

BOARD OF SELECTMEN MEETING

March 15, 2021

Chairman Jonathan R. Eaton called the meeting to order at 7:15 p.m. This meeting was held via ZOOM. Present were Selectmen Gregory B. Bendel, Kevin A. Caira, Gary B. DePalma and Jomarie F. O'Mahony. Also present was Town Manager Jeffrey M. Hull.

Chairman Eaton thanked IT Director John O'Neil and WCTV for facilitating the meeting.

Chairman Eaton stated that pursuant to Governor Baker's COVID-19 Orders Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c. 30A, § 18, imposing strict limitations on the number of people that may gather in one place, members of the public who wish to watch and listen to the meeting may do so in the following manner: WCTV (Channel 9 – Comcast xFinity; Channel 37 Verizon FiOS, and live stream wctv.org). This meeting of the Wilmington Board of Selectmen is being conducted via remote participation. **No in-person attendance of members of the public will be permitted**, but every effort will be made to ensure that the public can adequately access the proceedings in real time, via technological means. Members of the public who would like to listen to this meeting while in progress may also do so via telephone by dialing 1-646-558-8656 and enter meeting ID: 890 6488 9712 then press # and press # again at the next voice prompt. Members of the public attending this meeting virtually will be allowed to make comments if they wish to do so, during the portion of the meeting designated for public comment, by following the steps previously noted then press *9 on their telephone keypad. This will notify the meeting host that the caller wishes to speak. All callers using this feature will be placed in queue in the order they entered the prompt. In the event that, despite our best efforts, we are not able to provide for real-time access, we will post a record of this meeting on the Town's website as soon as we are able.

Chairman Eaton asked meeting participants to rise and he led the pledge of allegiance.

TREASURY WARRANTS

There were none.

MINUTES

There were none.

DR. GLENN BRAND, WILMINGTON SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENT, RE: OVERVIEW OF THE TOWN'S APPLICATION TO THE MASSACHUSETTS SCHOOL BUILDING AUTHORITY (MSBA) INCLUDING THE STATE OF CURRENT ELEMENTARY SCHOOLING, THE TOWN'S FACILITIES MASTER PLAN, THE SCHOOL SYSTEM'S FACILITY NEEDS, THE MSBA APPLICATION AND THE NEXT STEPS IN THE PROCESS OF BUILDING WITH THE MSBA

Participating in this meeting, in addition to Dr. Brand, were Bryan Perry, Finance Director/Town Accountant; Paul Ruggiero, Assistant Superintendent of Administration and Finance; George Hooper, Superintendent of Public Buildings; and School Committee members Mary Jane Byrnes, Jesse Fennelly, David Ragsdale and Jason Samaha.

Dr. Brand thanked Chairman Eaton and the Board of Selectmen for the opportunity to be present on behalf of the school system. He stated that he and Town Manager Hull have been working to bring focus to the opportunity before the community as it relates to the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA). He noted that he has made the presentation twice within the last week, once to the School Committee and once to the Finance Committee. He stated that it was

recommended that, because members of the Board of Selectmen have seen the presentation previously, it be modified. Dr. Brand stated that a number of the slides that were included in the other presentations have been omitted. He advised that the full presentation will be made available to the public for those who would like to see it.

Selectman Caira asked Dr. Brand who asked him to modify the presentation and stated that not everyone may have seen the presentation. Dr. Brand advised that it was recommended through a couple of conversations including with the Town Manager, the Chairman of the School Committee as well as with Chairman of the Board of Selectmen. Selectman Caira expressed his preference that the full presentation be given this evening or reschedule to another time for the full presentation to be made.

Chairman Eaton advised that Dr. Brand will present this evening. He stated that it is an evolving process and there will be time for questions and comments at the conclusion of the presentation. Selectman Caira expressed his objection to proceeding with the modified presentation. He opined that Chairman Eaton ought not to have made the decision to condense the presentation. Selectman Caira raised issue that the Board of Selectmen was not provided with a copy of the presentation. Town Manager Hull emphasized that there was no effort to derail the process and noted that there were two presentations made last week. Both presentations can be reviewed by the public through WCTV's archives. He stated that the concern he raised is that the presentation had been done twice and both presentations were identical and because members of the Board had already seen the presentation rather than a third presentation the thought was to condense it and focus on options that the Town has no interest in pursuing.

Dr. Brand stated that the purpose of the presentations is to ensure the community has clarity of this opportunity as it appears with MSBA. Ultimately, the Town is seeking feedback on the options to provide to the MSBA at the end of March.

Dr. Brand reported that the Town of Wilmington currently has eight (8) schools which house students in Grades Pre-K through 12. He provided information on the age of the facilities with Wildwood School being the oldest having been built in 1955. The newest school facility is the Wilmington High School which the Town began occupying in 2015 and the Wilmington Middle School which the Town began using in 2000. He stated that considerations of whether to contemplate new construction or renovation in contrast to maintaining current facilities. Public Buildings Superintendent George Hooper provided information to Dr. Brand regarding the projected costs, over the next seven years, of capital needs for the six (6) elementary schools is approximately \$10 million for items such as roof replacement, floor replacement, window replacement and boiler replacements. He noted that the \$10 million will not change the interior of the buildings or modernize the buildings.

Dr. Brand stated that the Master Plan, completed in 2018, did not focus on just the school facilities and noted there was a specific proposal for school consolidation that emerged from that study to help improve the situation with schools given that there are six aging schools. The reasons for school consolidation included the reduction of overall operating costs, operating new but fewer facilities and minimization of school transitions. The study noted multiple times that people are concerned with the number of transitions from one building to another from Pre-K to 12th grade. This fact to consider is time to completion would be a benefit of consolidation and consolidation enhances the possibility that the Town will benefit from future MSBA funding.

Dr. Brand provided an update on the status of the application process. The Superintendent of Schools was authorized by the Board of Selectmen and School Committee to submit the Statements of Interest (SOIs) in April 2020. SOIs were submitted for all six elementary schools with the Wildwood School being designated as the priority project. Dr. Brand stated that the MSBA received 71 CORE SOIs during the 2020 process and 30 of those were recommended to move forward in the process. Dr. Brand explained that there are two programs with the MSBA one is the CORE program which refers specifically to new building projects and the other is an Accelerated Repair Program for schools and communities who wish to update the envelope of a building. Wildwood Elementary School was selected as one of 15 Senior Studies. The MSBA contacted the School Department in January 2021 to advise that the Wildwood School was selected for Senior Study.

Dr. Brand provided information relative to the Senior Study explaining that Senior Studies examine the applicable enrollment, program and/or facility issues as identified in the SOI, visits are conducted by the MSBA staff members and senior architects with extensive knowledge of building systems and educational programs. A Senior Study is not an invitation to work with the MSBA but is part of MSBA's due diligence. The Wildwood study was held virtually in February and a video depicting the Wildwood School in detail was provided to the MSBA. The timeline has been adjusted due to the COVID pandemic.

MSBA recognizes that Wilmington has a tremendous need for assistance given that the community has six very outdated elementary schools; school consolidation not only makes sense for the Town situation but was identified in the Town's Facilities Master Plan Report and Wilmington is a strong partner given MSBA's recent experience with Wilmington High School. In addition, MSBA recognizes Wilmington's many possible consolidation options but would like to get a sense of which options the community does not want to explore.

Dr. Brand provided information relative to reimbursement with MSBA. He noted that it is the only grant program to offset school construction costs in the state. The exact level of reimbursement varies by community and is determined by a number of factors in a complex formula.

Dr. Brand advised that if Wilmington hopes to be seriously considered for the FY20 grant program it must provide MSBA with additional information.

Upon further consideration and feedback from various committees, he and the Town Manager don't believe a Town survey makes sense at this time given the recommendation of the Facilities Master Plan and benefits associated with school consolidation. The School Department wants to clearly convey their position to the MSBA by the end of the month.

Dr. Brand reviewed options Wilmington is not interested in studying including replacing the Wildwood School as a stand-alone Pre-K-K, or any option that does not include Pre-K, and it does not seem prudent to keep the same number of buildings. He provided options that Wilmington would consider studying if invited in to the program which would be a Pre-K through 3rd grade option for the north side of town or a Pre-K through 5th grade option for the north side of town.

Dr. Brand stated that it is important to note that if the Town is fortunate to be invited into the program, this presentation is only the beginning for public outreach. None of the projects may go forward without the support of the community. If the Town is not invited in this year, the opportunity is there to apply in 2021.

The Town is in the process of developing a Request for Proposals (RFP) to assist in studying best options for students, staff and programs of the Wildwood School.

Chairman Eaton thanked Dr. Brand for the presentation and he provided context on how the Town got to this point.

Chairman Eaton commented that he is comfortable in stating that he is not interested in constructing one building for all elementary students as he believes it would be cost prohibitive and would compromise the Town's ability to address other capital needs. He is also not interested in rehabilitating the six elementary schools with the current configuration. Chairman Eaton asked Dr. Brand to confirm MSBA's request of the Town.

Selectman Caira asked to clarify Chairman Eaton's comment as he did not hear the option of one elementary school in the presentation. He asked why it was mentioned. Selectman Caira stated that he saw new slides this evening and expressed his concern that it was not fair to the School Committee or to the public. He stated that he had difficulty following the presentation with the packet that was provided to the Selectmen.

Selectman Bendel thanked Dr. Brand and the School Committee. He expressed his pleasure that the MSBA has shown interest in wanting to work with Wilmington again. He believes it is a great opportunity and he hopes the Town does not miss out. He stated that residents do not want to take on multi-project debt at one time. Residents like the idea of rallying for a new Wildwood School and suggests building community consensus to focus on the one school. Selectman Bendel commented that there is a sense of urgency as Public Buildings Superintendent has indicated that the Wildwood School will not last more than five years. Although he has advocated for a North Wilmington substation, there is not a grant program available to the Town to accomplish that project.

Selectman DePalma noted that he was in agreement with Selectman Bendel's comments. He stated that the community does not want to incur the expense of remodeling or building additions given the fiscal climate. He stated that the Wildwood School is in deplorable condition and it is embarrassing that new students have to learn there.

Selectman O'Mahony opined that there are too many transitions and supporting six older schools does not make sense. She expressed concern relative to the social component for children. Selectman O'Mahony stated that other, different needs have been identified and opined those needs need to be addressed and to figure out a way to accomplish that.

Selectman Caira commented that this evening's presentation was different than expected. The other boards were provided with several options. He opined it was unfair and that the Selectmen were not provided with the presentation in advance so that they could make notes.

Selectman Caira stated that he is in favor of a new elementary school whether at Wildwood Street or Glen Road. He recalled the Cecil Group making comment that Wildwood Street was a great location for a new school and Selectman Caira opined that it would solve a lot of issues. He asked Dr. Brand his philosophy on transitions. Dr. Brand advised that he arrived in Wilmington at the conclusion of the facilities study and read the comments regarding the impact on students and on families when they move to a new facility. Reducing transitions is felt to be better for students and their families. Selectman Caira opined that sometimes transitions are good for kids, depending upon how it is approached. Selectman Caira commented relative to a survey that reported 60.4% of educators support transitions while 26.1 do not.

Selectman Caira asked Town Manager Hull whether he has spoken to the Owners Project Manager (OPM) for the Senior Center and Town Hall/School Administration about what is happening with the schools and was advised he has. Selectman Caira opined that the Town Hall

could play a pivotal location as Town Hall was a former school. He explained that rather than renting modules, the current Town Hall could be made available while a new Wildwood School is built but P3 needs to understand all three components taking place.

Selectman Caira stated that Town Meeting in June appropriated \$80 million for Dr. Brand to have a feasibility/planning study with the approval of the School Committee. He opined that there have been many studies and spending tax payer dollars on another study was not necessary as it is agreed a new school is needed. Chairman Eaton clarified that the appropriation was for \$80,000.

Town Manager Hull clarified that the Senior Study was intended for MSBA to get further information on the Town's current desires/goals with respect to SOI submitted. The \$80,000 appropriation was recognition that the Wildwood School cannot stay in its current state indefinitely and the goal was to identify the most cost effective options.

Selectman Caira asked Dr. Brand if he intended to submit options the Town does not want to the MSBA. Dr. Brand advised that the Town must provide the MSBA what options the Town does not want them to study if the Town is invited in. The MSBA is not looking for options that the Town wants them to study, they want to know unequivocally which options the Town does not want them to study because they want to focus their resources and time and the MSBA wants projects to succeed. Even if invited in, there is not one singular option that will lead to a new facility and the residents will have a very important vote in whatever project moves forward.

Selectman Caira questioned the option listed as one the Town does not want to consider "Replacing the Wildwood as a standalone PreK-K facility". He asked whether the survey was sent out and was advised that it had not at this time.

Selectman Caira inquired how many public meetings have been held with residents to determine what they want. Dr. Brand stated none but understands from conversations with MSBA that is not out of the norm. He emphasized that if invited into the MSBA program, there will be public meetings to allow for community engagement in a more comprehensive way.

Selectman Caira asked Dr. Brand what he was looking for from the Board of Selectmen. He asked whether the MSBA was looking for a vote of support of the governmental body. Dr. Brand stated that he would like to report to the MSBA that the interest is there for consolidation. Dr. Brand asked that Wildwood School remain the priority project as there is no question that the building needs attention. Any potential project will have to include the Wildwood.

Selectman Caira commented that he is in favor of a new elementary school at the Wildwood and further that the Shawsheen, Woburn Street, North and West schools become Pre-K through Grade 5 thereby having five neighborhood elementary schools with no transitions. The Boutwell could then be recommissioned.

Selectman Caira asked when Dr. Brand will be submitting a letter to the MSBA and what the letter will contain. Dr. Brand explained that they have not gotten to that point and he is not sure that the MSBA is looking for anything in writing. He advised that the MSBA is aware of the outreach meetings being made to the leadership boards.

Town Manager Hull stated that what has been learned this evening is that several members of the Board seemed to be more inclined to replace the Wildwood School, perhaps in its current configuration without a change in grade level. He opined that would be counter to consolidation. Selectman Caira disputed that he said he wanted the configuration to remain the same. He stated that he is in favor of a PreK-3 or PreK-5.

Mr. Hooper stated that a lot of work and effort was put into the presentations. He said that whatever the Town decides, the Public Buildings Department is committed to maintaining the building to keep it functioning. Information was provided through the Facilities Master Plan and he understands the concern for the taxpayer and he is in agreement with the consolidation of the schools.

Bryan Perry offered comment that, from a financial standpoint, there are ramifications in trying to determine a long-term cohesive plan in solving the needs of the school buildings.

Chairman Eaton advised, as a point of order, that it is an exception to the Open Meeting Law that attendance by a quorum of a public body at a meeting of another public body that has complied with notice requirements of the Open Meeting Law. The Town is in compliance so long as visiting members communicate only by open participation in the meeting and do not deliberate.

Chairman Eaton offered Mr. Ruggiero as Assistant Superintendent of Administration and Finance, as well as members of the School Committee, the opportunity to comment. He noted that Dr. Bryson reached out to him and advised she had a work commitment that prohibited her attendance this evening.

Mr. Ruggiero thanked the Board of Selectmen for listening and participating in the meeting, noting the presentation contained a lot of good information. He noted that if it had been normal times and not during a pandemic, the Town would have been invited in already. The MSBA is simply seeking additional information.

Selectman DePalma wanted to clarify comments he made earlier and stated that he would like the Wildwood School to be rebuilt as an elementary school.

Selectman Bendel asked Mr. Perry questions regarding the Town's debt. Mr. Perry advised that there is a total of \$40.7 million in debt service owed through FY 2037. He noted that a majority of that, \$33.6 million, may be attributed to the high school. Selectman Bendel stated that \$40.7 million in debt is hard to ignore and to combine that with other needs of the Town. He expressed his appreciation for comments made by members of the School Committee and Finance Committee at the previous presentations.

Mary Jane Byrnes, School Committee, wanted to clarify the review of transitions and opined that it is not a transition of convenience, they impact the education of the students from school to school. Buildings are not just municipal buildings, they are learning centers and part of the tools that educators teach with. Mr. Hooper and his employees have been tremendous in making the building function.

David Ragsdale, School Committee, opined that the members of the Town and School team who worked on the MSBA project were put in a tough position of having to submit SOIs for the six schools. He acknowledged that it was a tremendous amount of work in a short period of time.

COMMUNICATIONS

There were none.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Chairman Eaton asked if there were members of the public wishing to comment and was advised there were not. Chairman Eaton reminded viewers of the process to make public comment and advised that he would wait a moment in the event someone wishes to comment.

Chairman Eaton asked Mr. O’Neil whether there were any callers wishing to speak and after confirming no additional speakers he declared Public Comments closed and continued with the remainder of the agenda.

Town Manager Hull asked to address a question that was raised earlier regarding the options listed in the current presentation and replacing the Wildwood School as a stand-alone PreK-K. He stated his understanding from the comments that at least three members are interested in the prospect of replacing the school in the current location as a PreK-3 or PreK-5. He asked whether the other members had an opinion of replacing the Wildwood School as a PreK-K. Chairman Eaton stated that he would be opposed to replacing the school with the same configuration. Selectman Bendel stated that he had avoided the question because he does not have a clear answer, he is open to all configurations.

Each member of the Board agreed that they do not know what the appropriate configuration would be, that more discussion could be had at a later time and that the Wildwood School remain the priority project.

Selectman Bendel requested that this evening’s presentation be forwarded to members of the Board by Dr. Brand. Dr. Brand indicated his willingness to provide the presentation to Town Manager Hull for distribution to the Board.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

There was none.

NEW BUSINESS

There was none.

IMPORTANT DATES

Town Manager Hull reviewed important dates including:

- March 16 – Finance Committee/Planning Board Joint Public Hearing Relative to the Warrant for the Annual Town Meeting – Virtual – 7:00 p.m.
- March 18 – Finance Committee – Virtual – 7:00 p.m.
- March 22 – Board of Selectmen – Virtual – 7:00 p.m.
- April 3 – Brush Drop-Off – Old Main Street – 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
- April 5 – Last Day to Register to Vote at the Annual Town Election and Town Meeting
Town Clerk’s Office Open 8:30 a.m. – 8:00 p.m.
- April 7 – Brush Drop-Off – Old Main Street – 8:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.
- April 10 – Brush Drop-Off – Old Main Street – 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
- April 12 – Board of Selectmen – Town Hall – Room 9 – 7:00 p.m.
- April 14 – Brush Drop-Off – Old Main Street – 8:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.
- April 17 – Brush Drop-Off – Old Main Street – 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
- April 19 – Town Offices Closed – *Patriot’s Day*
- April 21 – Brush Drop-Off – Old Main Street – 8:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.
- April 24 – Brush Drop-Off – Old Main Street – 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
- April 24 – Annual Town Election – Polls Open 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.

April 26 – Board of Selectmen – Town Hall – Room 9 – 7:00 p.m.

May 1 – Annual Town Meeting – 9:00 a.m.
Shriner's Auditorium, 99 Fordham Road

SALUTE TO SERVICE

Chairman Eaton recognized Carl Guarino, a Vietnam Veteran who served September 23, 1966 to September 18, 1968 in the US Marine Corps 1st Combat Engineer Battalion. Mr. Guarino earned Vietnam Service and Campaign Medals, National Defense Medal and passed away January 23, 2019 as a result of exposure to Agent Orange.

A motion was made by Selectman DePalma, seconded by Selectman Bendel and by the affirmative roll call vote of all, it was

VOTED: That the Board of Selectmen adjourn.

Meeting adjourned at 9:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Recording Secretary