

Carla Benka, speaking on behalf of the Advisory Committee

There probably aren't many – if any – people in this auditorium who haven't asked or been asked the question, "Where are we going to build the 9th school?" Baldwin? Pine Manor? None of the above?

This article – STM 1-1 - asks Town Meeting members and others to consider a different question: How should we address increased student enrollment in our schools? It is a broader question, one that encourages more flexible thinking, and one we should embrace.

If approved, this article would start two processes. The first, for which \$300,000 is sought, would continue the exploration of 1) building a school on the campus of Pine Manor College on approximately seven acres of land either purchased or taken by eminent domain; 2) building a school on the Baldwin School site via the procedures stipulated by Article 97 and the National Parks Service, including a land swap to make up for the park land impacted by the school; and 3) building a school on the unrestricted 1.46 acres of the Baldwin School site, in which case no swap would be required. Further due diligence regarding these three options would include traffic studies, comparative cost analyses, complete legal analyses, where appropriate, and an appraisal of the Pine Manor parcel.

The second process, running concurrently with the first and to be funded with a portion of that same \$300,000, would be to undertake site evaluations of the Baker and Pierce campuses, as well as any other property identified as worthy of exploration. Such evaluations would include legal, environmental and engineering issues as well as site planning, design, and cost studies. Once the evaluations are completed, they would be publicly discussed to the extent advised by Town Counsel. The decision to move forward with a one-site or a multi-site solution would be made by the Select Board and School Committee, with input from the Advisory Committee's Ad Hoc subcommittee. Further feasibility of the site or sites would follow. Up to \$400,000 could be spent for further feasibility for one site and an additional \$300,000 could be spent for further feasibility for multi-sites.

STM 1-1 is not prescriptive. It does not eliminate the three existing options of Pine Manor, Baldwin with a swap, and unrestricted Baldwin. It does not require demolishing Pierce. It does not look to building a second school on the Baker site.

It does, however, offer needed flexibility by raising the possibility of pursuing a multi-site solution to our school capacity problem.

One potential scenario under this article would be to address South Brookline's needs by expanding Baker via building more classrooms and right-sizing dedicated spaces such as staff offices, library, gym, and cafeteria, and to address North Brookline's needs by renovating and expanding the Pierce School, located in what many regard as the epicenter of capacity deficit. Pierce's deficiencies have been thoroughly described by the previous speaker. Suffice it to say that no one disagrees that this school requires a major overhaul.

It bears repeating that a multi-site solution could allow us to address the problem where it actually exists and to maintain Brookline's walkable school tradition, treasured by so many. In addition, it could keep school communities intact; address the issue of equity; and cast a wider net to gain support for a debt-exclusion override.

"We need a new school and we need it now" while succinctly summarizing the current situation, does not acknowledge the hurdles - be they cost, legal challenges, delays due to litigation, or political opposition - that need to be overcome in order to reach that goal. Determining just how high those hurdles are requires additional study and analysis and that's what STM 1-1 offers. Expansion at Baker may not be possible because of the SJC's decision in the Westfield case; Pierce may be too expensive; an eminent domain taking at Pine Manor may involve too many unknowns in terms of final costs and possible delays. Right now, we simply don't know enough, and without a sufficient knowledge base, it would be unwise to proceed with a particular scheme that we think - or hope - is the way-to-go.

By a vote of 23 in favor, one opposed and no abstentions, the Advisory Committee asks you to support the motion found on page 17 of the supplement and to reappropriate \$1 million from last May's Special Appropriation 67 to help us find a successful solution to our school capacity challenge.