

**PUBLIC HEARING OF MAY 1, 2019**

Public Hearing of the City Council was held in the City Council Chamber, Room 219, City Hall, on Wednesday, May 1, 2019.

CALL TO ORDER

Council President Scott Joseph Graves called the Public Hearing on the New Elementary School Project to order at 6:00 o'clock p.m.

ATTENDANCE

Eight (8) Councillors were present including President Scott Joseph Graves and Councillors James Boone, Ronald Cormier, Edward Gravel, Karen Hardern, Christine Johnson, James Johnson, and Elizabeth Kazinskas. Councillors Nathan Boudreau, Craig Cormier, and James Walsh were absent.

Others Participating: Mayor Mark Hawke; Kristian Whitsett and Helen Fantini, Jones-Whitsett Architects; Eric Bernardin, P.E., Fuss & O'Neill; Tim Alix, Owner's Project Manager (OPM), Collier's International.

President Graves announced that the purpose of the public hearing is to hear comments from the public about the proposed elementary school project. He outlined guidelines for the hearing.

Kristian Whitsett, Jones-Whitsett Architects, provided an overview of the project by showing a power point presentation, summarized below and attached hereto.

MSBA Process

- The MSBA dictates the School Building Committee's composition and the reimbursement formula – eligible and ineligible costs.
- Gardner reimbursed 80% of eligible costs (amounts to about 60% of total costs).

❖ The Need

- Waterford Street School.
- Elm Street School

❖ Feasibility Study: Educational Envisioning**❖ Guiding Principles****❖ Feasibility Study: Exploring Options**

- Advantages of new PreK-4 at Pearl Street – addresses all need for PreK-4 grades.
- Fully wooded – trails on-site – historically logged.
- To be built at the highest point on the property – stay away from buffer zones.
- Lease expensive option per square foot.

PUBLIC HEARING OF MAY 1, 2019

- State established population configurations.
- ❖ Traffic Study Recommendations
 - Traffic not significantly impacted – multiple families with children currently attending more than one school (vehicle trips).
 - Installation of 2 lanes (exit).
 - Proposed Bus Stop at Dunn Park
 - Construction of full path and sidewalk along roadway to the school.
- ❖ Preliminary Site Plan & Site Analyses
 - Bus circulation
 - Positioning of interior daylight and tree cover.
 - Landfill on the site will be used for terracing the lots.
- ❖ Cross Section through Site and Sketch of Arrival Landscape
 - Focus on natural plantings and materials – wood, stone.
- ❖ Topography and Stormwater
 - Rain gardens on-site.
 - All stormwater treated on-site.
 - Resource protection.
- ❖ What Can Outdoor Learning & Play Look Like?
 - Similar learning and play areas.
- ❖ Floor Plans
 - Comprised of three buildings by grades and core facilities (cafeteria, stage, gym, offices, etc.)
 - PreK and K
 - Grades 1 – 3.
 - Grade 4.
 - Car drop-off loop.
 - Separate PreK parking for parents to walk-in students.
- ❖ What Can a New School Feel Like Inside and Outside?
 - Recently completed projects – show daylight impacts learning – helps to increase math and reading scores.
 - Spaces are formal and informal for learning.
 - Natural materials are used – do not emit gasses and toxic chemicals.

PUBLIC HEARING OF MAY 1, 2019

- ❖ Estimates Construction and Project Costs.
 - Projected costs are only estimates at this point – Estimators based the current costs on schematic designs. Several more estimates will be made during the process. Next estimate anticipated June, 2019.
 - Details outlined in Power Point slides.
- ❖ Current MSBA Projects Cost Comparison
 - Details outlines in Power Point slides.
- ❖ Project Schedule
 - Next submission – July 2019 (for August MSBA Board meeting).
- ❖ Why Act Now?
 - Accessibility
 - Class sizes.
 - Keep Gardner students in Gardner.
 - Maximize efficiencies by keeping students all together.

Amy Doucette, 194 Central Street

- Questioned the ratio of teachers to students in the new school.
- Questioned whether there are other grants available to assist with the project

Superintendent Pellegrino

- Student-Teacher ratios expected to remain the same.

Tim Alix, Owner's Project Manager (OPM), Collier's International.

- Green technology rebates – for higher efficiencies.

Mayor Hawke

- NGRID could contribute for buildings over 100,000 s.f.

Anthony P. Kraskouskas, Jr., 222 Bickford Hill Road

- Cited declining birth and student populations for many decades.
- Gardner has only an elderly population to pay for the school.
- Cited the wet conditions of the site.

Anthony Ruggiero, 429 Parker Street

- Concerned with wet conditions on the site. Not enough retainage for Stump Pond and Dunn Pond. Erosion concerns.
- Displacement of water as a resulting from excavation, land clearing, blasting, etc.

PUBLIC HEARING OF MAY 1, 2019

Eric Bernardin, P.E., Fuss & O'Neill

- School to be constructed on highest ground.
- Must meet EPA/DEP/ConCom regulations/guidelines.
- Can only put back into the environment what is there presently (roof water, rain gardens).
- Sediment treatment.
- Detention basins to be installed – basins required to be empty of water within 72 hours.
- School campus will be 700 feet from Pearl Street and 1,000 to 1,200 to front door.

Paul DeMeo, 9 Willis Road

- Concerned that the Gardner Conservation Commission has not been involved in the process to this point.
- The proposed school is within the 500 acres Dunn Pond Watershed, as is the Middle School and the Trailer Park off Pearl Street.
- Cited dredging of Dunn Pond in 1983 the Report addressed Dunn Pond and Stump Pond and filtering water. The dike is not doing its job. The Report recommended that Stump Pond be turned over to the State. No maintenance on the dike has been done.
- Concerned that Gardner just applied for a new EPA Permit and all water draining into Stump Pond is not part of Gardner's application.
- Foster Brook (included in the State Report) – two legs feed Stump Pond on north side of Pearl Street. The proposed access road to the School will cross a perennial brook – protected under the Massachusetts Rivers Act.
- Concerned if a bridge will be constructed that will span Foster Brook.
- Concerned that the new school will have room for expansion due to student growth.
- Cited the loss of neighborhood schools.
- Questioned access – culverts or bridges?
- How will rainwater gardens function?
- Gardner noted for poor maintenance.
- Expressed concern with the Engineering Reports - he never received a response to his communications to the engineers.

Helen Fantini, Jones-Whitsett Architects

- Concerning ability to expand – MSBA requires that the ability to expand be shown to them – some ability to expand academic wings – small group rooms are paired, so can be broken up to create other classrooms within the existing building design.

Eric Bernardin, P.E., Fuss & O'Neill

- Two crossings – Main access road from Pearl Street and GMS access road - concrete culverts with environmental features.

PUBLIC HEARING OF MAY 1, 2019

Superintendent Pellegrino

- School Choice (out) have increased in the past, but decreased this year to 291.
- Goal is to keep Gardner kids in Gardner schools. Students leave elementary grades because of building conditions.

Mayor Hawke

- Conservation Agent walked the proposed site.
- The City has to follow the rules – Planning Board and Conservation Commission review the plans later.
- City under MS4 Permit.
- About a dozen students currently walk to Elm Street School.

Amy Doucette, 194 Central Street

- Recommended that more effort be made to improve the educational system and the district is working to improve transportation options.
- Cited concerns with sending students to out-of-district schools. She noted that the Perkins School tuition is \$90,000 to \$100,000 per year.
- Noted that the existing school buildings need to be brought up-to-code and noted a past lead issue at Waterford Street School.
- The new school would offer local connectivity with the teachers, that the priority would be on education and provide reasons for students to stay in the Gardner Public Schools.

Steven Rockwood, 310 Pearl Street

- The construction of the Middle School added water to the Pond.
- In favor of new infrastructure and a new school – not opposed to the proposed site, but to do it right.
- Cited a blind curve at 300 Pearl Street and concern about vehicle crashes at the school's entrance.
- Location creates problems for abutters to enter and exit driveways,
- Questioned security measures for the school site and abutters, as well as maintaining privacy for the abutters.
- Cited visibility of MWCC's windmills when trees were removed.
- Water now in his backyard that was not there before – neighboring properties water flowing downhill to his property.
- Noted claim of former “dump site.” This area is away from the proposed school site – stopped dumping about 1930 – consisted of bottles, dishware, rusted pails.

PUBLIC HEARING OF MAY 1, 2019

Kristian Whitsett, Jones-Whitsett Architects

- Access through from door – monitored by the Office.
- Security cameras will monitor all areas. Integrated with the Police Department.
- Play areas – all fenced.
- School District determine its lighting needs.
- No evidence of contamination on the site – only household products.
- Report found no evidence of spraying.
- Power line Easement – removed.

Council President Graves

- Will there be Phase II Environmental Report?

Kristian Whitsett, Jones-Whitsett Architects

- Could be done if environmental issues are raised.

Eric Bernardin, P.E., Fuss & O'Neill

- Final site plan not completed.
- 300' to 400' of mature trees will shield the abutters from the school.

Alan Preliasco, 300 Pearl Street

- The proposed road to the School abuts his property.
- Concerned with the proposed traffic pattern – difficulty exiting his driveway now.
- Asked that the entrance road be relocated away from his property.
- Cited 2 years of noise and pollution during construction.

Tim Alix, Owner's Project Manager (OPM), Collier's International.

- The proposed access road is the most logical place.
- All relevant issues will be kept in mind during project design, etc.

James Kiewel, 345 Elm Street

- Questioned whether the City could afford the new school and whether it would affect staffing and pay.
- Stated that Gardner is a dead City – no population growth.
- The City will be building a school in the middle of a swamp and concerned with mosquitoes and mold because it will be in a swamp or watershed.
- Questioned the length of time that the designer is responsible for the school's construction. How long will they be on the hook for their mistakes?
- The modern practice is to reuse and repurpose.
- Questioned whether the City plans to tear down the old buildings.

PUBLIC HEARING OF MAY 1, 2019

Mayor Hawke

- Noted that Gardner is one of only 17 communities in Massachusetts that never have passed a property tax override or a debt exclusion. One is for operating and the other for capital spending.
- People are moving to Gardner every day because of affordability. More adults, fewer kids over the year.
- In the next Fiscal Year, Gardner will spend over \$1M above Net School Spending.
- He presented a pro forma (tax plan) to the Finance Committee for funding the new elementary school, one that will not affect staffing.

Eric Bernardin, P.E., Fuss & O'Neill

- The project design will consider all uses. The school will be built 80' to 90' higher in elevation compared to Pearl Street.

Mayor Hawke

- Wetlands flowing constantly.
- Helen Mae Sauter School will be used in the fall for Administrative Offices and GALT.
- Waterford Street School is located in a swamp. The Boys & Girls Clubs have expressed interest in using the pre-school portion of the facility (on a slab). The remaining two-story structure could be demolished.
- Once Elm Street School is vacated, the Administrative Offices and GALT could take over the building.
- Prospect School Building could be abandoned by the City and then used by Collaboratives.

James Kiewel, 345 Elm Street

- Concerned about snow removal on the new school site.

Kristian Whitsett, Jones-Whitsett Architects

- Will address the snow removal process with the City.

Mayor Hawke

- The City utilizes green salt, which is better for the environment and melts at lower temperatures.

Superintendent Pellegrino

- Currently, 291 Gardner children are "choiced-out" to other school districts at a cost of \$5,000 to \$10,000 per student or \$60,000 for SPED.
- Currently, \$1.7M leaves the School District budget for choice students.

PUBLIC HEARING OF MAY 1, 2019

- \$1M is taken from school maintenance and operations to support ELL and low-income students.
- The District is looking for space for a school psychologist.

Mayor Hawke

- Acknowledged that there would be errors during design and construction, noting that there will be hundreds of pages of construction documents and change orders.

Richard LaBonte, 169 Summer Street

- Concerned that there is the lack of a traffic study.
- Stated that Pearl Street is a State Highway, Route 101, and that the City must work with the State concerning speed limits, curb cuts (entrance), etc.

Eric Bernardin, P.E., Fuss & O'Neill

- Stated that the section of Pearl Street where the School would be constructed is City-controlled and not under Mass DOT.
- A traffic study was performed and the design is in a preliminary state. All traffic situations are included in the Study and it will be posted on the City's website.

Anthony P. Kraskouskas, Jr., 222 Bickford Hill Road

- In 2012, 180 students left Gardner. Now, 300 left.

Superintendent Pellegrino

- This is the first year in the past 2½ years that the number of choice students decreased.
- First year since 2003 that the number of SPED students decreased.
- The focus is to keep the kids in Gardner schools.

Scott Michael Graves, 92 Ash Street (not the City Council President!)

- Concerned with water management on the proposed school site.
- Has not seen the feasibility studies for the rejected school sites.

Mayor Hawke

- Elm Street School (ESS) was considered for renovation.
- Addition to ESS would have required to cut 15' to 20' into the playground (hill).
- Stone Field would have been taken to construct 200 parking spaces.
- For 2 to 3 years, students would have to attend ESS during construction and then for the earlier grades to move in.
- Waterford Street School would be costly to renovate and maintain -almost as much as constructing a new school. Then there is the water!
- Matthews Street Site (near the Court House) – Wetlands conditions.

PUBLIC HEARING OF MAY 1, 2019

Tim Alix, Owner's Project Manager (OPM), Collier's International.

- The Architect also looked at the athletic fields behind the Middle School.

Mayor Hawke

- Traffic concerns – adding 600 more students to the site – a nightmare.
- Few walkers to the Pearl Street site.
- Synergy with the Pearl Street site – presence of Watkins Field and access road to GMS and GHS – a second agrees created.

Erin Kiewel, 345 Elm Street

- Questioned the life of the new school.
- Concerns with crosswalks, sidewalks, and stop signs.
- Would there be a Library in the School?

Kristian Whitsett, Jones-Whitsett Architects

- State requires life of the school to be 50 years. The Architects propose 75 years.
- There are plans to house a Library/Media Center in the new school.

Debra Eckler, 12 Moran Street

- New resident in Gardner.
- Glad to see that there are plans to reuse the old school buildings.

Charles Hodgkinson, 148 Oak Street

- When the new school is completed, water patterns will change.
- Sewer/water system must be designed to prevent future earth movement.
- Concerns for a single access road when the school first opens – ingress and egress.
- Suggested one road for ingress and a second road for egress.
- Potential for local population growth with advent of commuter rail locating further west.
- Local property values have been increasing.

Mayor Hawke

- Regarding the access road to the Elementary School and GMS and GHS – starting and ending times are staggered.

Kathleen (Woodcome) Vautour, Fitchburg

- Has family residing on Pearl Street.
- Concerned that water will run downhill and that the sump pumps run a lot now.
- The area is built on natural springs.

PUBLIC HEARING OF MAY 1, 2019

- Noted the current traffic situation at the intersection of Pearl, Elm, and Green Streets caused by the schools, as well as MWCC and Heywood Hospital traffic.

Laureen Peabody, 3 Jackson Park

- Questioned impact on programs at Dunn Park.
- Questioned traffic snafus on Pearl Street.
- Cited environmental concerns.
- Questioned ability to evacuate the entire area in the event of an emergency.
- Noted that the area is isolated.
- The new school project is the most expensive option.
- Questioned if something is found during construction.

Kristian Whitsett, Jones-Whitsett Architects

- More geotechnical studies would be conducted in the event of any findings.
- A Contingency is included the project budget for unanticipated conditions.

Ian Flaherty, 441 Parker Street

- The goal is to attract younger families to Gardner.
- Noted safety due to familiarity with the area of the schools – from Elementary to Middle School to High School.
- Questioned whether MSBA funding would be affected is the project is delayed.

Tim Alix, Owner's Project Manager (OPM), Collier's International.

- MSBA wants the facility to be where the City wants it to be.
- 120 days for local site approval.

Councillor James Johnson

- Noted that it is a long process.
- If the Council moves it along, then it will still be 3 years to completion.

The Hearing concluded at 8:30 p.m.

Accepted by the City Council: