



FOX HILL SCHOOL BUILDING COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

DATE: Tuesday, January 18, 2022
TIME: 7:00 pm
LOCATION: 123 Cambridge Street, Burlington, MA 01803
Administrative Offices, School Committee Room

ATTENDEES

MEMBERS PRESENT: Superintendent Dr. Eric Conti, Director of Operations Mr. Bob Cunha, School Committee Vice Chair Mrs. Katherine Bond, School Committee Member Ms. Martha Simon, School Committee Member Mrs. Christine Monaco, Fox Hill Parent, Mrs. Jennifer Priest, School Committee Member Mr. Carl Foss

MEMBER(S) ABSENT: School Committee Chairman Mr. Thomas F. Murphy, Jr., Town Manager Mr. Paul Sagarino, Senior Building Inspector, Mr. John Luther, Fox Hill Community Member Mr. George Papayannis

MEMBER(S) REMOTE: Business Manager Ms. Nichole Coscia, Fox Hill Principal, Mr. David Rosenblatt, Director of Technology Integration, Mr. Dennis Villano, Fox Hill Grade 4 Teacher, Mrs. Tara Carroll, Fox Hill Special Education Teacher, Mrs. Audrey Boeri, Town Accountant Mr. John Danizio, Ways & Means Committee Member Mr. Roger Riggs, Fox Hill Parent, Mr. Edward Parsons

GUEST(S) REMOTE: None

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION: None

INTRODUCTION

Vice Chair Mrs. Bond called the meeting to order at 7:00 to introduce the members in attendance and invited Dr. Conti and Mr. Cunha to provide an update of the MSBA meeting from January 6, 2022 in addition to the two warrant articles submitted for Town Meeting.

PROJECT UPDATE

Dr. Conti explained the two warrant articles had been submitted for Town Meeting which has now since been postponed until February:

- Article #11 is with MSBA funding for the Fox Hill project
- Article #12 is without MSBA funding for the Fox Hill project

After review with the Ways & Means subcommittee, a suggestion was made that the MSBA language which is required will cover both scenarios in Article #11. Both town and school committee counsels agreed that the MSBA language which is required will cover both scenarios in Article #11. Dr. Conti noted that one of the actions for the building committee tonight would be to recommend to school committee to withdraw Article #12 to minimize confusion.

Dr. Conti discussed the slide presentation / handout¹:

- Statement of Interest (SOI) priority shifted from BHS to Fox Hill
- Fox Hill accepted into the MSBA grant program
- MSBA has a 7 year, highly scripted process with timeline
- Currently in Eligibility Period of the project (phase 1)

MSBA is projecting a decline in enrollment over next 10 years and will support the project in a consolidated manner going from four elementary schools to three:

- Current enrollment Grades K-5 = 1,681
- MSBA projection Grades K-5 = 1,526

The MSBA examines all of the elementary schools during the Eligibility Phase and assumes 23 students per classroom in their modeling which is significantly higher than we define in Burlington (average 18 students per classroom).

At the January meeting with MSBA, we discussed the questions the committee asked from the December meeting:

1. **Q:** Can Burlington pay for additional classrooms to take us from a 23 student/classroom model to an 18 student/classroom model?

A: No, we cannot add things that are not based on enrollment.

¹ Fox Hill Elementary School MSBA Project Slide Presentation



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2. **Q:** Can Pine Glen be used as a swing space and remain open?
A: Yes, it can be used as a swing space; but No, it cannot remain open. MSBA will only support a three elementary school configuration.
3. **Q:** What about future programming such as a Universal Preschool?
A: This would not be a part of the enrollment driving model to maintain four elementary schools.
4. **Q:** What about new home construction?
A: That growth is already built in and would not make an impact on their enrollment projection.

Dr. Conti also explained that we double checked if we were identifying all the classrooms that we currently have in use for their purpose and if they are looking at it correctly? Mr. Cunha explained that during this part of the eligibility phase, we are only looking at K-5 classrooms. For clarification, Ms. Simon referred to them as homeroom classrooms.

Current Classrooms = 95 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Memorial = 24 ● Francis Wyman = 30 ● Pine Glen = 17 ● Fox Hill = 24 	Consolidated Classrooms = 80 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Memorial = 24 ● Francis Wyman = 32 ● Fox Hill = 24
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In response to Mrs. Priest's question on the number of FW classrooms as 32, Mr. Cunha has a question into the MSBA with regards to this as two rooms may be mislabeled in that building which may allow us two additional classrooms in the new building. Mr. Cunha explained the below model which ultimately shows us the impact of closing a school, having to redistrict and increase the enrollment in two other elementary buildings.

Post Enrollment Projections	
Pine Glen Current Enrollment = 275 Consolidation CLOSED	Fox Hill Current Enrollment = 440 Consolidation 480
Francis Wyman Current Enrollment = 518 Consolidation 635	Memorial Current Enrollment = 410 Consolidation 480

Discussion: Dr. Conti reiterated that the MSBA involvement does not mean that the need for the high school renovation or the new Fox Hill building do not exist; we are talking about the pathway to get there. Mr. Cunha added that as part of the MSBA consolidation, they would require us to submit a SOI (Statement of Interest) for Pine Glen School as part of this project. He further explained that if we agreed with the consolidation plan and were accepted into the next phase for the Fox Hill project, that is when we would have to submit the SOI for Pine Glen. He made mention of this as it relates to us asking to keep Pine Glen open after it has been used as a swing space during construction; the SOI would publicly state that the building has deficiencies.

Dr. Conti and Mr. Cunha confirmed Mr. Parsons' comment that essentially MSBA is interested in funding the Fox Hill School project, but not just replacing Fox Hill; they would replace Fox Hill and Pine Glen. In response to Mr. Parson's question, Dr. Conti explained that we have to agree to fulfill our end of the bargain as to how we get reimbursed as part of the project. Mr. Cunha further explained that there are checks and balances during the process. In response to Mrs. Bond's question, Mr. Cunha explained that potentially we could keep Pine Glen, but as part of the consolidation, move those students out of Pine Glen until we are able to update or rebuild Pine Glen. MSBA's recommendation for consolidation would not allow us to keep that school open as a fourth school in its current condition. Mrs. Monaco commented that even if the school committee agreed to the consolidation, it would still mean that for a few years students would be squeezed into three buildings until we were able to do something with the Pine Glen building. School committee does not want 23 students per classroom in our elementary schools. Dr. Conti commented that MSBA was looking at their projection (+ or - 10%), and it looked like we would have 20 students per classroom. MSBA's position is that we would have access to their grant program by decreasing class sizes by 2 students. For modeling purposes, they would be building a 4 section school (meaning 4 classrooms per grade K-5) for a total of 24 classrooms. Roughly this would be a \$40 - \$50 million project with \$15 - \$20 million one time reimbursement from the state.



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In response to Mrs. Monaco's question about withdrawing the Fox Hill project and proceeding with MSBA on the high school project, Dr. Conti explained that we can submit a Statement of Interest (SOI) every year. We have submitted one for the high school for 8 years, then we replaced the high school with the Fox Hill project. Fox Hill was accepted to the grant process and then we immediately submitted a SOI for the high school; so currently, we have an active SOI for the high school. MSBA will let us know about the high school in April. Dr. Conti commented that the MSBA rarely approves 2 projects in one community at the same time. Dr. Conti posed a question to the committee: If MSBA gave us a good indication in April that the high school would be accepted into the grant program, could we pull Fox Hill out of consideration to give us better chances of funding one of the projects? It's all in the timing. If we move forward with the Fox Hill project, it would lower our chances with the high school. MSBA staff agreed that both projects are needed in the community.

Mr. Cunha provided an update with the high school feasibility study. During his most recent call, if we proceed with the HVAC repair of the building, it will trigger a full code restructure of the high school building which would include fire alarm systems, elevator repairs or rebuilds, hallways, science labs. In response to Mrs. Monaco's question, and bottom line, the high school is not going to be cheaper than Fox Hill. Dr. Conti commented that the MSBA staff has mentioned several times that the high school was a "good project" and they have appreciated our persistence; but there are no guarantees. Mr. Cunha clarified that MSBA made it clear that we cannot swap the Fox Hill project for the high school. He also confirmed that we are only talking about Fox Hill; Pine Glen is a secondary part of Fox Hill that MSBA is strongly encouraging us to consider for consolidation.

Dr. Conti explained that MSBA is suggesting we ask for an extension to the Fox Hill eligibility phase (while discussing enrollment) and this would extend us beyond the 270 days in this phase to their April board meeting. The extension would possibly give us the time to receive their answer on the high school project; we could then withdraw the Fox Hill project if we do not want to consolidate.

With a show of hands, who wants to proceed with the proposed consolidation plan?

Virtually through WebEx 3 out of 8 members raised their hands in favor of consolidating Fox Hill and Pine Glen:

Mrs. Audrey Boeri, Mr. Edward Parsons, and Mr. John Danizio

(noting that Ms. Nichole Coscia and Mr. Roger Riggs did not have video)

In person, 0 out of 7 members raised their hands in favor of consolidating Fox Hill and Pine Glen

In response to Mr. Parsons' request to better understand the reasons why we want 4 elementary schools, Mrs. Monaco explained that the school committee feels it is a better educational model where schools were smaller. Among other reasons, neighbors did not want to consolidate due to traffic, we didn't want larger class sizes, and we wanted to stay with a neighborhood school concept. Ms. Simon added that there is some research that backs up their reasoning for smaller school sizes which provide a better educational environment. Mr. Rosenblatt emphasized that the elementary class size in Burlington is a source of pride. Lower class sizes are impactful as it affects the relationships that are built between the teacher and the students. It affects the quality of instruction teachers can provide to their students; the less students in the room, the more effective the teacher can be. It provides more opportunities for teachers to build community. Ms. Simon added that we are proud of our teachers and having 23 students instead of 18 would be about 25% harder (more kids to keep track of, more grading, more communications with families, etc). Ms. Simon commented that with smaller class sizes we can help students' social emotional issues and mental health issues that have surfaced even more with the pandemic. Mrs. Bond noted that classroom sizes are part of what attracts people to our town; she disagrees with MSBA's enrollment projection and is concerned that we will outgrow the school before we move in.

Mrs. Boeri simply stated that we need more space. In response to Mrs. Carroll's question and Mrs. Boeri's space concerns, Dr. Conti explained that they would size the school based on all of our programming, but we are strictly speaking of the number of classrooms. Dr. Conti explained that there is really no way for us to move forward with them in a non-consolidated manner.

Mr. Danizio echoed Dr. Conti in the fact that the program drives the other spaces and the real battle is how many sections they will build for each grade. And, he posed a couple of questions: (1) Does it make sense to pause and is there a number of sections that the school committee is comfortable with? For example, 30 sections (instead of the proposed 24). (2) And, is it really 23 students per class? Based on their projection of 480 students with 4 sections comes to about 20 per class. He also explained how the MSBA payment plan works; it is called [Pro-Pay](#) where you submit invoices for reimbursement as you go.

Dr. Conti agrees with some of Mr. Parsons comments, however, is concerned that if we do move forward with MSBA on the Fox Hill consolidation project that it would take the high school out of MSBA consideration. Mr. Parsons agrees that the high school project would have a bigger impact on the town's budget. Dr. Conti is optimistic and believes it makes sense to wait until their board votes in April on the high school's Statement of Interest.

Mr. Cunha confirmed that February 22nd is 270 days so if we do not come to a conclusion before then, we would need to apply for an extension on our eligibility period.



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In response to Mrs. Priest's question on whether Francis Wyman or Memorial can handle the additional amount of students, Mr. Cunha explained that "on paper", Memorial was built to handle 25 students per class at the time it was built. Now, at 23 students per class, they would say that the building is capable of handling 552 students (24 classrooms x 23 students). The same applies to Francis Wyman; they would say that the building is capable of handling 690 students (30 classrooms x 23 students). Dr. Conti commented that the educational experience would be different than it is now and is concerned about the impact on Francis Wyman. To give us more time to gather more information to make better decisions, Dr. Conti is recommending we request the extension.

In response to Ms. Simon's question about what we have to gain on extending the process, Dr. Conti explained that we have an active Statement of Interest for the high school project and it is our first priority in the cycle. Fox Hill has been accepted, now the high school is our priority. Mrs. Bond agrees that the extension into April would give us a better idea on the probability of the high school project and allows us more time to figure out Fox Hill. Mr. Cunha confirmed that we submitted the SOI for Fox Hill in 2020 and notified in 2021; in 2021, we submitted the SOI for the high school so that is our current Statement of Interest that we are still awaiting a response from MSBA.

In response to Ms. Simon's questions about the Capital Budget, Mr. Danizio explained the debt plan where we have placeholders for projects over the next 10 years. For the two specific projects we're talking about, we have about \$40,000,000 for the Fox Hill project and just the HVAC portion of the high school set aside in the debt plan. The plan would be to start borrowing \$10,000,000 next year for Fox Hill and the HVAC at the high school; town share of Fox Hill assumed to be about 50% and assuming the high school HVAC would be \$15 - \$20,000,000. Mr. Cunha clarified with Mr. Danizio that the town contribution would be roughly 50% and that MSBA or another entity would pay for the remaining portion of the Fox Hill project and the non-HVAC portion of the high school project.

Motion was made by Mrs. Monaco to recommend to the School Committee to request an extension to the Eligibility Phase of the Fox Hill Project to the MSBA April Board Meeting; seconded by Mr. Foss.

Mrs. Boeri - aye, Mr. Rosenblatt - aye, Mr. Parsons - aye, Mr. Villano - aye, Mr. Danizio - aye, Mrs. Carroll - aye, Mr. Riggs - aye, Ms. Coscia - aye, Mr. Foss - aye, Ms. Simon - aye, Mrs. Priest - aye, Mrs. Bond - aye, Mrs. Monaco - aye, Mr. Cunha - aye.
Motion carried 14-0-0.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion was made by Mrs. Bond to adjourn at 8:37 pm; moved by Mrs. Monaco seconded by Ms. Simon.

SUBMITTED

Respectfully,

Kristen Downie
Recording Secretary

Date Submitted: 6/2/22

Date Approved: 6/2/22