

Steering Committee Meeting Minutes
August 3, 2016, 6:00PM

Location: WPS Phillips Building, Innovation Lab (Third Floor), 30 Common Street, Watertown, MA 02472

Present: Steering Committee Co-Chairs John Portz and Elizabeth Yusem; Steering Committee members Toni Carlson, Pete Caron, Michael Dattoli, Jean Fitzgerald, Elaina Griffith, Chris Lowry, Steven Magoon, Alyson Morales, Lindsay Mosca, Vincent Piccirilli, and Michael Shepard; SMMA's Joel Seeley and Michael van Hamel; various members of the community

Members of the Steering Committee not present: James Kimo Carter, Charles Kellner, Debra King

Co-Chair John Portz called the meeting to order at 6:00PM. He asked the Steering Committee if they would approve the draft minutes from the previous meeting. Pete Caron noted he was not present as indicated on July 19, 2016. With that amendment, the minutes were approved.

Mr. Joel Seeley of Symmes Maini & McKee Associates (SMMA) said that tonight's meeting would be focused on design options for each of the schools. He said that SMMA will take feedback from the committee and meet with estimators to determine the rough costs of the proposed renovations. He said the Steering Committee's next meeting will be to discuss a draft of the the Master Plan. The final Community Forum will follow that meeting, occurring on August 24, 2016. It was decided that the Steering Committee would schedule one final meeting to occur near the end of September during which the group will review the finalized Master Plan.

Dr. Michael van Hamel reminded the Steering Committee that by rebalancing Watertown's elementary districts, the goal is to have approximate student enrollment numbers of 400 at Cunniff Elementary School, 450 at James Russell Lowell Elementary School, and 500 at Hosmer Elementary School.

Dr. van Hamel showed examples of renovations to Cunniff for the accommodation of 400 students "with flex" should enrollment rise. He said the construction of an offset second story over one of the building's wings would make room for additional classrooms and possibly outdoor balconies overlooking the courtyard. Some offices and the art room would be relocated; the security of the main entryway would be upgraded; the cafeteria, gymnasium, and library would be expanded with room for a MakerSpace; and outdoor playground space would be upgraded. The cafetorium and gymnasium could be located together in a more public area near the school's main entryway with classrooms located securely beyond the vestibule. Co-Chair Elizabeth Yusem said she appreciates that this design idea has a true concept for 21st century learning whereas the current building feels disjointed.

Next Dr. van Hamel showed options for renovations to Lowell for the accommodation of 450 students. The goal here, he said, is to increase space for Special Education programs and preserve the aesthetics of the greenway. Options for renovations included the construction of a new classroom wing to mirror the other existing wing, an increase in cafeteria space, an expansion of the gym, updated entryway security, and possibly reconfiguration of the school's overall internal layout.

Renovations to Hosmer for the accommodation of approximately 500 students would create needed space for Special Education programs. The first option, Dr. van Hamel said, would be to perform simple renovations to the existing classrooms and update the building's security. The second and more intensive option would include the construction of a large new wing to eventually house a universal prekindergarten and preschool.

Dr. van Hamel said Watertown Middle School is a building that will be easily renovated and updated. One option here would be to focus on upgrading the cafeteria, kitchen, and gymnasium space. A more dynamic renovation would be the conversion of the lower gymnasium into a multistory multimedia space housing the art rooms, a MakerSpace, and the library. Further large-scale renovations could provide openings of indoor spaces into the courtyard.

At Watertown High School, an overall renovation of interior spaces could bring the building “up to speed.” Further options were said to include a reconstruction of the cafeteria and kitchen to create a sort of culinary arts wing. Art-specific areas could also be created within the school. Dr. van Hamel reminded the Steering Committee that the Master Plan process being conducted by SMMA is separate from the Statement of Interest that has been submitted for a new high school.

Mr. Seeley said SMMA will draw up conceptual sketches of the options for renovations to each school. These and relative estimated costs will be discussed at the upcoming Steering Committee meeting on August 16, 2016 as SMMA prepares for the third and final Community Forum on August 24, 2016.

The meeting adjourned at 8:05PM.