

Somerville School Construction Advisory Group

Meeting Summary- October 8th, 2024

On Tuesday October 8th, 2024 the Somerville School Construction Advisory Committee convened its first meeting at Somerville High School. Links to summaries, presentations, and recordings from this meetings can be found here: <https://www.somervillema.gov/cag>

Below are important points and action items, followed by a summary of discussions. A list of Advisory Group attendance is attached at the end of this document.

Action items

CBI and Planning Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Poll members on their preferences related to meeting logistics• Discuss and pursue additional Advisory Group members
Advisory Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide CBI with preferences for upcoming meeting logistics

Summary of discussions

Welcome and Introductions

The meeting opened with a welcome and expressions of gratitude from Mayor Katjana Ballantyne, Superintendent of Schools Rubén Carmona and the Somerville School Construction Advisory Group planning team. Advisory Group and Planning Team members introduced themselves.

Advisory Group Purpose and Timeline

Stacie Smith, group facilitator from the Consensus Building Institute (CBI), oriented the advisory group to ground rules, the project's timeline and the group's purpose: to help develop recommendations on the location and scope of the new school, which will be considered by Mayor Katjana. This includes the following questions:

- If Somerville builds a new school rather than renovate the old Winter Hill School, should the school be located at the Winter Hill site at Sycamore Street, or elsewhere?
- Will the Brown School be included in a joint school, or, if not, how should Somerville plan for the future of the Brown?
- What do these choices mean for the Somerville School District and City as a whole?

She referenced the detailed description and ground rules for the [group](#).

Advisory Group Composition and Information needs

Stacie then shared and invited input from the Advisory Group on additional group members and information needs. She provided an initial list of the types of information that will be made available to the group, as well as the current group membership. She also emphasized this process will build on previous work, such as the outreach done by the Winter Hill Innovation School 8th grade Civics students. Advisory Group members listed enrollment projections, educational / programmatic needs, building energy usage, and legal considerations as important data to consider. One member emphasized that there will be qualitative data to consider such as social emotional impacts on students and another member urged the Advisory Group to keep educational needs front of mind. Advisory Group members suggested adding members to represent specialized school programs, educators (if possible), neighborhoods where the school could be built, Mayor's Office representation, and parents living in affordable housing.

Defining Success

The facilitator asked Advisory Group members to characterize a successful process. Members reflected by themselves and then shared their aspirations with the group. Their responses are grouped thematically below:

Thorough Decision-Making Process

- The Advisory Group reaches consensus and the mayor accepts the group's recommendation.
- The Advisory Group works together thoughtfully by listening, debating and remaining open minded throughout the process.
- The decision made by the Advisory Group is transparent, explicable and understandable.
- Advisory Group members have fully explored all aspects and options.

Inclusive and Equitable Outcomes

- All students have access to the best schools without driving up costs or displacing families.
- This decision provides guidance and certainty for families looking to raise kids in the area.
- This process leads to the advancement of the whole community and considers challenges of all Somerville schools.
- Advisory Group members visualized a school that considers all aspects of student success and happiness.

Community Engagement and Trust

- All decisions made by the Advisory Group are made with input of students and educators.
- The Advisory Group gets as much community support as possible.
- This process restores trust between the city of Somerville and the Somerville community.
- Somerville residents embrace the process and the decision.

Long-term Planning and Vision

- The decision is a long-term plan for students to prevent future displacement or facilities concerns with school buildings.
- The Advisory Group makes a generational decision that considers long-term city goals, projection of future students, and enough room for growth.
- The decision results in a major success and stability for the affected neighborhoods and for the whole city.

Work Plan

Stacie Smith presented a draft work plan for the Advisory Group. She suggested that the Advisory Group would meet roughly every month, and noted that initial Advisory meetings would focus on sharing and discussing the relevant information to guide the work, that the next set of meetings would focus on developing options, and ultimately, the group would work on evaluating and refining options to come up with their best recommendation. To do this, the Advisory Group will draw on the results of a broad public process into their work over the next year. The first phase of the public process would ask residents to express what is important to them about the project. This information would inform the advisory group's criteria when considering options. The second phase will invite the public to help weigh pros and cons of the Advisory Group's initial options. And phase three will welcome any final suggestions prior to seeking consensus on a final recommendation.

Advisory Group Norms

Members discussed the logistics of future meetings such as timing, format and advance notice for independent work. The Advisory Group asked for information within one week of an upcoming meeting and more time for lengthier documents. Advisory Group members generally agreed on the importance of being able to ask experts questions directly and the use of executive summaries. In addition, group members emphasized flexibility in meetings, especially for members with children. Advisory Group members discussed the most accessible format for the meetings (virtual, hybrid, in-person, streaming locations). One member commented that there could be benefits to creating sub-working groups in the future.

Public Comment

Ms. Megan Brady, a teacher at the Winter Hill school, spoke during public comment and noted the remarkable work done by her 8th grade Civic's students, who personally polled and interviewed students, teachers, and community members. This member of the public shared a vision of success where Winter Hill students get their dream school and know that the adults in the community value them.

Other matters and closing thoughts

The Advisory Group adjourned at 8:25 PM and will meet next on November 12 at 6 PM.

Meeting Attendance

Somerville School Construction Advisory Group Members	
Winter Hill Parent Representatives	Cassie Walston
	Matthew Daniels
Brown School Parent Representatives	Ryan Williams
	Marta Guerra Pastrian
SPS District Parent Representatives	Emily Miyares
	Matthew Roberts
Business Community Representative	Adam Portnoy
	Jack Connolly (alternate)
Community Groups: Green New Deal for Somerville Schools Representative	Corey Donahue
Community Groups: Padres Latinos	Gandhy Aldana
	Marta Fuertes (alternate)
School Committee Representative	Andre Green
City Council Representative	Kristen Strezo

Planning Team

Facilitation Team: Consensus Building Institute	Stacie Smith
	Meira Downie
Somerville Public Schools	Amara Anoiske
City of Somerville	Nikki Spencer