the portion of the existing building housing the multi-story library space) and the Historic Pierce Primary building while infilling between with an addition. Option 3 explored demolishing the existing building and building a new structure while keeping the Historic Pierce Primary Building, and Option 4b explored building the school in the park across the street and replacing the park on the existing site consistent with Article 97.

MDS reviewed key issues identified to date. MDS noted that through discussion with the Working Group, entrance locations were identified. A main entrance near the drop-off loop with secondary entrances on Harvard Street and School Street were most advantageous to allow for access from all directions. This would also allow for separable public access to gyms and multipurpose space.

Building Organization is a priority for the project as grade bands for Pre-K to grade 2, grades 3 to 5, and grades 6 to 8 should ideally be maintained in a new design. The building program needs to be laid out in a way that minimizes student travel time and maximizes student learning time. A media commons should be centrally located to encourage some of the quirkiness and connectedness that occurs at the existing unit A. Daylight and views should be maximized. The ability to separate the public spaces from the core school activities.

Use of the Historic Pierce Primary building on site has been discussed at length. Either the building can be reused as part of the new design, or it can be repurposed as a separate project for other Town use. Reusing the building takes pressure off the density of the site development, but also spreads out the building and would increase travel times for some students. It was noted that connecting to the Historic building also is in conflict with improving the permeability of the site.

Program use of outdoor space should consider the creation of congregation space near main entrance or entrances, secure play areas for youngest grades, recreation space adjacent to dining spaces, outdoor classrooms and amphitheater, an education garden, and outdoor extension of the maker space.

Other priorities that have been identified to date. The civic connections through the site can be improved through the design of the project. The building massing should be shaped to mitigate the impact on the surrounding neighborhood. Parking and service access should be maintained on site including service access to the Library.

The reuse of the Historic Building was reviewed. The first idea was to move Pre-K and K to the building only. This would pull the smallest children away from shared building resources including dining which would significantly increase travel time for them and isolate the teaching staff for that grade band. The team explored reusing the building for 7th and 8th grade, this would require an infill of the courtyard to be able to house the appropriate program. It has been noted that grades 7 and 8 are more easily separated and given the age of the students transition time would be easier.

Preferred Schematic Report (PSR) Options Development was reviewed with visuals of the schemes shown.

Option 2b – Keep A and H – MDS reviewed the building program and how it interacts with the surrounding site. The multipurpose room is located at grade level off School Street allowing for easy access to the public. The drop off loop entrance is located one level up to navigate the grade across the site. There would be parking garages under building as they are located now. MDS noted that there is a bridge connection to the second floor of the Historic building that allows for better permeability through the site. Green space concepts were reviewed.

Option 3 – s – New Building over New Garage – MDS reviewed the building program and how it interacts with the surrounding site noting that this scheme does not connect to the Historic building, meaning that building would be repurposed for Town purposes and would need to be renovated as a separate project. MDS noted that the goal was to create a presence at the corner of School and Harvard Streets with the gymnasium and multipurpose spaces pushed to the corner. The cafeteria pulls back along School Street breaking up the massing along that side of the building and introducing more green space. MDS noted that the core of the building could be developed to create connections through shared building resources.

Option 3 – cube - New Building over New Garage – This scheme uses the media center/reading room as a central core with grade bands located around it. The gym is pulled away from the core of the building with the cafeteria connecting between. The roof of the cafeteria could be occupiable green space. Massing would resemble a cube along the corner of Harvard and School Streets. This scheme allows for less permeability across the site.

Option 4b – New Building on Existing Pierce Park – MDS showed that the massing of a new building on the park site would take up much of the site. They explained that the drop off entrance experience would be a difficult and given the need for a drop off loop, would mix pedestrian and vehicle access at the main entrance. The existing school site would need to be redeveloped with similar program to what is on the park site now. A 20' retaining wall would be necessary to create an even site to allow for ball fields and basketball courts. Vehicular traffic would be pushed into the residential neighborhood with informal drop offs happening in the surrounding streets. This option would not include connection or reuse of the Historic Building given the increase in distance.

A member of the committee asked if the team could provide a slide that compares massing across all options in future presentations.

The Pierce School interim Principal noted that Option 3 – S is the most programmatically advantageous scheme from the school's perspective. She noted that she would like to see the media center/reading room as the core of the building, more central to the school. The scheme creates nice adjacencies in grade bands, and minimizes transitions within school and from the building to the playground across the street. She noted that it allows for collaboration across grades and allows all grade bands to be maintained. She added that Option 3 – S maintains the curiosity that the existing building has while addressing the many issues of the existing building.

MDS explained that there is a possibility to combine the quirkiness of Option 3 – S with the efficiency of Option 3 – Cube and added that they would combine the two options.

A member of the committee noted that benefits of Option 3 – S include the potential to allow for views and daylight in both the media/reading center and the gymnasium. He noted that the option also allows for more permeability of the site.

There was discussion about the massing of the options and how the massing would relate to the heights of the surrounding neighborhood. MDS noted that the massing of the building closest to the Library will match up to the four story height of that side of the site, but all would be taller than the residences across School Street. MDS added that these studies are massing only and the articulation of the building façade will be sensitive to the surrounding buildings. A member of the committee noted that using the Historic building in the new design may allow the building to become shorter.

A member of the committee asked if, given the height along School Street across from a number of shorter residences, is it possible to pull the building back off of the street a bit to allow for softer connection along sidewalk with a buffer of more vegetation.

A member of the committee asked about the connectivity to the green space and playground across School Street. MDS explained that there are several treatments of the street that are being considered and will need to be developed in any of the schemes that are chosen. The traffic consultant is looking at narrowing the street by only allowing turn lanes at intersections which will calm traffic and allow for more robust sidewalks. They are also starting discussions about installing flashers and a raised crossing will also indicate strongly to vehicular traffic that the space is meant for pedestrians to cross.

MDS added that each option has good potential to relate to the park. Making a fluid connection between the park and the Historic building through a view corridor and a universally accessible route to move between school street and the rest of the civic campus. Great potential to connect a robust plaza

and welcoming space with the park along School Street. MDS showed how students would travel to the park from the school, the principal noted that when PE uses the park for a class, the class usually meets at the park rather than meeting in the gym and transitioning together to the park.

A member of the committee noted that there is an underground connection from the existing 1970s school building to the Historic building, but MDS noted that it would be a difficult transition to make it accessible.

MDS reviewed the probable garage entrance locations. MDS noted that there would likely be a need to enter/exit on Harvard Street with the Washington Street entrance to the Town Hall garage maintained. A member of the committee noted that there are upcoming projects that are being considered that may push more traffic from route 9 to the surrounding streets.

A member of the committee asked if the garage under the building in the scheme that keeps unit A remains in the same location. MDS noted that this condition is not fully resolved, but the goal would be to maintain a service area between the building and the library in order to share the space with the library. Another member of the committee noted that there was a discussion during the working group meeting that if there are chances to share amenities like the library loading dock area, we should take advantage to utilize the site in the most efficient way.

Sasaki noted that there is a current connection between the civic campus and the Pierce playground via a dark staircase that allows the community to pass through the site if they choose. A member of the committee noted that because the passage is not a welcoming experience, it is not a connection that is used very often. MDS added that there is a connection through to Harvard Street that will likely not exist in the new design as it would be difficult to create an accessible path in that location.

A member of the committee noted that if the Historic Building is not being used in the project, a cost would need to be assigned to that separate project for reuse. This cost would need to be shown as additional to the cost of the scheme.

Matt Gillis, project manager for the School Department, noted that there are likely two ways the Historic Building would be reused if it was not used for the Pierce School project. The first of which would be for School Dept. offices, which the Town leases space for at this time, and the other option would be for BEEP.

Another member of the committee noted that he was not sure that there is a financial benefit to using the Historic Building as part of the Pierce School project, though another member noted that it would house some of the necessary program which would spread out the massing and lower the height of the building a little. It was noted that the MSBA pays for Pre-K space as it is part of the Pierce Educational Plan.

A member of the committee asked about the renovation and reuse of unit A and whether the team has considered building on top of it. MDS explained that the structural engineer has looked into this, but significant structural improvement would be necessary to allow building above.

A member of the committee asked if there is an opportunity to reskin to allow more light in and upgrades the efficiency of the building. MDS noted that the exterior walls of the building are bearing

walls and every change to those walls is particularly expensive as they would need to account for structural improvement as well.

The Pierce Principal noted that keeping parts of the existing building as proposed in Options 1 and 2b are the worst from an educational perspective as it does not promote teacher and student collaboration, it increases transition times within the building, creates the least organization of program. She added that she has taught in the Pierce School for many years and these options would keep a lot of the negative aspects of Pierce and the building would not be functional for the next 50 years. Other members of the committee noted that while there are a lot of skilled construction professionals on the committee and project team, it is of the utmost importance to listen to the principal as the client to ensure the building functions as it should.

Leftfield reviewed a high level schedule showing upcoming milestones and meetings that will occur through the end of October when the PSR is scheduled to be submitted. It was noted that the options will be submitted to two estimators at the end of the month with draft estimates due by September 17th and reconciled estimates due by September 24th. During the month of September, more meetings will be held to review the options with the wider community. The PSR is due to the MSBA on October 28th.

Leftfield presented a budget update noting that invoices are approved monthly through the Building Commission. Amendments are also approved through the Building Commission and then are up for approval at the School Committee and Select Board.

A member of the committee asked what the process is to decide on a single schematic. The schedule shows the School Building Committee voting on a single preferred option in early October which would allow the project team to develop the PSR to submit to the MSBA by the end of October.

A member of the committee asked which options would be developed further based on comments the team has heard to date. MDS explained that they are working with Sasaki to develop a scheme that combines the best aspects of options 3 – s and 3 – cube to present next time, and will develop another option that demolishes the 1970s building but also attaches to the Historic Building.

Deborah Rivers, member of the public, noted that the 4 story wall at School Street is very tall related to the surrounding neighborhood. She noted that the building could be set back 15' – 20' with greenery and trees added to soften the feel in the neighborhood.

Tal Kenet, member of the public, noted a preference for option 3 – S. They noted that there may be locations in the scheme that do not receive daylight, it is not obvious from the images. It was added that existing unit A has a looming, overwhelming presence along the street and that windows and openness will help soften the presence on the street based on what she has seen at new High School. They noted that it might be helpful to consider closing School Street to through traffic during pick up and drop off hours. The question was asked if Pre-K was moved to the Historic Building, how would this work with the rest of the Pierce School. The principal noted that she believed the 3 preK classrooms would be included in the main building, but other PreK classrooms that the Town is currently leasing space to run could be moved into the Historic Building. The site is accessible by public transportation and is fairly central for all Brookline families which could make this a good location for the rest of the BEEP program.

A member of the committee noted that she is not in favor of keeping unit A as it is a large and imposing presence on the site. She added that as the project progresses, she is confident that the design team will

consider the pedestrian experience along the building. She also thanked the Pierce principal for the excellent and caring feedback to the project.

Tima McLaren, member of the public, noted that the traffic on School Street needs to be slowed to allow for safe pedestrian crossing to the park. She added that she would like to encourage the traffic consultant to watch the traffic in Brookline Village where drivers become frustrated by congestion points, she added concern about adding a garage exit/entrance on Harvard Street.

Other members of the committee noted agreement about the traffic around the site moving too fast and that the safety of the pedestrian crossing at School Street needs to be a priority.

The meeting adjourned at 5:04 PM.