



Hill International

Lincoln Eliot School - NECP School Building Committee

Meeting: August 3, 2021, 6PM

Location: Digital, via Zoom

Attendees: Rebecca Grossman*, Josh Morse*, Alison Leary*, Kathleen Browning*, Danielle Morrissey, Peter Barrer*, Alex Valcarce, Johnathan Yeo.

* - Denotes Voting Member

Professional Team: Tina Soo Hoo – Arrowstreet (AST)
Mary Mahoney, Matthew Sturz – Hill International (Hill)

Guests: Maria Leo – Design Review Committee
Stephanie Gilman, Caitlin Hogue – Newton Public Schools
Emily Prenner – School Committee
David Sellers – John Barry Boys and Girls Club
Paul Ferolito - Public Buildings

The meeting was called to order at 6:00PM.

1. J. Yeo provided an introduction of attending School Building Committee members and project professional team members from Hill International, Owner's Project Manager (OPM), and Arrowstreet, Designer.
2. Hill provided an overview of NECP at 687 Watertown Street project status:
 - a. Re-start of project, and information-gathering for creation of a conformed set of Bid Documents.
 - b. Bid Documents were issued for review by prospective bidders on 7/29/2021.
 - c. A pre-bid conference was held on 8/5/2021 to show the existing building conditions to prospective bidders.
 - d. Filed Sub-Bids will be received and opened on 8/19/2021 in accordance with MGL Ch. 149 procurement laws. General Bids will be received and opened at 10:00AM on 9/7/2021.
 - e. Hill remains optimistic that the City of Newton will receive favorable bids on the project.
3. **A Motion was made and seconded to approve the 10/24/2019 Meeting Minutes.**
 - a. **Motion passed by unanimous vote.*
4. NPS made a presentation, which was an updated version of the material presented on 7/20/2021 to the School Committee.
 - a. Design Enrollment projections were reviewed to re-confirm numbers presented to the School Committee previously.
 - b. NPS emphasized that the focus of the discussion is only on the number of classrooms, and would not affect any other core school spaces.
 - i. This point was substantiated with a review of enrollment data charts, presented by S. Gilman of NPS.
 1. Design enrollment ranges from 396-414 students. Fall 2020 projections indicated enrollment of 353, a number which is projected to shrink to 334 by 2025. This number includes the impact of all permitted residential developments.



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- ii. NPS' recommendation is for a 20-classroom school (18+2)
 1. Gym, Art, Music, Library would all be comparable to what is provided at Angier, Cabot, Zervas.
 2. School would be designed and sited to accommodate a 4-classroom addition if needed in the future.
 3. Goal in reducing from 24 classrooms (22+2) to 20 classrooms (18+2) is to align the classroom count with enrollment projections and avoid overbuilding.
 - a. C of N noted that the park/green space possibility is a huge asset/opportunity if the site is not consumed by a larger building footprint.
 4. A space program chart was presented, making direct comparisons between the square footages being proposed for different uses, and those same spaces at Angier, Cabot, and Zervas.
 - a. NPS noted that a 4th flex classroom was being proposed intentionally over-size to allow flexibility of use in the event of a Kindergarten bump class.
 - b. Special Ed. spaces are larger than at Angier, Cabot, and Zervas; this is driven by the Educational Plan and the particular needs of this school's population.
 - c. A separate slide compared core space square footage (Art, Gym, Library, Cafetorium) to Angier, Zervas, Cabot. Square footage was shown to be comparable.
 5. The previous approval program was reviewed. At the time, the Design Enrollment was 465, which NPS noted was determined during a period of rapid growth. NPS advised that the proposed changes to the space program were made to align the # of classrooms with anticipated needs, and to support District-wide Special Ed. programs' space needs.
5. NPS followed up this overview of changes with a detailed presentation on enrollment data by C. Hogue (of NPS).
 - a. Enrollment data chart slide was presented again, followed by a discussion of cohort survival ratios and birth rate/K ratios. NPS reviewed the historic patterns for move-in/move-out from the District, and noted that NPS uses 5-year averages in their calculations.
 - b. Birth-rate-to-K ratio data was plotted on a graph, which illustrated that it has been generally under 1, indicating a decline.
 - c. City-wide, NPS is seeing a general trend toward declining enrollments. Lincoln-Eliot-specific data was overlaid on the full District data, corroborating this trend (including all current and planned residential development).
 - d. District-wide elementary school seat availability was reviewed. NPS shared future empty seat projections for 2025-2030, and 2026-2031. These numbers were inclusive of seats anticipated to be coming online with the completion of other school construction projects.
 - e. A map of the City of Newton school catchment areas was shown; overlaid on this graphic were information about enrollment percentages and numbers of empty seats.
 - i. C of N noted that, due to geographic constraints, there was not much room for the Lincoln-Eliot catchment area to grow or change very much. Additionally, there is not much possibility for further residential development within the catchment area.
6. Next Steps were discussed:
 - a. The Working Group will present to the School Committee on 8/16/2021 regarding the revised enrollment data.



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- b. Conceptual options will be developed based on the revised enrollment.
- c. 8/16 School Committee Meeting; Fall 2021 meetings and beyond.
 - i. Project is currently in the Feasibility Study phase. Building occupancy is being targeted for Fall of 2025.
- d. Building Commissioner J. Morse publicly shared his cell phone number and agreed to answer public questions in that manner. He further expressed a general sense of optimism about the project.
 - i. Align spaces with MSBA standards
 - ii. Core spaces to be comparable to other recently constructed schools in Newton.
 - 1. If approved, will be the largest self-financed school construction project in Newton's history.

7. Public Comment:

- a. Does the proposed 18+2 configuration include OT/PT spaces? – *Yes. A detailed space summary will be shared with the public. These are included in the published Special Ed. square footage.*
- b. Shouldn't there be some empty seats if the buildings are designed to target being full to 85% capacity? – *The project team will work with Parks and Recreation to develop a plan to address NECP and park needs.*
- c. Are there plans to merge the neighboring Ward/Underwood Schools? – *Not at this time.*
- d. How accurate does NPS feel these projections are, and do they account for anticipated development? – *Yes, and C of N will continue to monitor teardown / multi-family construction. NPS is very confident in the accuracy of the projections.*
- e. Could a partial addition be constructed if needed? Potential for cost savings building addition now vs. later? – *Yes, some or all of the addition could be built if needed. There will be excess square footage to pay for and maintain if the school is built larger than it needs to be. One of the "bump" classrooms is already sized to be a Kindergarten classroom if needed. The addition will have already been sited and designed, so not significant added time or cost to add it later vs. now.*
- f. Why were the Special Ed. classrooms reduced from 900 to 850 square feet? Are the Special Ed. classrooms comparable to Angier, Zervas, and Cabot? – *Fewer students in a dedicated Special Ed. classroom than there are in a general use classroom. The sizing was determined in consultation with the Special Education staff; although the individual classrooms are slightly smaller, there are 1.5x as many support spaces as Angier, Zervas, and Cabot have. Special Ed. square footage comparisons are also not "apples to apples" because Angier, Zervas, and Cabot included adjacent spaces in the Sp. Ed. square footage counts.*
- g. Have enrollment projections improved for future enrollment? – *NPS is most worried about possibly needing to close schools if enrollment continues to decline.*
- h. How accurate is the methodology for estimating enrollment? – *NPS tracks this every year, with COVID there has been more variation than normal this year. Projections are almost always accurate to within 5%, typically closer to 1-2% margin of error.*
- i. *[an audience member commented that construction attached to an active school might be more challenging than building that same space while vacant/already an active construction site.]*
- j. Is the time-value of money really an issue given the extremely low borrowing costs we are seeing right now? – *Yes. There are significant issues elsewhere in the district requiring capital investment.*
- k. Can Special Ed. Classrooms double as student services space when not in use? – *Working with the Design Team to study this possibility.*



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- i. *[An audience member commented that the Lincoln-Eliot community tends to have more socioeconomically-disadvantaged students, and implored the team to seek other sources of funding beyond C of N coffers to serve these students if needed.*
- m. *Why is this school being design to be “just right” when others are much larger? – Angier, Cabot, and Zervas were all built during a period of rapid growth. **The contemporary thinking was to build as much space as possible to accommodate anticipated need. Now, enrollments are declining, and there are real costs to overbuilding.***
- n.
- o. *Does the proposed design contain dedicated ELL space? – Yes, 2 of them at 300 sf. each. Additionally, there are 2 400 sf. Learning Centers provided.*
- p. *How flexible is the building with respect to reincorporating classrooms? If 4 additional classrooms are added, will these be able to be well-integrated into the school? Also, do not feel that if these 4 extra classrooms are built, the space will go unused if not needed for class – *There will be a 5-year lag in these children matriculating to become students, which will buy NPS the time needed to adjust if there are any large population shifts. These classrooms will be designed and sited in such a way that they will not read as an “add-on”, but will feel like a part of the building.**

Meeting adjourned at 7:44 PM.

To the best of my knowledge, these notes are a fair representation of the items discussed at the meeting. Additional items or corrections should be brought to the attention of the writer. Submitted by: Matthew Sturz 8/17/21