



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council School Building Facilities and Maintenance Special Committee

Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, October 4, 2023

6:00 PM

Joint Meeting with the School Committee's Finance and Facilities Subcommittee.

This meeting was held via Zoom and was called to order by Chair Gomez Mouakad at 6:01 p.m. and adjourned at 7:44 p.m. on a Roll Call Vote: 3 in favor (Councilors Davis, Clingan, Gomez Mouakad), 0 opposed, 0 absent.

Others present:

Michael Potere – Assistant Clerk of Committees; Matthew Bennett – Superintendent of Buildings, DPW; Jill Lathan – Commissioner of DPW; Neha Singh – Director of Intergovernmental Affairs; Richard Raiche – Director of IAM; Laura Pitone – School Committee, Ward 5; Sara Dion – School Committee, Ward 7; and Ruben Carmona – Superintendent of Schools.

Roll Call

Present: Chairperson Beatriz Gomez Mouakad , Vice Chair Jesse Clingan and Lance L. Davis

1. Committee Minutes (ID # [23-1139](#)) Approval of the Minutes of the School Building Facilities and Maintenance Special Committee meeting of June 28, 2023.

RESULT: ACCEPTED

AYE: Chairperson Gomez Mouakad, Vice Chair Clingan and Ward Six City Councilor Davis

School Building - Feasibility Study

2. Order (ID # [22-1528](#)) By Councilor Gomez Mouakad and Councilor Strezo That the Director of Infrastructure and Asset Management provide an update on the status of the School Building Systems Feasibility Study.

Chair Gomez Mouakad asked about the status of the chiller for the Kennedy School, noting complaints from constituents. Director Raiche replied that primary contractor bids will open next week, and that based on the bids received for the subcontractors, competent contractors have and will be bidding for the job. Director Raiche continued that the manufacturer will need approximately 47 weeks to build the unit, which means that another season of temporary chillers will be necessary. Chair Gomez Mouakad asked about the timeframe for accepting bids, and Director Raiche replied that the process should be complete in 1-2 weeks, and that the contractor should be scheduled sometime in early November 2023.

Chair Gomez Mouakad asked about the status of projects for the Healey and West Somerville Schools. Director Raiche replied that the department has at least nine possible solutions for the failing systems at those schools, but noted that a significant challenge in planning and preparation is that the work will need to be completed while the schools are occupied during the school year, and that space constraints will make that difficult to coordinate. Chair Gomez Mouakad asked for a timeline, preferably styled as a graphic, for these projects to be presented at this Committee's next meeting in December 2023.

Chair Gomez Mouakad noted that the projects for the Capuano and Argenziano Schools are still pending with no updates.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

3. Order
(ID # [22-1527](#))

By Councilor Gomez Mouakad and Councilor Strezo
That the Director of Infrastructure and Asset Management provide an update on the status of the School Building Feasibility Study.

Chair Gomez Mouakad stated that this Item would be taken together with Item 4 (ID # 23-1359).

Chair Gomez Mouakad asked Councilor Clingan if the printed timeline mentioned in Item 4 (ID # 23-1359) referred to the master plan, or to the Winter Hill School specifically, and Councilor Clingan replied that it referred specifically to the Winter Hill School.

Chair Gomez Mouakad stated that the language in the department's feasibility study could cause some confusion, noting that its terminology does not align with the Massachusetts School Building Authority's (MSBA). Director Raiche replied that although some of the terms are different, there is substantial overlap between the department's study and the MSBA requirements, and added that the MSBA itself confirmed this when they met last week, noting how thorough the department's answers were to its questions regarding the city's statement of interest. School Committee Member Pitone noted that the city does not need to wait for MSBA approval, and can instead spend its own money and later submit reimbursement requests to the MSBA.

Councilor Clingan stated that there is a desire for more clarity about this process that can be effectively translated to constituents who may not, for example, be familiar with some of the acronyms being used by the city.

Chair Gomez Mouakad asked for the current status of the School Building Feasibility Study, and Director Raiche replied that the Enrollment and Building Capacity Studies are complete, and the gap analysis is nearly complete.

Councilor Clingan reiterated a request for a timeline for the Winter Hill School specifically. Director Raiche replied that that timeline is what the department is currently working to develop, and specifically that it is working to analyze whether a variety of options are feasible, subject to the approval of the Superintendent's Office and the Mayor's Office. Director Raiche continued that this work is complex because it involves Geographic Information System (GIS) analysis to determine the size of the buildings that need to be built to house students and facilitate their necessities, and compare that to the amount of land that is actually available to the city for development. Chair Gomez Mouakad asked if this work is being done in conjunction with the School Department, and Director Raiche confirmed that it is. Chair Gomez Mouakad asked for clarification that the GIS analysis is effectively just looking at potential sites for evaluation, not a decision-making process, and Director Raiche confirmed that to be accurate.

Councilor Davis asked if the GIS analysis is also examining construction of multiple separate buildings to replace existing single structures, and Director Raiche confirmed that multiple options for land use and construction are being evaluated. Councilor Davis emphasized that the community should be involved in making the final decision as to where the new construction will be located.

School Committee Member Pitone reiterated the need for improved communication regarding these projects, and suggested that a committee for this purpose be formed sooner rather than later.

Superintendent Carmona stated that no decisions have been made at any level, and that instead the current status of the project is to evaluate viable options to then present to the community, and emphasized that no decisions would be made without input from the community.

School Committee Member Pitone stated that, although this process is time consuming, it reflects an intentional effort to plan not just for the current situation with the Winter Hill School, but also for the city's entire school system for the next 50 years. Superintendent Carmona added that part of the complexity in this analysis is anticipating what the city's school building needs will be in the future based on immigration patterns, for example. Director Raiche concluded that a main purpose of the present process is to be able to bring the community several realistic options that are logistically and financially possible, which will enhance the quality and scope of the discussions surrounding them.

Chair Gomez Mouakad asked that the administration be ready to discuss forming the building committee for the MSBA process during this Committee's next meeting, as well as other ways the process can be accelerated. Director Raiche stated that this is something the Mayor's Office is already discussing, including who would be selected for such a

committee.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

4. Order
(ID # [23-1359](#))

By Councilor Clingan and Councilor Ewen-Campen

That the Director of Capital Projects provide this Council with a printed timeline for the reconstruction of a new Winter Hill Community School.

Chair Gomez Mouakad stated that this Item would be taken together with Item 3 (ID # 22-1527).

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

School Buildings - Maintenance

5. Order
(ID # [22-1417](#))

By Councilor Gomez Mouakad

That the Commissioner of Public Works provide quarterly reports to the School Building Facilities and Maintenance Special Committee on any major repairs and 311 work orders in school buildings.

Chair Gomez Mouakad asked Commissioner Lathan about a reported gas leak at the West Somerville Neighborhood School, who replied that it was not a gas leak, but rather that a student accidentally opened a gas valve. In response to the incident, it was recommended that those valves be disabled at all schools except for the high school.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

6. Order
(ID # [23-1359](#))

By Councilor Clingan and Councilor Ewen-Campen

That the Director of Capital Projects provide this Council with a printed timeline for the reconstruction of a new Winter Hill Community School.

This Item is a duplicate entry for Item 4.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

7. Resolution
(ID # [23-0992](#))

By Councilor Gomez Mouakad, Councilor Clingan and Councilor Wilson

That the Administration develop a five-year assessment plan for school building systems and structures for all schools over five years old, to ensure proper funding is in place for capital repairs and to ensure the safety and uninterrupted operation of schools.

Commissioner Lathan stated that the DPW has hired a Building Systems Manager, who will be under the guidance of the Superintendent of Buildings, and will begin the process of not only creating a five-year assessment plan, but also working with IAM to create an updated building systems management plan moving forward.

Chair Gomez Mouakad asked if the DPW and IAM are properly staffed to proceed with these plans. Commissioner Lathan stated that the addition of the department's Building Services Manager will assist in the process, and

Director Raiche stated that IAM is sufficiently staffed for the projects, but that the department would ask for additional staff if necessary.

Chair Gomez Mouakad asked the administration to include the East Somerville Community School's east façade in the plan, and Commissioner Lathan replied that work on that is already in progress, and that bricks are currently being ordered to complete the renovations.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

Communications

8. Order
(ID # [23-1000](#))

By Councilor Strezo

That the Director of Communications and Community Engagement create a regularly updated public-facing website dedicated to the Winter Hill Community Innovation School plan, with links to publicly filed documents.

Director Singh stated that there currently is a website dedicated to the Winter Hill School, but that feedback regarding the difficulty in locating it would be brought back to the administration for evaluation. Councilor Clingan noted that the website can also be located using the Google search engine.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

9. Resolution
(ID # [23-0993](#))

By Councilor Gomez Mouakad, Councilor Clingan and Councilor Wilson
That the Administration publish yearly on the city website, a list of ongoing school repairs and improvements, similar to that posted by Chelsea Public Schools, and provide a yearly report to the City Council of such repairs and improvements before and after completion.

Chair Gomez Mouakad stated this Item came about based on constituent feedback regarding lack of communication for school maintenance and construction projects and their progress.

Chair Gomez Mouakad asked if this website would be more appropriately housed on the city's website or the school's website. School Committee Member Pitone replied that she did not have a strong opinion either way, and Commissioner Lathan stated that the DPW has a goal of creating such a user-friendly website for various DPW projects. Chair Gomez Mouakad asked the administration to prioritize its focus on a project like this.

Councilor Davis expressed strong support for this Item.

School Committee Member Pitone noted that the creation of a website similar to the one maintained by Chelsea Public Schools may not be very labor intensive to create and publish.

Chair Gomez Mouakad stated that although this Item is being closed, the

administration should keep working towards creating such a website.

**RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK
COMPLETED**