

Steering Committee Meeting Minutes
January 5, 2017

REPORT OF THE MASTER PLANNING FACILITIES STUDY: LAST MEETING

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 John Brackett, Steve Magoon, James Carter, Elaina Griffith, Peter Caron, Alyson Morales, Lindsay Mosca, Mike Datolli, Mike Shepard, Chris Lowry, Vincent Piccirilli; attendees Tom Tracy, Mark Sideris, and various members of the public

Executive Summary

We had a last meeting of the Master Planning Facilities Study Steering Committee and the committee members were given a set of questions and topics to think about before the last meeting. The meeting was well attended with good discussion and insight about lessons learned, the process, the SMMA report produced and next steps.

Questions sent to the committee in preparation for the last meeting:

1. What are your major conclusions or take-aways with respect to WPS and its buildings?
2. What lessons did you learn with respect to the planning process that can be useful for future work in this area?
3. For next steps, there are a number of key questions, including the scope and sequence of renovations. In moving forward, initial discussions have focused in three different areas:
 - a. RFP for architectural services
 - b. Educator engagement
 - c. Parent/community/town engagement

From your perspective, what are the key next steps that need to be taken?

We spoke broadly about development in Watertown, its impact on enrollment based on work done by SMMA for the Master Plan Facilities Study, DecisionInsite, and NESDEC reports done working collaboratively with the town planning office.

The School Committee working with the Superintendent and community has worked hard and ambitiously to support and complete all of these studies and we see the need to keep the momentum going to help answer lots of questions that were raised by the SMMA study.

We were able to use the SMMA study to begin a conversation in the capital budget with a category that identifies broadly potential future building costs.

However, as Dr. Brackett suggested, we need to get council to guide us moving forward. SMMA was a good report but lots of questions need to be addressed and asked. Dr. Brackett suggested he would need to formulate an RFP to hire an outside consultant that had expertise in addressing next steps and also helping to continue the work writing SOIs for the high school.

There is a lot of work to be done and we are at a point whereby an expertise is needed in hiring a consultant that understands laying the groundwork to move the process forward so that we do not get caught in pitfalls of politics or technical aspects of such a large project of future new building and or renovation work to be done at all the schools.

The meeting began at 6:30pm.

I. Facilities Master Plan Study

The group was asked to comment on the questions that were given and there were ranges of comment from the group.

The discussion began with comments on enrollment and looking at the reports produced, it seemed to one member that enrollment was not growing exponentially as had been thought by the new development in Watertown. Capacity issues seemed more due to programmatic issues and expectations to meet standards of teaching 21st century modalities not because of increased capacity due to enrollment growth.

Discussion about the town assessment of buildings occurred and the draft is not published yet. It was discussed that the town is doing a good job of maintaining buildings but the results of the assessment are not available yet to use as a reference by the heads of buildings.

One member felt that based on the square footage comparisons that there was plenty of room in the buildings and that space needed to be reconfigured. Another point was made that within the last few years that 60 FTE's were hired between FY '15-17 which further highlighted the need for more space. It was also noted that during the period of cuts between 2008-09 that there were many cuts so that adding back positions that were lost should also be considered.

The conversation moved in the direction of understanding what the master plan facilities study did teach and changed one member's mind. They discussed that they had been convinced that after looking at the 'population crunch' their position was to look more at the middle school and high school as the priority schools versus the elementary schools which was their initial position going into the steering committee.

Cunniff was discussed as an example of the complexities that would be involved in deciding that it could possibly be a starting place for temporary structures or renovation. The immediate problem at the Cunniff having a bubble last year seems to be down students at this point in time. The bubble at Cunniff is moving to the middle school next year.

Another member noted that teachers need space to teach. Teachers are teaching in ways to reach students, a wider variety of students, using more diverse modalities such as Makerspaces and project based learning. They specified that teachers need the architecture to be flexible so that they can switch and easily adapt to meet these teaching needs.

Some expressed that looking at the cost estimates comparing Options 1, 2, & 3 in the SMMA study that between Options 1 & 2, it would not be too much more to incorporate 21st Century learning environments when the buildings are being renovated. It was noted that between options 1 & 2, for \$40M more dollars in option 2, that would buy the flexibility that is needed in the redesign and renovation to meet enhanced learning environments needed to meet 21st century teaching—with respect to the costs necessary to upgrade all buildings, it is not a significant adjustment with respect to the long term costs relative to the need and cost to upgrade all of the school buildings.

It was noted that the last time there was an override for school buildings, it was to renovate the school buildings at a cost of \$20M, with bonds being paid over a 20-year period which is ending now. We are now looking at renovation costs that are for the long term about 40-50 years. Some stated that we need to be thinking about the costs as building for today or investing for the future. Additionally, the need to

include the Phillips into the next study was emphasized since it is a school building and whether it stays an administration building or not, it should be included in the next study.

II. Public Engagement and Next Steps

There was much discussion about the need for more teacher engagement to make sure that whatever is considered fits the needs of the teachers and that moving forward, we need much more input from the teachers about what they need. Discussion moved into the area of the importance to keep class sizes down as a priority in Watertown. There was also discussion that there is much need to increase professional development opportunities around the new modalities of 21st century learning before we can ask the community to invest in substantial infrastructural and renovation/rebuilding costs to meet these needs. It was emphasized by a majority of the members that we need to work into the budget, the professional development needs of teachers to teach in project based learning.

One member emphasized that the SMMA study was not a true master plan but rather a good assessment of the school building facilities at a high level. It was discussed that a master plan would be a more in depth study involving a broader discussion and input from the community.

The issue of lack of land in Watertown for swing space was also discussed. It was noted that on January 17th, 2016, the town will hold a meeting whereby there will be a discussion about the former police station as a potential swing space for town use whether through renovation or demolition and rebuild.

The superintendent discussed that there are a lot of questions and the need to get council for next steps. SMMA produced a good report but it left us with a lot of questions. Largely, there are political questions that need to be addressed, one being the issue of redistricting and its impact on school sizes and these are choices that the school committee is going to need to make. An outside consultant that specializes in helping with these types of issues will help to ensure that we do not rush and get into pitfalls revolving around politics or technical aspects that are not aligned correctly with moving forward in such a large undertaking as rebuilding/renovation for all of the school buildings.

We still have the MSBA SOI statement for the high school and we need to get a consultant that can help write a strong SOI. We need to make focus meetings work to get the right questions asked and hear teachers' voices of what they really need in their facilities. The consultant will need to have project management expertise and take all of our findings and reports and help guide us as to next steps. The time scope we are looking at is 2-3 months of council using about \$25-50K from the operating budget for financing a consultant. We need help with the decisions that need to be made before we go into the feasibility phase. Big picture issues need to be addressed using the help of council.

It was suggested that a motion be made at the next school committee meeting to support the superintendent in moving forward with the RFP to seek council for next steps.

The meeting adjourned at 8:10PM.

Submitted by Elizabeth Yusem and John Portz