



School Facilities Ad Hoc Committee

Committee Co-Chairpersons

Marnie Morrione, District 5, Portland Board of Education • Ethan K. Strimling, Mayor

David Brenerman, District 5 City Councilor

Justin Costa, District 4 City Councilor

Stephanie Hatzenbuehler, District 4 Board of Education

Nicholas M. Mavodones, At-Large City Councilor

Sarah J. Thompson, At-Large Board of Education

Anna Trevorror, Chair, Board of Education

Thursday, December 22, 2016
5:00pm – 7:00pm
City Hall – Council Chamber

Meeting Minutes & Notes

The meeting began at 5:03pm.

Attendance:

Mayor Strimling, School Board Member Marnie Morrione (Committee Co-Chairs)

Superintendent Xavier Botana

Councilors: David Brenerman, Justin Costa, Nicholas Mavodones

School Board Members: Board Chair Anna Trevorror, Stephanie Hatzenbuehler, Sarah Thompson

Superintendent Xavier Botana

Special Assistant to the Mayor Jason J. Shedlock

City Finance Director Brendan O'Connell

Mayor Strimling and Board Member Morrione began the meeting by welcoming the Committee members and the public and letting the attendees know the purpose of the evening. This meeting would consist of an update on the attempts to secure state funding to defray the costs of the Buildings for Our Future plan as well as an overview of the recently-completed School Facilities Assessment. The Committee would also discuss the timeline for the committee's work and a possible referendum vote. The majority of the meeting would be reserved to hear proposals from members and deliberate on them. The Committee was reminded that the master question and answer document, along with other supporting documents and presentations, can be viewed in their entirety at <http://www.portlandmaine.gov/1803/School-Facilities-Ad-Hoc-Committee>.

The minutes of the November 17th meeting of the School Facilities Ad Hoc Committee were approved unanimously after suggested changes to the titles of committee members, consistency in names and titles, and technical corrections.

Councilor Mavodones stated that a prior commitment would mean that he needed to leave the meeting early. He also wished to put on the record his displeasure with a "backpack mailing" regarding the school facilities deliberations. He felt it was a violation of the School Board policy on commercialism and that he will be following up on those concerns with Superintendent Botana.

Superintendent Botana explained to the Committee that he and others presented at the state Board of Education's Construction Committee on December 12th and the full State Board of Education on December 14th. While the presentations were met by both bodies with appreciation for creativity and an understanding of the difficult situation Portland is in with the two schools, both unanimously dismissed Portland's request for funding for Longfellow and Reiche schools. Mayor Strimling as well as Councilor Mavodones thanked Superintendent Botana for his hard work at exploring all avenues at state funding.

Superintendent Botana then discussed the facilities assessment that was been recently completed by contractor Sebago Technics. He stressed that the findings of the study, over \$300 million in facility needs over the next 20 years (almost \$40 million over the next 5 years), do not include addressing any improvements needed to bring schools to 21st century learning expectations (unlike the Buildings for Our Future proposals contemplated by the Committee). Superintendent Botana noted that there are other non-Buildings for Our Future schools, particularly at the secondary level, with significant project needs which may become better candidates for state major construction funding in the next project round.

Superintendent Botana stated that Sebago Technics is in the process of scoring all schools using the new state funding rubric. Preliminary findings indicate that the needs of Portland's secondary schools may stand a better chance at scoring higher on the state scale than others, including the schools currently being discussed by the Committee.

Councilor Brenerman asked why the findings were different from the new assessment and those explored in the Buildings for Our Future plan. He asked that if we fund these four schools locally, would the School Department seek state funding for other schools? Councilor Brenerman also asked what plans would be in place for the schools, once upgraded, to not degrade like the way they did to leave us facing the current reality. Superintendent Botana stated that the facilities assessment only focused on physical needs to upgrade physical plants, not ensuring 21st century learning environments. He stated that the School Department would absolutely apply to the state for funding of additional schools in need. Superintendent Botana also stated that it would be important to work with the School Board and the City to make difficult budgeting decisions in the future to meet the needs of all school buildings, including those what would be renovated.

Mayor Strimling stated that based on the Committee's work, ensuring public voices as well as incorporating the review time and votes from the School Board, the Council's Finance Committee and the full Council, the timeline of a public referendum would be Spring of 2017.

Mayor Strimling then presented a proposal from himself and Co-Chair Morrione for a four school, \$60.9 million plan to meet the needs of Reiche, Longfellow, Lyseth and Presumpscot by transforming them into 21st century learning institutions. He noted that the plan included the Adjusted Project Scope previously discussed by the committee, included a staff person to work – either for the school department or the city – to coordinate the administrative aspects of the project, in addition to the already-budgeted Clerk of the Works and added back the solar domestic hot water heater at Reiche. He stated that he was confident that the plan addressed the critical needs of the schools and the students (the Adjusted Project Scope plan was previously-vetted and agreed to by the principals) while balancing the impact to taxpayers. Mayor Strimling also stated that the plan contemplates spreading the borrowing over six years in order to lessen the yearly impact to taxpayers.

School Board Member Morrione added her support for the proposal. She also passed along an idea heard at a District 5 community meeting that the public might have the option to vote on two referenda, one containing the \$60.9 million figure, and one adding the additional \$10 million for the full Buildings for Our Future proposal. Bond Counsel would need to advise if and how that would be possible.

Superintendent Botana was supportive of the Co-Chairs' \$60.9 million proposal. He stated it was a thoughtful proposal that took into account principals' feedback. He is confident that School District officials would be able to realize adequate savings by implementing repurposing and bulk purchasing for equipment; and community and grant dollars for playground and outdoor learning items.

Councilor Mavodones asked about the new Project Coordinator position, and whether it would be a Public Schools or a City position. Mayor Strimling stated that where the person sits could be decided, but that he wanted to make sure the additional assistance was budgeted for. Councilor Mavodones stated that it is important that the person have educational knowledge and experience.

Councilor Brennerman asked about the timeline and whether it was realistic. He wants to be sure we have the personnel needed at the City to coordinate these projects. Deputy City Manager LaChance has been shepherding the Hall School Committee, and each of these projects would need someone akin to her to fill that role. He also asked about the CIP projects already in the pipeline or ones that are needed before the Buildings for Our Future work would begin. These items would include the fieldwork at Lyseth and Lyman Moore as well as brickwork at Longfellow.

Councilor Mavodones stated that the Co-Chairs' proposal showed a lot of thought and he appreciated the effort that went into it. He stated that he does not know where he will end up on the proposal. He went on to say that if we are going to be investing \$60 million, maybe we should just invest \$70 million? Councilor Mavodones then went on to say that he believes people will have issues with spending that amount of money. He suggested perhaps there were other proposals to consider. Options might be waiting for the state to fund two schools. A \$35 million proposal that the school department could recommend might also be an option. He asked what might a plan that addressed two schools and \$35 million would look like?

He also registered concerns that borrowing \$60 or \$70 million would limit the city's ability to implement any other capital improvement projects for six years. He stated that when the middle schools were completed in the 1990s, that municipal spending "came to a halt." Mayor Strimling asked for further clarification on that point, and an accounting of municipal spending in the 1990s. Councilor Mavodones then stated that he wasn't attempting to scare people, just understand the impact of a bond.

Board Member Thompson stated that the facilities assessment highlighting \$300 million in needs over the next 20 years was "sobering." She stated that the community needs to know that the need is even greater than once realized, and that \$70 million is only a small portion of the real need. We can only defer maintenance for so long and the schools are getting worse as we wait. Board Member Thompson stated with we must "bite the bullet" and make this investment.

Councilor Costa also thanked the Co-Chairs for their proposal. He stated that he too feels people must understand the order of the magnitude of the needs for the school system overall. He stated that the school department must know that tough choices must be made, but that the co-chairs' proposal is moving us in the direction that we need to go. Councilor Costa stated that while he is open to some negotiation, we are getting very close to what the schools need to move forward. He stated that he and others have been working on this issue for years and that it's time to move ahead. He went on to explain that there is only so much uncertainty that we can avoid and that we will continue to incur deferred

maintenance needs. He concluded by stating that while he is inclined to support the co-chairs' proposal, that any and all other viable options should also be made clear and laid out for public review.

Board Member Morrione began by stating that we must reframe the conversation about schools versus city needs. They are shared needs. We must also look at the economic impact of not performing this work. We must invest in families and invest so that families return to the city. We must prioritize the investment in our next generation and if we do not, we are taking a step back as a city.

Board Chair Trevorrow stated that the Co-Chairs proposal should be presented to the public for their review. She stated that it has been eye opening to see the vast amount of work that the schools need that will have to be included in a Capital Improvement Plan, and that the Co-Chairs' proposal would put a dent in what is necessary to upgrade out schools. Board Chair Trevorrow stated that she supports the Co-Chairs proposal to move forward for public review, and that the public should see any and all proposals to have the most information as they make their decision.

Councilor Brenerman agreed with Board Chair Trevorrow that the public should have access to all of the information they might need to make the best decision on how they want to move forward.

Board Member Hatzenbuehler stated that the needs identified in the facilities assessment were sobering and reasonable. She said that she is very familiar with the capital needs and the budget process, and she is concerned that there is a huge gap between needs and dollars available to address them. She is very concerned about services declining and rising debt. Board Member Hatzenbuehler stated that the choices must be made crystal clear for the public, and that we must balance the polies surrounding steps towards universal Pre-K and universal breakfasts as well. She supports the public having a variety of proposals to choose from, including the Co-Chairs' as well as any others developed.

Mayor Strimling also stated that the public should have all the information they need. He stated that over the course of the six months of committee work, and years of prior study, the situation is very clear. The public is aware of the cost. They are even more aware of the cost of inaction. The schools have been underfunded for decades and now we must act to right that wrong. Our kids deserve 21st century learning institutions. Our excellent teachers and administrators deserve the tools they need to make that environment work for our kids. Mayor Strimling stated that the Ad Hoc Committee, and the full Council, should allow for the voters to decide. He stated that the Co-Chairs' proposals are indeed the same items that this Committee has been discussing for months. There is nothing new and that it's where this process led them.

Mayor Strimling announced that the tentative date for the next meeting is January 19th. It was noted that Board Member Thompson does have a conflict on that date.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:43 pm.

Submitted by Jason J. Shedlock, Special Assistant to the Mayor