

Madalyn Letellier

From: Adrienne Bruno [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, June 12, 2023 4:07 PM
To: Andre Green; Ilana Krepchin; Sarah Phillips; Emily Ackman; Laura Pitone; Ellenor Barish; sdion@k12.somerville.ma.us; leiran4somerville@gmail.com; Katherine Santiago; Mayor; Public Comments; All City Council
Subject: public comment for the record of the 6/12/23 School Committee Meeting of the Whole
Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Flagged

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Dear Mayor Ballantyne, Council Ewan-Campen, Chair Green, Members of the School Committee,

I am writing to submit public comment for the record with regard to the physical location of the Winter Hill Community Innovation School. I know that the current building at 115 Sycamore St is likely uninhabitable, and that our community will be temporarily housed elsewhere. I want to encourage you all to ensure that the temporary location is fully accessible, meaning a functioning elevator and ramps at the entry points. My son, a rising first grader, uses a wheelchair due to a medical condition, and there is at least one WHCIS teacher who also needs an elevator to access their space. Please consider the needs of these community members when you are looking for temporary space. If you move our school from one decrepit old building to another, I am certain that we will be back in this awful situation again in a few months. I know that a temporary space is difficult to find, and it may be outside of the Winter Hill neighborhood, which brings me to my next point.

I ask for the School Committee's advocacy and support in making sure the Winter Hill School building is rebuilt at 115 Sycamore. Moving WHCIS out of Winter Hill to a new location on Franey Rd or to Washington St would leave the Gilman Square area a "school desert". Students who live nearby might end up having to cross Broadway or McGrath highway to get to the school closest to their homes.

The Wildcats are an incredible community who deserve a new building in the same central location they currently occupy. Please do not break up our community or send us across town. Please keep our school at 115 Sycamore.

Thank you,
Adrienne Bruno
Parent to Wildcats Cliff (Kindergarten) and Josie (3rd grade)

Madalyn Letellier

From: WHCIS PTA <winterhillpta@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, June 12, 2023 4:06 PM
To: All City Council; City Clerk Contact
Subject: Fwd: FOR PUBLIC RECORD: Statement from WHCIS PTA

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FYI to City Council.

Thank you,
-Uma Murugan
(Pronouns: she, her, hers)
Sent from my iPhone. Please excuse any typos.

Begin forwarded message:

From: WHCIS PTA <winterhillpta@gmail.com>
Date: June 12, 2023 at 15:10:57 EDT
To: Sara Dion <sdion@k12.somerville.ma.us>, Laura Pitone <lpitone@k12.somerville.ma.us>, Andre Green <agreen@k12.somerville.ma.us>, Sarah Phillips <sphillips@k12.somerville.ma.us>, Ellenor Barish <ebarish@k12.somerville.ma.us>, Emily Ackman <eackman@k12.somerville.ma.us>, Katherine Santiago <ksantiago@k12.somerville.ma.us>, Ilana Krepchin <ikrepchin@k12.somerville.ma.us>, Katjana Ballantyne <mayor@somervillema.gov>, benforward2@gmail.com
Cc: jcurley2@k12.somerville.ma.us, Courtney Gosselin <cgosselin@k12.somerville.ma.us>, "Ames, Christopher" <cames@k12.somerville.ma.us>, whcis-pta-executive-committee@googlegroups.com
Subject: FOR PUBLIC RECORD: Statement from WHCIS PTA

WHCIS PTA Statement, June 12 2023

What has happened to the WH school, including the failure of structural concrete, is a result of failure of government. In the absence of swift and effective action on the part of the government at so many levels, many of our members have stepped in to fill the vacuum. We encourage all voices raised to get our problem solved. We, as PTA officers, will work as best we can with parents and parent groups, as well as teacher and teacher groups, to get us the attention we deserve.

But our PTA members are not all on the same page. Many are calling for the engineering reports to be made public. Some are not interested in any reports published by the city because they have lost trust in such processes. Many non-PTA voices are not even being heard. We know that most of these voices are also disconnected from city government.

There are immigrant voices, and our PTA membership does not represent them. Our PTA is only 9-12 months old. Our PTA officers are loosely connected with Padres Latinos. Together, we have worked hard to establish a presence among diverse immigrants in the WH community. However, during this time of

chaos and crisis, our PTA officers do not feel like we have a handle on the worries of our most vulnerable families. We worked with Family Liaisons all last year to support the Free Food market. We have slowly had some impact, as non-native English speakers are only now beginning to understand what a PTA even is. PTA officers are not equipped to speak for families who are facing food or housing insecurity, but we know many of them. We rely on Family Liaisons and SPS staff to not only support the most vulnerable families during the tumultuous period of potential relocation, but also to uplift their concerns so that they too can be included in the conversation.

Our PTA's focus in the coming months, and throughout the 2023-24 school year, must be to support our Family Liaisons in engaging families and understanding how to get information to them and from them in order to plan for a long-term solution to the problem of school facilities.

Although we are a fledgling PTA, we have done enough work to know that the City must do the following:

1. **Keep our school community intact.** Our school is a special place for all our children. But most citizens of Somerville do not realize the enormous value our school adds to the city of Somerville. It houses the AIM program, the Newcomer Academy and the SLIFE program for the entire district. For students of various nationalities, ethnic and social histories, although our building has been declared unsafe, the safe and welcoming community that our teachers have created for us is priceless. For many immigrants and refugee families, our school is the only family that we know. We do not want to be split up this Fall like we have been in the last two weeks of school. We belong together, and, we belong to the city of Somerville. Our school is our sanctuary. Please keep our school community intact.
2. **Take control of the narrative.** Meet with us and address the urgency of the situation. Address our fears, hear our concerns and give us information we can use. Our PTA cannot compensate for the lack of city leadership. In the absence of a clear narrative around whether or not our building is safe, whether or not our school will reopen at 115 Sycamore in the fall, etc. our PTA encourages any and every voice raised to demand a new WH school facility.
3. **Foot the bill to fix Winter Hill.** PTA's building survey done at the beginning of the current school year made it clear that the current building at 115 Sycamore is standing in the way of effective teaching and learning. Our petition to the Mayor in June 2022 asking to fix our building got us some attention, but it now appears that our school needs a 911, and not a 311. PTA's teacher appreciation survey done in May 2023 has made it clear that our teachers are working overtime and are severely overburdened. PTA believes that the School Improvement Plan can only be implemented if the building doesn't stand in the way of its progress. We have dealt with enough time lost, both teaching/learning time, and time on moving the facilities planning forward. Our children are being punished for something successive city governments have failed to do.
4. **We are a walking school.** From what we have heard, most of us want to come back to 115 Sycamore as the permanent location of the new WH school.

Here are our immediate demands:

1. **Meet with us.** Tell us what had really happened to our school building and what that means. Tell us where our whole school, while staying intact, will function while summer school is in session; where aftercare for summertime will happen; and where our whole school will function in the 2023-34 school year.
2. **Tell us how we will get to school.** If we will go to school anywhere other than 115 Sycamore, budget for the transportation of any and all students to a swing space.
3. **Complete modest repairs to any temporary swing space where we relocate to THIS SUMMER.** If we are temporarily relocated, teachers should not have to continue to spend their time dealing with building distractions that take away time from teaching and learning. That would be unacceptable.

4. **Budget for the transportation of caregivers to evening and after school events** such as Back to School Night, PTA meetings, PTA social events, school events such as learning celebrations, our annual Mae Day, graduation festivities, etc.

Here are our long-term needs: Don't just keep us together!

1. **Preserve what's special about our community.** Ensure that the SPS provides adequate staffing for all existing innovation practices, student support services, restorative justice and theater curricula. Add staff if necessary. Preserve all existing inclusion practices in every classroom. Ensure legally mandated SPED services. Ensure enough space for children to be comfortable as they learn. Ensure enough space for expanding programs, including AIM and after-school.
2. **Keep us safe!** Ensure that all families feel safe in any school facility that is chosen to house our school community in 2023-24. PTA believes that families need to not only BE safe, but also FEEL safe. Children cannot learn if they don't feel safe, cared for and respected for who they are. In addition to ensuring that the school facility is safe, PTA would like to remind the City and the SPS that, in response to our Student Council's self-advocacy in the 2022-23 school year, we have called for the implementation of Somerville's version of the "Handle with Care" policy that Plymouth County DA has in place, starting in the 2023-24 school year.
3. **Keep us informed.** Establish a website dedicated to the master-plan for school facilities that includes information on plans, timelines and funding sources, as well as links to publicly filed documents. Ensure that the website is regularly updated for the public in English, Spanish, Portuguese and Haitian Kreyol.

Signed by PTA Officers in attendance at our May 2023 Executive Committee meeting today:

- Uma Murugan, President
- Gandhi Aldana, Vice President
- Cassandra Cruikshank, Vice President
- Rosa Relena Valladares, Secretary
- Cassie Walston, Secretary

Sent on behalf of the PTA for Winter Hill Community Innovation School

WHCIS PTA // winterhillpta@gmail.com

Website: <https://sites.google.com/k12.somerville.ma.us/winterhill/pta>

Follow us for news and announcements! <https://www.facebook.com/WinterHillSomervillePTA>

Join the (private) WHCIS Families discussion group! <https://www.facebook.com/groups/whcis.families>