



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council School Building Facilities and Maintenance Special Committee

Meeting Minutes

Thursday, February 6, 2025

6:00 PM

Joint Meeting with the School Committee's School Building Facilities and Maintenance Committee

The meeting took place remotely via Zoom and was called to order at 6:05 PM by Chair Davis. The committee adjourned from 6:07 PM to 6:08 PM to allow the School side to begin their meeting. The meeting adjourned at 8:06 PM on a roll call vote of 3 in favor (Councilors Sait, Clingan and Davis), none against and none absent.

Others present:

Somerville Public School staff: Laura Pitone, Leiran Biton, Superintendent Ruben Carmona, Dr. Sarah Phillips and Amara Anosike.

City staff: Director Richard Raiche – Infrastructure and Asset Management, Commissioner Jill Lathan – Public Works, Director Anna Gartsman - SomerStat, Director Neha Singh – Intergovernmental Affairs, Peter Forcellese – Legislative Clerk.

Roll Call

Present: Ward Six City Councilor Lance L. Davis, Ward Four City Councilor Jesse Clingan and Ward Five City Councilor Naima Sait

1. Committee Minutes (ID # [24-1678](#)) Approval of the Minutes of the School Building Facilities and Maintenance Special Committee Meeting of November 18, 2024.

RESULT: **ACCEPTED**

AYE: Ward Six City Councilor Davis, Ward Four City Councilor Clingan and Ward Five City Councilor Sait

2. Resolution (ID # [24-0466](#)) By Councilor Davis
That the Administration provide the Special Committee on School Building Facilities and Maintenance with regular updates about the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) process for the Winter Hill and Brown Schools.

Director Raiche reported that the process has advanced to the next stage, which is formulating the project team. Director Raiche anticipates that this may take 6 months.

RESULT: **KEPT IN COMMITTEE**

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3. Order
(ID # [25-0063](#))
- By Councilor Wilson, Councilor Clingan and Councilor Sait
That the Director of Infrastructure and Asset Management update this Council on the timeline for constructing a new school building.
- Councilor Sait inquired about locations for the school(s) and Director Raiche said that the matter will be a community discussion in the next phase, between July 2025 and June 2026. Councilor Clingan asked about speeding up the decision-making process, questioning the delays and Director Raiche replied that ideas, plans, and renderings wouldn't be ready until summer or fall of this year. Once the project team is formed, a feasibility study for the Winter Hill School and for a combined site will occur. Various sites will be considered and designers will be reviewing massings from July to October. Mr. Biton expects the Construction Advisory Group (CAG) to have recommendations by September 2025. Ms. Pitone raised questions about using the DPW site and Director Raiche noted it's not off the table but presents some complications.
- RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED**
4. Order
(ID # [24-1595](#))
- By Councilor Pineda Neufeld
That the Director of Infrastructure and Asset Management provide a timeline and update on the creation of a production kitchen at the Argenziano School.
- Mr. Biton stated that the production kitchen was previously located at WHNS before its closure and that food is currently being provided by vendors, and moving the kitchen to the Argenziano would result in cost savings and more nutritious meals. Superintendent Carmona mentioned this is a priority, but noted there have been delays. Director Raiche explained that relocating to the Argenziano involves plumbing, electrical, and roof work. The project went out to bid with only two bids being received, both of which were incomplete. The project was re-bid, and the contract was awarded to Eagle Point. Preliminary work has started with plumbing, electrical, and appliance installation planned for the February school vacation. The lead time for a walk-in refrigerator is 10 weeks, so it will not be ready for installation during the April school vacation.
- RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED**
5. Order
(ID # [24-1594](#))
- By Councilor Pineda Neufeld
That the Director of Infrastructure and Asset Management provide a timeline and update for installation of a new classroom on the third-floor atrium at the Argenziano School.
- Mr. Biton stated the need for a new classroom, and Superintendent Carmona mentioned ongoing construction and space challenges. The construction will start early this summer and should be ready by the start of the next school
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year. Director Raiche noted that the original building designer is returning to assist.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

6. Order
(ID # [25-0071](#))

By Councilor Davis, Councilor Pineda Neufeld, Councilor Sait and Councilor Burnley Jr.

That the Commissioner of Public Works and the Director of Engineering report to this Council on the failure of the boiler at the Brown School and the short- and long-term plans to address heating for the building.

Chair Davis spoke of residents' complaints about noise from the temporary heaters. Commissioner Lathan reported that, upon inspection of a failed boiler, DPW staff determined that a 2nd boiler could be a problem down the road, so 2 new boilers were ordered for the school. The lead time for these boilers is 20 weeks. Upon learning of the failure, temporary heating equipment was quickly put in place to provide heat to the building. Commissioner Lathan commented that there is some at piping at the school that might have to be dealt with over the summer months.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

7. Order
(ID # [25-0094](#))

By Councilor McLaughlin

That the Director of Parking allow public use of school parking lots during snow storms.

Chair Davis explained why the policy was changed some years ago (at his request).

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

8. Resolution
(ID # [25-0157](#))

By Councilor Davis and Councilor Strezo

That the Administration immediately withdraw the School Building Community Feedback Survey, released this morning, regarding the replacement of the Winter Hill and, potentially, Brown School.

Chair Davis explained the frustration caused by the survey among CAG members, city councilors, and school parents, due to its biased questions. Although the Administration has not pulled the survey, the outreach has paused to allow for the survey to be redrafted. Director Gartsman stated she created the survey with input from various parties, including the CAG. Chair Davis questioned why the survey was still live if responses weren't being collected and Director Gartsman said that backend data was being tested. Councilor Clingan questioned the necessity of the survey and Director

Gartsman responded that it aimed to gather community input on important school features, leading to tailored variants in the next phase.

Director Raiche emphasized the strategy to engage the broader community beyond those already interested, explaining that the first step involves collecting broad data not necessarily specific to the Brown School. Chair Davis noted a bias towards combining the Brown and Winter Hill Schools, despite the preferences for separate neighborhood schools shown in previous surveys. He requested, again, that the survey be pulled and that the Administration collaborate with the CAG.

Councilor Sait asked about CAG's involvement and Director Gartsman said initial topics came from two CAG meetings, however, due to the CAG's desire to move fast with the survey, it wasn't brought back to them for review prior to its release. The Communication Department will work on other methods of outreach and Director Raiche commented that SomerNova and others would be involved with meeting people where they are.

Dr. Phillips highlighted technical issues with the survey, e.g., it doesn't allow for wide variation and noted its resemblance to a poll. Ms. Pitone and Mr. Biton expressed concerns about bias and insufficient CAG input and Councilor Strezo voiced doubts about the survey's credibility and accessibility, saying that it was only available online, thereby excluding a portion of the community who do not have internet access. She noted her concern that the survey doesn't represent the questions CAG wanted. Director Gartsman stated that there is no agreement among CAG members on how to proceed, so they need a more cohesive agreement before going forward.

PTA President and CAG member Ryan Williams underscored the importance of having trust between parents and the city and criticized the survey's integrity and balance. He called for its removal to focus on more productive efforts. Chair Davis stated that combining the Winter Hill and Brown Schools shouldn't be an option since both schools have done things on their own to make them models to be followed. He stated that there is a perception that public processes are just window dressing, and this survey reinforces that perception.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED