

November Community Forum Notes

ABRSD CT Douglas Elementary School Building Project
Community Forum Notes
Community Forums held on 11/27/18 & 11/29/18 at the RJ Grey Library

Tuesday Community Forum – 11/27/18

(counted 60 people present)

Peter Light gave an introduction. Gave an update on the group on the process thus far. Stated that the focus tonight is to update the community/gather feedback on site selection.

Arrowstreet Presentation (led by Emily)

- Overview of the feasibility study process (shows the process Skanska diagram)
- Overview of current sites
- Overview of the educational visioning process
- Overview of site development

Q: Traffic assessment or study?

A: Yes, there will be but some of that data already exists from the master plan done by Dore & Whittier.

Q: I want to understand the net-0 / what soil tests have been done Conant and Gates?

A: JD - Goal around net-0 energy is focused around making sure we are producing as much as we are consuming. We are targeting a low EUI, which will give us the best chance in hitting net-0. We still need to figure out where 4% of the waste will go. We also will try our best to collect rain water.

A: Emily – we will also be conscious of construction site waste

Q: Are test pits scheduled?

A: They have not been performed to date, but they are in the progress of being scheduled.

Follow up Q: So, you don't know if these sites are feasible?

Q: How will you handle the Conant intermittent stream and ledge issues?

A: We've been working with Acton engineers to address the Conant stream. We are also identifying wetlands currently. Where we see visual ledges (in the west) we don't plan to build there. We will avoid ledge where we need to.

Q: Is there an option to keep the pre-k out of the project to conserve the footprint given the constraint of the sites.

A: The conditions of the pre-school are currently not ideal. We will be considering the cost of including the pre-k but it is important to note that the MSBA will reimbursement for the pre-k if it is a part of this project.

Q: Do the schools need to be physically connected to be considered a twin school/ for reimbursement?

A: Yes

Q: What will happen to the existing Douglas school after the program moves to a new building?

A: If we build on the Conant site we need to decide what to do. We will not leave a vacant school. Which is a School Committee decision. It could potentially be the next site for a new school project.

- If Gates, then ball field / swing space
- If Conant, then need to determine next use of Douglas bldg.
- We will have a plan for the site by the time we come to the town for a vote

Q: When does the committee decide on the site?

A: December 19th

Q: Will traffic studies be weighed in for the December 19th decision?

A: We have the studies from the previous traffic plan. We are cognizant of the post office. We will not have projected trips.

Q: If there is a later off-property traffic impact in relation to the project will MSBA reimburse to mitigate?

A: No. The MSBA does not reimburse for offsite improvements. It will be at the district expense.

A: Peter: The improvements are up to the state government for approval.

Q: What is the current parking proposal?

A: The plans allow for parking spaces for staff and guests. If the new consolidated building is on the Gates property, some parking will be on the Douglas parcel of land.

Q: Does the use of Arlington Street make Gates a more attractive site?

A: The busses will follow a single route (turn around)

Comment: Douglas is one of the only schools in a neighborhood where students can walk and ride bike to schools. Supports the Gates site for this reason.

Comment: Concerned with how many students would need to be bused from Gates area.

Q: What's the architects' perspective on the most favorable site?

A: We can build a beautiful site on Conant or Gates. Douglas is challenging.

Q: What is the cost benefit for net-0 paying off? If you built an ugly school that performed better, would you do it?

A: Emily - Taking ascetics out of it, your students deserve a school that has great air quality, access to natural light etc. Education has changed. It is more about the individual. Closed buildings need to open up to accommodate this new way of teaching. Our goal is to work with the community to build a school that is right for you.

A: Larry - Some of our buildings have been called ugly. We want to design a school that creates a sense of space. It makes more sense to build new. You will get a better-quality building.

A: Peter – this process and this team is about checks and balances. The SBC will be evaluating the estimates. We will keep a close eye at the return on energy efficiency.

Q: As a rep of the youth softball committee in town, happy to see the new fields in the design. How long do you think we'd be without the fields?

A: Chuck- It would be about 3 years without the softball fields.

A: Mary – we will help the community find alternate fields

Q: What is the full project timeline? Can we start a new project as this one is in progress?

A: About 7 years. The MSBA will only participate in one district project at a time.

Q: Where is the extra square footage coming from in the proposed project besides the pre-school?

A: We need to keep the two separate schools programed to their needs. There is also addition of special ed classrooms and to create classrooms for the projected enrollment.

Comment: Regardless of the sites, there is a sense of community surrounding Douglas. We walk to school and there is a sense of pride. Would like the committee to consider the impact of the Douglas families.

Q: In favor of Douglas because parents don't want to send students on long bus rides and crossing Route 2.

Comment: The busses will get backed up at a twin school because they are arriving at the same time. Supports the Conant site as it will allow for traffic mitigation.

Q: Is the survey our vehicle to say we prefer the one site over the other? Should we email our concerns?

A: There is a section in the survey where you can select a preferred site. The survey is the preferred vehicle to collect input.

Q: Preference for Gates site. Where would a sewer go / can we potentially tie up with new Acton sewer project?

A: Peter - unsure currently.

A: JD - During SD we will estimate the cost between construction water hooking up to the town project / vs. having onsite septic.

A: Chuck - We will present the project as if the sewer project does not exist because of if this sewer project does not pan out, the school will not be able to open.

Q: Has there been population studies? If we build a twin school, could that school host all three schools?

A: It won't fit three. There have been studies on the twin school scenario.

Q: What are the main goals of the survey? What outreach is happening for young families?

A: The goal of the survey is to get community input on the site selection, and to get input on other design features. The survey will go out via email to a list we have that includes all of the area preschools. We will take the input from these forums and the survey to the SBC. We will also be taking the cost and site information and the committee will decide on the site.

Q: Will the survey layout the pros and cons of each scenario?

A: Yes, we can put together a fact sheet to set the stage for the survey

Q: Can you add a question in the survey of “have you attended a forum”?

A: Yes.

Q: Which site is the SBC leaning towards?

A: We originally were leaning towards Gates, but now leaning towards Conant.

Comments: In favor of Gates. As a driver, Taylor road is not appealing. Will you be able share estimates/risk profiles?

A: Chuck: At this point we are looking at the sites from an educational standpoint. We aren't looking for cost right now. The estimators are working on initial estimates now. We will be sharing the information as soon as it's reviewed.

Q: Is the magnitude of the ledge estimated at this point? Could you switch sites?

A: Yes. Ledge is being considered based on historical data as of now.

Comment: Comment about interest rates.

Comment: Living on Arlington Street for the past 12 years – there is nothing you can do to the access point on Gates. It would be disappointing to build a school and have a flooded property.

Q: In the Gates option, how many floors would the building have? What will the bridge look like?

A: 3 stories to minimize footprint. The concept of the bridge is that it will be accessible by a bobcat sized plow. The bridge will not be reimbursed.

Comment: At the April town meeting – there needs to be a more solid presentation on the project.

A: We will show the cost impacts / projected reimbursements. We won't know the full cost/reimbursement rate because the hard cost is not agreed until the August Project Scope & Budget Board Meeting.

Q: Are the abutters being contacted for their input?

A: Individually no. There are being invited to the forums. We can take a more aggressive approach in contacting them.

Thursday Community Forum – 11/29/18

(counted 70 people present)

Q: Is it possible to keep Douglas where it is because my house is close by?

Q: If they're building a school what is it made of?

A: Emily – Made out of a mixture of materials such as brick, metal, paper products etc.

Q: If part of the school is under construction is complete then will what happen to the kids who whose portion of the school has not yet been completed?

A: Emily - The phasing is an aspect that has not yet been figured out.

Q: In terms of energy use, some of the designs have more surface energy which are less energy efficient. Have studies been done in what these bus routes have been like and the energy the buses use up and the time it takes for the kids to get to school has that been considered in the plan?

A: Emily I can address that for building surface area. We take it very seriously and part of it is as a function of the size of the building. Maintaining the building and the right depths to maximize daylight so we want the building to be efficient as possible in terms of footprint and be appropriate for the community. Looking a look at solar studies and a lot of items are being done in feasibility

Follow up Q – we don't have a full plan yet for energy usage?

A: JD - We are setting up targets for EUI for energy usage. In terms of bus usage, the goal is to design a building to have a low EUI in the preliminary stage for schematic design we will have that in the back of the design. By adding wing walls in certain areas, we will lower the energy usage of a building. Due to the way the school system is done, the location of the school would not have a significant impact of the carbon footprint because we bus everyone to anywhere they want/need. We don't know what the long-term location will be for the bus parking, the largest gains would be knowing the dead-head miles and knowing about where bus parking is available. That is something we wish to try learning long term

Q: What happens with the other school if 2 of them are combined what happens to the 3rd?

A: Mary - That is correct. If we combine two of the schools, we will end up needing another building project. Every few years a new building project will be needed. For example, Gates would need to be done if it was not included in the process. Right now, the state is giving a 45% reimbursement, if the Gates building were to be empty, it would be used for something, but the logistics would not be there yet. If it's a gate Douglas option, then the building would end up being knocked down and would be used as ball fields. We do not currently know what the building will be used for, but it will not be a dead-end building and will be responsibly used.

Q: Have there been studies done for the water table and how will the building affect it, and will the building be able to be there due to how high the table is. Is there a plan developed?

A: Emily - Tests have been done. Both of our sites have large amounts of water, we have experience with building buildings in flood plains will need to plan for the high-water table and there are options that can be done. But to think about that we will need to do more investigation.

Q: How is the school building committee going to prioritize the school choice and the location?

A: We will take all of the information and tie it all in together. We will use information given to us by all of the consultants and Arrowstreet as well as information we have gathered from the community forums on the 11/27 and tonight. Answers from the survey will also be tied in. It is a fast process that we have been under and we have been learning new information all the time. We will end up learning a lot more when the 12th comes. We are doing our homework and reading materials and trying to keep up with everything. There have been no matrixes yet on how we will decide the preferred location/schematic, the committee will take a look at using a matrix to help with the decision making.

Q: Concerned that the 500 flood plain maps are not incorporated. Due to climate change, the 500-year floods could be accelerated within 5 years. In Acton, we have a conservation committee that will approve projects and study flooding mitigation methods such as a retaining wall or a dam. Would you consider going to the Acton conservation committee and getting their committee before deciding?

A: Emily - Absolutely, I've had conversations with Tom Tibid and will follow up.

Q: While town staff is wonderful to deal with – it is made up of different citizens that live in Acton, I would like if you kept interfacing with that committee and the individuals.

Q: (Community member on the board of the sports/softball) The softball fields are heavily used. Are you convinced that the plot of property would be big enough for two softball fields? One of which would be used by the junior high and secondary?

A: Chuck - Same question was asked on the 27th. The fields would be compromised for 3 years. The Douglas school must stay in operation until it can be built. The school must be built on the site of the fields. The school must then be torn down and then the fields would go up. They will fit there. There may be additional site work that would be done. Yes, they will fit and two, they will be done for 3 years, due to the time of the projects and the time of the fields to be ready.

A: Emily - It's not usual regarding the flood zones. It's also not ideal, but not unusual to see athletic fields that are not built for varsity sports, to be built near or in flood plains due to space limitations.

Q: I want to just go over the cost of just building the Douglas school, what is it? What is the cost of waiting, feeling that the Dec 19th vote of waiting, what is the decision with the MSBA and in terms of the building

A: Chuck - 2nd answer. The cost of waiting is tremendous. The longer you wait for construction to happen the more it will get expensive. It has to do with the market but also the shortage of labor. The MSBA puts you into a program with a finite deadline meaning that if you don't accept their terms of being into the process they will go into the next town. There are

300+ Towns in Massachusetts who want access to the MSBA funding. This is how they share the money is using tax dollars. The longer you wait the more you will pay. The timeline is condensed because the MSBA only meets every other month to review project. We need to meet the MSBA deadlines. If we would extend this deadline then you could get pushed off and pushed out of the process.

A: The cost of a single Douglas school would require finding space for 400 students outside of the Douglas space, we looked at the option of the building being adjacent, we advised that to be expensive to do with a very tight site and the timing would start to push you out for years so it didn't make a lot of sense for the kids for a lot of reasons.

A: Peter Light – one of the costs associated may not even on the Douglas project, it could be the costs on other building projects. We know we need 3 schools that need a lot of work and renovation we know as a community, the next school we can do with the MSBA is 7 to 10 years away and then it would be an additional 7 to 10 years away or the 3rd school. It's really about the economic feasibility of combining the schools for the pricing. This decision to do that was done a while back as a community we also know that when you combine schools into a single footprint you're also saving on construction and design costs that way because you're building one building with the functionality of two schools.

Q: Does the MSBA require a specific LEED program?

A: JD/Chuck- The minimum requirement is LEED silver for additional incentive points. The further you meet the ladder LEED, the higher you go you can get more additional points. We sat with the consultant the town and community, the lead percentages become irrelevant as you go towards EUI and net zero wastes because they items become much more valuable to your dollars. It seems like it may be more money but longer-term usage it would be better.

Q: Can you briefly go over 500 vs 1000 students.?

A: Emily - This was initially when the district submitted, and we were entered into the problem the analyst was done when this was submitted. Trying to figure out the estimate of the students of how many students are in the program

A: Mary - If you've heard we have had declining enrollment in the district. The housing market in Acton/Boxborough has gone down, now the new projections for the community at the elementary will be level for several years and then it will begin to increase. We have done extensive estimates for years with estimates and trying to figure out the projections for the community. What I'm hearing is part of the question is what is with the 650 students for a single school vs an 1150 student school vs what we thought to be for 1000 kids on a different schematic. Part of it is due to the projection how that will affect the other schools. There will be items such as a case collaborative room there will be play done across the district.

A: Emily – as part of the study, as a single school as 650, and as a combined school jumps around depending on what's going on.

Q: Do you have an estimate on the project cost?

A: Mary - On the 12th we will have a cost another is currently no favorite site

A: Chuck – (Chuck explains the estimating process) All the info will be shared. The school building committee meetings are open, and they are both in this room on the 12th and 19th.

Q – Will be unlikely to be picked again for a MSBA project? What do we do with the kids who are in the other two schools that are not updated because by the time they're there, they'll be looking at schools that are pushing 60 years. A secondary part, we know some of the pre-k will be done to the kids, what will be done to the building after they've moving out?

A: Mary – The next project will be chosen by the greatest need.

A: Chuck - The projects have been done by need so if a school needs to be redone it will be redone. The MSBA has been able to identify the needs. The district would need to update the Statement of interest as the project goes on. It is a process you keep submitting, but the MSBA will not fund two projects in the same district at one time.

A: Emily – The MSBA is funded by a penny from the sales tax.

A: Peter – What we defer are some of the major repairs because what we don't want to do is put money into a building that may not be around for year or two. Ongoing maintenance is being done so the students have a quality education and the school committee this year has been reviewing all the capital items across the district and prioritizing those items and starting this summer over the next ten to 12 years, the committee has held/withheld items from the 3 schools until a school has been chosen. Then, the committee will look at the non-chosen schools and see what will need to get done.

Q: Has there been a discussion on what will happen with school choice when there is a twin school?

A: Peter - It is something we recognize it will have some impact, I don't want to get into specific schools and how things are done. Historically there may be some swing, but we have a process now where there is priority given and there is a lottery system. We have discussed how that might change. We will need to get through this process and there will be concerns from both sides for either location and we are looking at what may happen. There are questions with walkability and walker status for the Douglas school depending on what site is chosen. There are different opportunities that present themselves for the longer term and there are a lot of considerations that will be taken of the upcoming years.

Q: I think those of us that live close by are concerned with what will happen to the Douglas building. What do you plan on doing with Douglas if it isn't chosen?

A: Mary - It would be up to the school committee. I do not believe we would sell the land. It could potentially be a swing space when we build a new Gates building. We need to really think about where we'll go from Dec 19th. We will have a better idea from that point on.

Q: We are walkers and I am an elm street abutter. This is easily an emotional issue for me. Wanted to see about the Tuesday or Thursday forum, there were a lot of comments about how the location how the Douglas community is tied to the building location. I do not have all the buildings that you guys have. Location matters, currently there are 73 families within a 1 mile radius of Douglas, if the school moves to Conant there will only be 10, 7 of the families will be out of walker status, and the 3 I have no answers to make a call about. Immediately, there is a change of culture and neighborhood feel. I took that information and overlaid the current Douglas location onto the map of the town, I wanted to see where we are. When I looked at that it brings a lot of questions about increased traffic and congestion there are 153 families that are currently don't cross route 127, that is just the greater Indian village and southwest between 111 and 127. Those families are not meeting up at Kelley's corner, Hayward's on the other side of the town and the roads to the north leading in. So, I have concerns about the traffic patterns and property values were mentioned at other meetings also to the stress to the

other buildings, the Gate's & Conant's students will not have these issues. The Douglas students have an additional stress is that they will be uprooted by their community, the other communities will not have to deal with the stress of being uprooted. It is a huge uprooting for the kids that they should not have to deal with. Our OPM and architects have told us that both sites have challenges, but both are viable, there is no runaway, there no slam dunk answer, so to me that makes the importance of community even greater when all is said and done this is all about kids and the community, so it preserves the community.

A: Mary - There is still more data coming in, there is not a clear winner yet.

Q: (kids) You said you were going to make the cafeteria bigger. how will having more kids increase the amount of lunch periods?

A: Emily - You need to have a cafeteria to only hold two lunches. There are a variety of rooms that can be incorporated into the cafeteria as opposed to a single large room

Q: (kids) Will we be sharing the playground between the schools?

A: Emily - We are not sure, there are advantages to a shared playground. But, we have not gotten to that point yet.

Q: (kids) If we built Gates at Conant how long would it take would it build?

A: Chuck - It will take the same amount of time at both places. Both projects are difficult sites, but we can do it. It will take two years for either school, but there is a year before we even get a contractor out to bid. Total 3-year process.

Q: (kids) Will the kids stay on the same bus if the schools are changed around?

A: JD - The schooling bus scenario would be combined together

Q: (kids) Will we have one school building for Douglas, would there be different wings for the two schools?

A: Emily - Yes. The concept is to have two separate buildings with a connector for the two.

Q: (kids) So, if Douglas required a badge where they can get outside or inside, would all students need a badge for the kids or would we be sharing a teacher badge?

A: Emily - It's going to depend on how they want to have the school operated

Q: (kids) What will happen to the playground? Will it get pulled off the Douglas property or will it stay there if you build at Conant?

A: We will still own the property, we don't know what would happen, it is a future school committee decision. We would want to keep it open to the community. Every school would still have a playground.

Q: Are there concerns from the surrounding businesses if Douglas moves?

A: We have not heard anything from the surrounding businesses.

Q: Will the project be single or multiple phases? Can you also talk about traffic, the percentage of driver vs buses?

A: Mary - Both are still on the table, the committee is waiting to hear back on the price, want to hear about the cost vs benefit.

A: Peter - Just to echo Mary what was said, we don't know about what the phasing will be like at this stage, we will know defiantly after Schematic Design.

A: JD - In terms of ridership information, we find that 70 to 75% of the student's ride the bus at the entry level, and a lower percentage ride on the high school level. Based on a 12-week study, we have not seen the changes that have been made that effect ridership. We are trying to figure about the ways buss traffic can be done so they are not mixed in with cars.

Q: If we combine Douglas with Conant what happens for Gates? Would it be Rehab or a Reno or would it have some work done so it is still viable?

A: Mary - It depends on the trends for the future, so we cannot talk about. IT would provide swing pace which is a consideration.

Q: (kids) Would there be water problems in the new school? Currently the water is tinted yellow.

A: Mary - Clean water is an important consideration of this project.

Q: (kids) Do the faculty at Douglas get to keep their jobs?

A: Mary - the staff will move with the new school.

Q: Can you formally reach out to west Acton businesses? A year ago, Douglas Gates was as a preferred option – how does that affect this year's vote?

A: Depending on things play out – would go towards West Acton joining, but if we see that there are more pros on the Conant site then the building may go there instead. it depends on the connections and options it depends on the other choices

Q: Follow up on swing school comment by Peter – having a swing school would be a lesson learned for the community. Comment on how far Douglas school is from the Gates school? If we had the Indian village then how would things change?

A: JD – Douglas and Gates are about 800 ft apart.

A: Peter - We talked about it by just a Gates option. It will be an administrative decision on how the priority status would work.

A: JD - We will look what will be a safe walk at the school of choice.

A: Mary - We want to look at and see how it is feasibility, want kids to still be able to walk to schools. If we send walker status to everyone, would have to look at displacing students from other schools. We will need a solid plan for how it would get enacted over time, we want the best solution, not a quick one.

Comment: We may have to switch our kids around to different schools from Douglas depending on what's going on – I would like the businesses to be a part of the decision.

Q: Transportation and safe walks – concerned about the safety of the town with the kids walking and riding bikes. Is there going to be some upgrade to the crosswalk system in town? Are the police aware? I'd hope there will be improvement.

A: The traffic safety, that is something the town manager and I have talked about throughout the year. Suggested route 27 specific, it is a state highway, we can do not any changes to it

because it is a state highway. Work to route 27 has been in discussion to see about how we can improve walker safety in general and then a sidewalk community that is looking at sidewalk safety.

A: JD - Feeling vulnerable about west Acton answer. I understand the vulnerability and how the residents feel about it

Q: follow-up best case scenario if we hit the ground running whichever property we choose, and it is unlikely we would get two projects funded at once. How soon could we go from building combined school and then getting to the Gates work?

A: Chuck - 7 to 10 years would be the time for another project to hit.

Comment - If we build a school along the brook, then we must make sure the building is sustainable.

Q: At the next two meetings, can we change the agenda and put public participation first?

A: We will put it earlier.

Comment - I would be willing to do a single school at Douglas and keep it there as is.

Comment – Multiple people have made comments on the importance of the Douglas school staying in West Acton.