

A BUILDING PROJECT DECISION

By Katherine L. Babson, Jr., Chair of School Building Committee

Last week, the sixteen members of the School Building Committee (SBC) and Permanent Building Committee (PBC) reached another milestone for the High School Project by voting unanimously to pursue a building project based on the “Hub” option, a one-phase, all new construction project, with an estimated cost of \$158 million, and to provide this information to the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA). Based on assessment criteria, extensive studies and much thoughtful deliberation, the members determined that the approach which best meets the current and future needs of the Town of Wellesley in the most cost-effective way is to construct a new high school facility on the current site.

The Hub is aptly named for the central gathering space at the building nexus. This “hub” lies at the front of the school and the primary entrance, off Rice Street. The project yields an entirely new school built on the current parking lot, part of the Seaver Street parcels and the former Selectmen’s land. The new facility is adjacent to the existing facility which remains fully intact during construction.

The SBC has completed thorough reviews of the current High School Building and the alternatives for addressing the deficiencies. The deficiencies of the current facility are great: The state of the physical infrastructure, capacity constraints, lack of ADA and current building code compliance and the fact that the current building does not adequately enable the educational program. Early on, the review of these deficiencies led to the conclusion that there was no simple solution or quick remedy. This prompted the review of a major renovation/addition or all new construction project. Narrowing the alternatives to one has included a comprehensive assessment of priorities, program and mandated requirements, and numerous series of community meetings over the last year to garner resident input. .



In making this final determination, the members of the SBC and PBC systematically worked through a list of assessment criteria. These criteria enabled an assessment of the two options under consideration. General categories were: Site, Education/Program, Building, Construction, and Bottom-line (costs). Results of the summary assessment can be found on the Town website at www.wellesley.ma.gov, under *School Building Committee*. Many of the criteria are quantitative and obvious; others are qualitative and subject to opinion. At a risk of not doing the large body of work justice in this space, a list of the primary factors in making the decision were as follows: The “hub” approach offered a more functional layout for the educational program, less risk to the

town both cost-wise and time-wise, less impact on students and staff during the multiple phases and years of construction and an opportunity to build for the future.

The SBC has forwarded information on this decision and the summary assessment to the MSBA to add to the work already provided to receive partial state funding. The SBC is committed to working in collaboration with the MSBA in this building project effort. At this juncture, the MSBA is reviewing the documentation. They will be making a determination at a future board meeting on the project.

I greatly appreciate the gravity and earnest effort made by each member of the SBC and PBC to provide balanced, thoughtful and conclusive remarks. Many, including myself, articulated a difficult conflict between a strong desire to preserve the 1938 structure and the realization that this was not the optimal approach. In comments on my vote, I concluded that despite my wish to preserve the past, now was the time to forge the future in the best possible way for the students, for the residents and for the town. It is an exciting opportunity for the community to provide a facility, the cornerstone of our educational system, around which the community can rally and take pride in the result.

Over the coming months, efforts will focus on the detailed design and specific layout of the building. Initial efforts will focus on optimizing the square footage where possible and continued work with the neighborhood to limit disruption during construction and to lessen the impact of the building. Additionally, creative design work will begin in earnest to yield a building which will be aesthetically and architecturally progressive. We look forward to engaging all residents as much as possible during these efforts and welcome input at our email: sbc@wellesley.ma.gov.