

DRISCOLL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL – BROOKLINE, MA	MEETING MINUTES Approved 8/5/22
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DRISCOLL SCHOOL BUILDING ADVISORY COMMITTEE		May 6, 2022
Location:		Online Zoom Meeting
Time:		9:00 AM
Name	Assoc.	Present
Miriam Aschkenasy	Town of Brookline, Co-Chair SBC, TOB Board of Selectmen	Y
Valerie Frias	Town of Brookline, Co-Chair SBC, PSB	Y
Susan Wolf Ditkoff	Town of Brookline, SBC, PSB	Y
Karen Breslawski	Building Commission	Y
David Pollak	Advisory Committee	Y
Ali Tali	Transportation Board	N
Nancy O'Connor	Parks and Recreation Commission	Y
Dan Deutsch	Community Representative	Y
Victor Kusmin	Community Representative	Y
Linda Monach	Special Education Parent Advisory Council	N
Arjun Mande	Community Representative	N
Lakia Rutherford	Parent Representative / METCO	Y
Sara Stoutland	Community Representative	N
Mel Kleckner	Town Administrator	N
Dr. Linus Guillory	Superintendent of Schools	N
Lesley Ryan Miller	Deputy Superintendent of Teaching & Learning	Y
Matt Gillis	Director of Operations	Y
Michelle Bartley	Driscoll School Vice Principal	Y
Samuel Rippin	Deputy Superintendent of Administration and Finance	Y
David Youkilis	Driscoll School Principal	Y
Helen Charlupski	School Committee	Y
Tony Guigli	Project Manager, Town of Brookline	Y
Dan Bennett	Building Commissioner	Y
Charlie Simmons	Director of Public Buildings	Y
Jim Rogers	LEFTFIELD	Y
Lynn Stapleton	LEFTFIELD	Y
Jen Carlson	LEFTFIELD	Y
Adam Keane	LEFTFIELD	Y
Jonathan Levi	Jonathan Levi Architects	Y
Philip Gray	Jonathan Levi Architects	Y
Carol Harris	Jonathan Levi Architects	N
Kevin Cooke	Gilbane Building Company	N
Lynda Callahan	Gilbane Building Company	Y
Mike Toffel	Community Member	Y
Clint Richardson	Community Member	Y
Andrew Fischer	Community Member	Y
Dr. Mary Sabolsi	Community Member	Y
Dr. Paul Hsieh	Community Member	Y
Casey Hatchett	Community Member	Y
Nicole McLelland	Community Member	Y
Susan Helms Daley	Community Member	Y

The meeting was called to order at 9:00AM.

Approval of February 11, 2022 SBAC Meeting Minutes

Miriam Aschkenasy made a motion to approve SBAC Meeting Minutes for February 11, 2022, Victor Kusmin seconded. Roll was called and the vote was 9-0-0, the motion passed.

Turf Warrant Articles:

Co-chair Frias explained that Warrant Article (WA) #23 proposes the creation of a committee to look at safety aspects of synthetic turf. WA #24 proposes imposing a multi-year moratorium on the use and installation of synthetic turf. According to Town Counsel, WA #24 would apply to the Driscoll project despite the fact that the process to develop the design for the park and playground was a public and well-documented process that involved many community members.

Driscoll principal, David Youkilis presented some information on the benefits of synthetic turf as they relate to educational programming. Via a letter Mr. Youkilis read from the health and wellness teachers, it was noted that a synthetic turf field would allow the school to use the field more often than the current grass field, which is shut down during and several days following weather events. Grass fields that are heavily used, as is the case at Driscoll, become stressed, resulting in dirt patches throughout the field. These patches create uneven conditions that are unsafe for students.

Principal Youkilis explained that the field is used beyond health and wellness programming, it is used regularly for recess, after school activities, and on the weekend recreationally. Over time the field has become riddled with holes, rocks and roots and sprinkler heads protrude from various areas from erosion, all of which have created tripping hazards that have resulted in student injury. He added that while currently the school operates as a 3 section school, the new school will be a 4 section school which will put even more strain on the field with more students utilizing it throughout the day.

Members of the Driscoll Park and Playground Design Review Committee (DRC) explained the public process followed was in line with the process followed on previous projects in Town. Representatives from the Parks & Recreation Commission, from the School Committee, and from the community were appointed to work with the Project Team to design the park and playground portion of the site. The Parks & Recreation Commission bylaws require a minimum of 2 public meetings of such a subcommittee, but the Driscoll DRC held 5 meetings. It was noted that the meetings were all well attended by the community and members of Town and School staff, and robust discussions were had. One of the Parks and Recreation Commissioners on the DRC explained that approximately 20 years ago the Driscoll School community began requesting that the existing natural grass field be replaced with a synthetic turf field due to poor conditions and unsafe conditions.

The Parks and Recreation Commission voted unanimously to support the Advisory Committee's recommendation to support Warrant Article #23 as amended, which would create a committee to look at safety aspects of synthetic turf before making a determination. The School Committee and Select Board also voted to support Warrant Article #23 and not Warrant Article #24. It was noted that if people want to speak at Town Meeting on the issue, or any issue, they can reach out via email to be added to the list of speakers.

Andrew Fischer, petitioner for WA #24 explained that he was not aware that the park and playground at the Driscoll School was being redesigned and he felt the design has more paved surface than not. He noted that there are people that use the park and playground space year round adding that the safety concerns of the school do not paint a full picture of community use of the school grounds. He stated that he believes the synthetic turf is made of toxic materials that children should not be allowed to play on, explaining that plastics contain PFAS and that PFAS are a forever chemical that is unhealthy to be around. He explained that WA #24 would put a hold on new synthetic turf surfaces in Town and allow alternatives to be explored.

Co-chair Frias explained that the issue of synthetic turf was discussed at length at the November Driscoll SBAC meeting. The recording of that meeting can be found on the Driscoll Project website.

Mike Toffel, Town Meeting Member Precinct #8, petitioner for WA #23 which would bring a task force together that would take a closer look at what is science vs. what is advocacy and weigh all of the information against the needs of the Town to come to a decision. He added that PFAS is in fact an environmental and health issue and that it can be found in many places. It was recently discovered that PFAS can be found in synthetic turf fields, but it is important to realize that it may not be a significant contributor to harm relative to the other sources of PFAS in the environment. WA #23 would ensure that a decision on whether to proceed with synthetic turf is made by experts, not advocates. The decision needs to be made based on the science along with data and perspective from the economic side, availability of field space, injury risk, the mind-body connection, and Town needs. He explained that WA #23 would gather data that could be considered at Town Meeting in Fall which would allow the Town to make the decision with fact-based information in hand.

A member of the committee noted that the park and playground are school grounds and that while they are shared with the community, the primary purpose of the playground is to support the school needs.

A member of the committee asked what the square footage of the synthetic turf field is and what is the square footage of the natural landscape of the site. JLA stated that the square footage of the field is 20,100SF but that they would need to calculate the natural area square footage but would provide that. JLA also noted that the synthetic turf field currently specified does not use PFAS in its construction according to 3rd party testing results provided by the manufacturer. It was also noted that the underlayment and infill is a natural material – a combination of coconut fiber, peat, and cork. JLA added that 185 new trees would be added to the site and have been reviewed in public meetings with the Tree Warden.

A member of the DRC noted that the landscape design introduces many new trees, shrubs, and natural landscaping. She added that natural grass fields rely heavily on water and that conservation of water is becoming more of a concern even in New England. She explained that natural grass fields also require fertilizer that is another environmental concern.

A member of the SBAC and DRC presented images of Brookline Ave field considered an athletic field. The image shows a number of people playing soccer, a number of dogs running through the scheduled Brookline soccer club practice. Also visible in the image is a sign stating that the field is closed to all activities that is being ignored. He noted that for various reasons – weather conditions, field rest periods, wet field conditions – the field is closed for at least half of the year which puts so much demand on the landscape during the limited time the field is open.

He noted that the field at Driscoll is in the center of the landscape design as an important program space for the school. He added that if the center feature of the design, which has a priority of active use across the entire site, is closed more than half the year, it really undermines the functionality and success of entire landscape design.

A member of the public noted that she is a public health professional and that she believes that there is a corporate misinformation campaign surrounding synthetic turf. She noted that Silica, listed as an ingredient in the coconut fiber infill is a respiratory toxin, and that PFAS is a toxin.

A member of the public stated that she and her husband strongly support synthetic turf at the new Driscoll School. They have four children, two of whom still attend Driscoll. She noted that based on the many years she and her husband have spent at Driscoll, she is confident that the school community is in support of a synthetic turf field. She noted that there are many injuries related to the compacted dirt and rocks and tripping hazards at the existing field and that the field is not always available for use by the school because of poor field conditions. She added that a usable field is important for all students who enjoy access to the outdoors, not just those who play a sport and that during the pandemic, having more usable outdoor play area has been very important.

A member of the public stated that he agreed that it is important to ensure that there is science backing the decision made on whether or not to proceed with synthetic turf and that what he has heard in the meeting so far is advocacy, not science. He noted concern that waiting to collect more data and information, that it will not change opinions and that a number of people in Town will not be satisfied either way.

A question was entered into the chat asking if there is any natural grass planned in the landscape, or if the design only includes trees and shrubs. The design team explained that there is natural grass at Washington Street along the front of the building.

A member of the public who is also a Driscoll parent noted that health and wellness is not just about physical play time, but that it extends to environmental exposures. She noted concern about long term, repeated exposure to micro plastics, PFAS, and Silica. She encouraged members of the SBAC to research the effects of these exposures before making a decision on the field. She added that she believes many parents do not know that this decision is being made and that without everyone's input she is unsure that there is widespread support in favor of synthetic turf. She said that the safety studies done on the topic of toxic materials are usually studies funded by the industries affected and should not be taken at face value.

Susan Helms Daley, Town Meeting Member Precinct #1 and co-petitioner for WA #24 noted that she was not certain that the science on PFAS is completely settled, but added that initial studies are alarming enough that the Town should take a cautious approach to installing synthetic turf fields. She noted concern that Chik-fil-A and Burger King recently announced that they are removing PFAS from their food wrappers, Congress is considering banning PFAS in food packaging, Massachusetts recently put a limit on PFAS in drinking water. She noted that while the science is new, it is pointing in a direction that seems to show that prolonged exposure to PFAS is not safe. She said that PFAS do not break down over time and that children are developmentally vulnerable to such exposures.

Miriam Aschkenasy made a motion that the Driscoll School Building Advisory Committee reaffirm the use of artificial turf on the Driscoll School project as consistent with the current design. The motion was seconded by Susan Wolf Ditkoff. Roll was called and the vote was 12-0-0, the motion passed.

Construction Update

Gilbane reviewed the 3 week look ahead while outlining progress on the latest aerial photo of the site. Gilbane explained that steel erection at Building C to the North of the site, roof decking is currently going up at that location. Core AB is in progress. Geopier installation will begin at the South side of the street along Washington Street, the work will continue clockwise around the building and then into the middle of the building. At the front of the site, the building mock-up is underway with masonry almost complete and glazing and metal panel installation about to begin. Once all parts are reviewed and approved, the mock-up becomes the bench mark for construction moving forward. Progress photos were shared. The project team will arrange a site walkthrough and circulate a sign up list.

Budget Update

LeftField presented a budget update noting that there is still approximately \$5.8M left in the total Owner's contingency line items (which includes a budget line called Construction Contingency and one called Owner's Contingency). The project started with just about \$6M in contingency and given where the project is and the greatest unknowns of the project being underground, the project in very good shape financially. LeftField explained that there is about \$81M balance to complete on Gilbane's contract and a good rule of thumb for new construction is that there should be around 4-5% left in contingency on the balance to remain. Currently, the Driscoll project has about 7% remaining in contingency against that balance to remain. Having the additional contingency available allows it to be used at any point to accelerate schedule if necessary, owner-initiated changes, or during demolition of the existing building if there are any unforeseen conditions that need to be dealt with.

Upcoming Meetings

- May 10, 2022 – Building Commission Meeting – 6:00 PM
- June 14, 2022 – Building Commission Meeting – 6:00 PM
- July 12, 2022 – Building Commission Meeting – 6:00 PM
- August 5, 2022 – School Building Advisory Committee – 9:00 AM

The meeting was adjourned at 10:15am.