

**Introductory Statement of Neil Wishinsky, Chair of the Board of Selectmen
Joint Meeting of the Board of Selectmen and School Committee
October 3, 2017, Brookline High School**

Good evening. I will convene this special joint meeting of the Board of Selectmen and School Committee to hear a presentation by the Town's architectural consultant relative to siting of a new/9th elementary school. Before I begin my introductory comments, I would like to remind everyone why we are here in the first place. Education is Brookline's Brand. The Brookline School system is the community's crown jewel. It is an important reason many of us moved here and many of us stay here. The Town has a fundamental legal responsibility to educate every child that lives in our community. We can't establish a limit on how many students we can educate depending upon the space or the budget we have, nor should we. During the 2006-07 school year, the Brookline Public Schools educated 4,059 students in its K-8 elementary schools. K-8 enrollment has risen every single year since then and today that number has grown to 5,482 students – a 35% increase. That is almost 3/8ths larger – or the equivalent of adding the enrollment of three more elementary schools! Despite our best efforts to subdivide and adapt spaces within existing schools, to permanently expand space at the Heath, Runkle, and Lawrence schools, and to add temporary classrooms onto Baker, rebuild and expand the Devotion School, and lease privately owned property, we have concluded that we need an additional K-8 school in our system. This is a crisis that needs to be addressed now. We have run out of time.

Last October, and after many months of study and public process, our boards took votes to select the Town owned Baldwin School property as the preferred site for the 9th school. We hired Jonathan Levi Architects to conduct a feasibility study of the site, and were prepared to appropriate additional funds to have schematic level design performed, along with more reliable cost estimates, at the November Town Meeting. The preferred site of the Baldwin School, like every other site the Town has identified as a potential alternative, immediately generated opposition from the neighborhood. Attorneys representing neighbors who oppose the construction of a school on the site threatened litigation against the Town if we pursued

the Baldwin property. And then, in April 2017, we learned that the National Park Service considered the southern portion of the Baldwin School site to be protected from development under the terms of a modest federal grant the Town received in 1975 to improve the tennis courts on a corner of the site. This is despite the fact that Town Meeting acquired that property back in 1941 explicitly for school use. A request that the National Park Service reconsider this determination was unsuccessful. As a result, our boards needed to consider whether or not to proceed with the Baldwin site in view of the threatened litigation, and we determined that it would be prudent to consider an alternative site as well. This discussion was conducted in executive session because it concerned litigation strategy and the acquisition of an alternative privately owned site, both of which are appropriately proper subjects for discussion in executive session under the Open Meeting law. At the boards' September 19 meeting in executive session, the Board of Selectmen and School Committee voted independently and unanimously to expand the sites under consideration to include the acquisition of an approximate 7-acre parcel of land on Heath Street owned by Pine Manor College. This vote did not remove the Town-owned Baldwin site from consideration, nor did it explicitly authorize the taking of the College property by eminent domain. The vote was as follows;

“To modify the prior decision to locate the 9th elementary school on the Baldwin site by expanding the Town’s consideration of other sites to include acquiring land at Pine Manor College and conducting due diligence and obtaining public feedback to make a final decision on site selection.”

This evening, we have asked our architect to present a summary of his planning on the Baldwin site to date along with some very preliminary concepts on the possibilities of the Pine Manor site. Immediately following tonight’s meeting, we will post this presentation, along with other materials, on the Town’s website in order to begin the public input process. We encourage you to listen to this evening’s presentation and then to provide public comment in writing via traditional and electronic means or at the public hearing that will take place in this room on Monday evening, October 16. Public comment will be limited this evening, since the

presentation has not been available publicly until now, and because we are unable to devote the entire evening to listen. We will provide an opportunity this evening to allow Tom O'Reilly, president of Pine Manor College, to speak. We look forward to having a full hearing from the community on October 16. Other hearings and public process will take place prior to the November 14 Town Meeting, at which time it is expected that a vote will be offered to move forward with additional study or design of the 9th school subject to completion of due diligence and consideration of public comments. To be clear, we have not made any final decision about the site of the 9th elementary school and will not do so until more study has been completed and all public input is considered. Even then, a two-thirds vote of Town Meeting is required to authorize capital funding for a school project and authorize the taking of private property. Those questions will come before Town Meeting at a future date.

Before we begin the presentation, I would like to comment on the Pine Manor College land. The Town values Pine Manor College and considers it an outstanding community partner and institution. Despite their exemption from property taxation, they have voluntarily entered into a Payment in Lieu of Tax Agreement (PILOT) Agreement that paid the Town over \$40,000 last year. We admire new president Tom O'Reilly's leadership and efforts to rebuild the College, and we want to support and be a part of these efforts. The Town has reached out to Pine Manor to communicate our interest in siting a school on the site, and we have expressed a willingness to discuss strategic collaborations with the College. In addition to structuring a potential partnership with the College, siting the school at this location prompted the Town's interest for a number of other reasons, including the fact that the College has sold portions of its property in the past and has legally subdivided the property we are considering into multiple house lots. In addition, constructing the school on the Pine Manor site would allow the continued use of Baldwin as both a school facility and open space. However, be assured that there will be much more public process in the days ahead.

We hope you will keep an open mind as you listen to this evening's presentation and come back on October 16 to provide us with your opinions. At this time, I will ask our architectural consultant, Jonathan Levi, to make his presentation.