

## REPORT OF THE HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAM REVIEW ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The six members of the Program Review Advisory Committee (PRC) were appointed in July 2006 by the Town Moderator at the request of the School Committee, with the support of the Board of Selectmen and the Advisory Committee. The PRC's function was to participate in, review and advise on all elements of an in-depth programming project undertaken by the School Committee/Administration that would define the qualitative and quantitative attributes for planning the new/renovated high school. It was envisioned that this work would be completed by the Annual Town Meeting. [A list of the PRC committee members is included at the end of this report.]

The programming project was initiated in Spring 2006 and completed its activities by year-end. Although, as this book goes to press, the final report and recommendations from the School Committee have not been issued, the PRC offers its written assessment of the process and plans to date. In addition, concurrent with Wellesley's programming project, the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) was drafting its new regulations. The final regulations, now issued, call for the formation of a School Building Committee (SBC) to monitor and advise throughout the entire school building process. It made sense for the PRC to issue this report for Town Meeting and to pass along its findings and recommendations to the newly formed SBC. Two members of our committee will serve on the SBC.

### Background

In its January 2006 report, the WHS Facilities Advisory Committee (FAC) recommended that the School Committee develop a needs analysis and a building program, which would consider the current and planned curriculum and teaching approaches specific to Wellesley High School and also would look to innovative ideas and solutions from other schools around the nation. The FAC had pointed out that earlier building options were based primarily on an inventory of existing spaces expanded to reflect enrollment growth and were calculated on prior MSBA guidelines.

The final building program document would include hard data such as adjacency goals, layouts, and square footages; but it would also describe the feel and look of the desired learning environment – from both teacher and student perspectives. This is the type of information and vision that the architects need to design and shape the high school for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### Programming Process

After receiving funding from 2006 Town Meeting, the School Committee hired DeJong, Inc. (Dr. Frank Locker) to assist in developing the Space Program for the future high school. Dr. Locker worked with a Visioning Committee of 30 to 40 teachers, administrators, students and parents to translate academic program requirements, including core curriculum, electives, athletics, library/media, and special education into architectural program requirements. The latter would include number and types of spaces, desired adjacencies, technology requirements, etc. In addition to workshops, some Visioning Committee members visited new and renovated high schools in the area. In the late summer and fall, the School Committee sponsored a series of

public meetings 1) to solicit input on community sharing of future high school facilities, 2) to understand community priorities and concerns, and 3) later to share several feasibility concepts developed out of the programming exercise.

By the end of the process, well over 30 meetings or workshops were held for purposes of discussion and information in regard to a new high school building. PRC members attended all of the foregoing meetings and visits, with the exception of the first DeJong meetings in June. Our goals were to assess the thoroughness of the analysis of requirements, the thoughtful consideration of alternatives, the balance of needs and desires and the consideration of community input. We worked with the Schools on a collaborative basis--asking questions, requesting further information, challenging assumptions and offering suggestions. The School Committee and Administration were always open to our input.

#### Areas for Position Documentation

As the School Committee developed their assumptions for design planning purposes, PRC identified particular areas, which would need a detailed rationale and explanation of alternatives explored. They were:

- Accommodation for projected enrollments and their variability
- Maintenance of the current class schedule vs. expanded hours
- Four-year vs. three-year high school
- 750 student auditorium
- New gymnasium
- Retention of 1938 or other buildings
- Parking requirements

Early on, we urged the School Committee to formulate and publish the values, principles, goals and priorities against which assumptions and decisions would be made.

Although most of the aforementioned documentation has been discussed and formulated, it has not been issued to date.

#### Observations on the Process

1. Developing a shared understanding of future educational goals and translating them into space requirements is a complex, non-linear, iterative process and involves significant investment of time and energy. The visioning teams, particularly faculty and administration, were excited by the opportunity and worked diligently to think creatively about future programming and ideal physical plants.
2. In order to achieve their goals while working within or close to MSBA space guidelines, teaching departments were asked to scale back initial visions for space and did so in a spirit of cooperation and realism. As a result, the final program of space needs, approved by the School Committee on November 7, 2006 represents a reasonable compromise between the bolder possibilities set forth originally by the visioning process participants and the requirements of fiscal responsibility.

3. It became clear that in order to envision and plan for a high school of the future (MSBA guidelines: 50 years), building for flexibility became an overarching principle in the programming process. Flexibility of space was considered in formulating the detailed descriptions of different types of space requirements, as well as in the determination of desired adjacencies for enhanced educational activity.
4. Important concepts also reflected in the programming work were increased collaboration opportunities for teachers, enhanced student-teacher interaction, greater opportunity for community use of space and the fostering of an environment that is welcoming, well-organized, well-lit and well-ventilated.
5. Four feasibility concept drawings were presented in mid-October by Symmes Maini & McKee, Associates at the direction of the School Committee. These generalized drawings reflected maintaining the 1938 building, while applying various levels of space elements to the existing site. Only one of the feasibility concepts met the final educational space program requirements voted subsequently by the School Committee.
6. Any town-wide process necessarily includes learning by doing, iterative cycles of input and preliminary conclusions, timing dictated by other town decisions and processes, and the challenge of being open to public input while also reaching a conclusive recommendation. Overall, we believe that the School Committee led a process that was open, transparent, and responsive.

#### Recommendations—thoughts for the future

We look forward to a final report from the School Committee, which should include:

- statement of educational values, principles, goals and priorities,
- articulation of positions on key assumptions referenced earlier in this report--enrollment, schedule, four-year high school, auditorium, gymnasium, retention of current buildings, parking requirements--all potential major cost drivers,
- comparison of current high school spaces to the envisioned spaces and the explanation for increases/decreases,
- comparison of envisioned spaces to the MSBA space guidelines and the rationale for any significant variances,
- final DeJong report.

We believe that working with the MSBA and adhering to their stated processes represents an opportunity to use what has been accomplished on the programming project and enhance the Town's chances of receiving Commonwealth reimbursement for a portion of a high school building project. Given the breadth of the decisions to be made and the investment required, the formation of a comprehensive, town-wide building committee (SBC) per the new MSBA guidelines makes good sense at this point in the process.

The new SBC should work on determining what the parameters are for retaining certain buildings or constructing new, particularly with regard to the 1938 building. Consideration must be given to the historical value of various aspects of the buildings, the costs of renovating to code

and program requirements, phasing implications and resulting length of disruption, and implications for constructing as “green” a building as possible.

This will necessarily involve the development of alternate feasibility concepts and identification of the pros and cons of the resulting concept designs. Several members of PRC feel strongly that the option of constructing a new high school on the current site should be re-examined as it may ultimately represent a significant savings in time and money, yield a better long-term result, and should be explored as part of the feasibility exercise.

We encourage the new Committee to include a strong role for public input and encourage dialogue among the constituents. Getting citizen participation upfront and fostering a meaningful and constructive dialog is always challenging. However, this has been a valuable component of the process to date and will undoubtedly remain so as the process moves further toward realization of a new school building.

We recognize the challenge inherent in addressing the urgencies of the immediate enrollment growth and pressing building maintenance needs while developing a comprehensive high school construction project on the same site, as well as the importance of determining what resources will be required to accomplish a project of this magnitude. We look forward to the Schools and the new SBC working together to accomplish these critical tasks.

Respectfully submitted,

The Program Advisory Review Committee

Sidney Farnsworth, Chair

Thomas Goemaat\*

Ann Howley

Susan Hurwitz

Nan Langowitz

Cynthia Westerman\*

\*Appointed to the School Building Committee