Somerville School Construction Advisory Group

Meeting Summary- December 18, 2024

On Wednesday December 18th, 2024 the Somerville School Construction Advisory Group convened its second meeting virtually on Zoom. Links to summaries, presentations, and recordings from this meetings can be found here: https://www.somervillema.gov/cag

Below are 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	● Send CAG members the December 2023 community feedback, draft December meeting summary and meeting materials.
Advisory Group	● Send CBI with any specific questions about municipal finance related to the project for the January CAG meeting.

Summary of discussions

Welcome and Introductions

Stacie Smith, group facilitator from the Consensus Building Institute (CBI), introduced the meeting agenda, clarified CBI email protocols, and noted that feedback from the December 2023 meeting had been transcribed and would be shared soon.

Review the MSBA Process and Timeline

Rich Raiche, Director of Infrastructure and Asset Management for the City of Somerville, presented the timeline for the MSBA process. Recently, the Massachusetts School Building Authority's (MSBA) Board of Directors voted to move Somerville's project forward to the next phase or module of the process. The MSBA process consists of seven modules.The project is advancing to Module 2: Forming the Project Team. This phase consists of two sequential steps: first, hiring an Owner's Project Manager (OPM), followed by hiring the designer. Module 2 is expected to take place from January 2025 through July 2025. The modules proceed sequentially, with one exception: Module 5: Funding the Project typically begins during Module 4: Schematic Design. The earliest projected start date for construction is January 2028 and Dir. Raiche highlighted that a building of this magnitude takes at least 3 years to construct. Dir. Raiche went on to present a visual timeline of the MSBA process alongside the CAG's process and noted overlapping milestones. The entire presentation and accompanying slides are available on the CAG web page linked here.

Members' discussion and questions are summarized below, with responses italicized.

- One member asked why the city could not bring the manager and architect in the same six month period

Dir. Raiche: The MSBA layouts out a linear process that requires that you hire the OPM first and the OPM assists in the designer selection process

- One member discussed interest in how this process worked for the most recent school building projects such as the East Somerville Community school and Somerville High School
  Dir. Raiche: While the High School was a different situation that did not consider combining schools, it did follow a similar process in evaluating different location options - we considered the option of putting the building adjacent to Trum field. East Somerville was different in that it was replaced in kind after a fire through a slightly different MSBA process, which was considered a repair rather than a rebuild. There were fewer options to evaluate since it was going into the same location. That repair option wasn't available for Winter Hill. This project also involves a decision about whether to include populations from two schools, so is markedly different from the High School.
- An Advisory Group member requested clarification about the expected construction timeline for this project and wondered whether the siting impacted the timeline.
  Dir. Raiche: A building of this square footage or magnitude requires at least 3 years to construct from laying the foundation to final finishings. Whether the new building is Winter Hill and Brown or just Winter Hill would not have a large impact on the construction timeline. The location of Sycamore Street or Trum field might impact build time by a few months, but this is all speculative until the feasibility study is complete. The Trum field is essentially a clear site, whereas the Sycamore Street site has known abatement needs associated with demolition.
- Members expressed confusion about the accuracy of project timeline milestones. One member urged that information provided to the community be consistent and accurate.
  Dir. Raiche: This timeline is the best current estimate given available information. As we get towards the completion of the schematic design, we will have a construction cost estimate that is sufficient for a debt exclusion vote. We expect that the required cost estimate will not be complete until the summer of 2027.
- One member asked what level of financial detail the Prop 2.5 debt override vote requires and whether residents can vote on funding for different projects.
  Dir Raiche: Until we are through the schematic design, we will not have a cost estimate at that level of sophistication required for a proposition 2.5 override. The city finance team comes up with a debt repayment schedule and there will be a presentation in January from the finance team. There could be multiple projects on the same ballot however they would need to be separate questions.
- One member was interested in opportunities to get ahead of the schedule when possible and considered whether the CAG coming to a decision prior to November 2025 would speed up the process.
  Dir. Raiche: Coming to a decision earlier will not lead to quicker completion of the feasibility study. The new building includes Brown or not, MSBA requires us to do due diligence and consider multiple sites. The timeline is not likely to change very much. Additionally, in order to deliberate and make an informed recommendation, the CAG and other members of the community are going to want to see all the information related to the options available to them, and the time needed for the development of that information is accounted for in the November 2025 timeline.
- One member asked at what point in the process the city will have estimates of operational and maintenance costs to fold into the CAG's consideration of each option
  Dir. Raiche: We can flag this during the feasibility study to have those sorts of numbers.

Community Process Update

Goals of Broad Community Process

Mayor Ballantyne introduced the broad community engagement process and clarified the Advisory Group's role to ensure those most affected have a voice in the process. Mayor Ballantyne stressed the importance that information provided to the Advisory Group incorporates diverse perspectives, so that these can be incorporated in their analysis of options. She reiterated that this public process will not slow down the school building process. Mayor Ballantyne noted that Somerville residents regularly provide input across various city decisions, from snow plow operations to million-dollar participatory budgeting initiatives, and highlighted the benefits of community engagement that builds early buy-in, leading to better results through shared purpose and "stress testing" of decisions.

Methods and Survey

Denise Taylor, Director of Communications for the City of Somerville, went on to describe the goals, methods, and role of the CAG in the broad community outreach process. A multilingual survey will be distributed across the district through multiple formats. The survey effort will be supported by in-person multilingual outreach, targeted listening sessions with marginalized or hard-to-reach groups, and a public meeting featuring updated information and discussion. The survey will focus on understanding core underlying interests and priorities associated with the decisions about scope and location of the school. The CAG can participate by helping in the promotion of the survey and public meeting. Members will later incorporate the results of the survey in their analysis to develop options and recommendations.

Anna Gartsman, Director of SomerStat, shared an overview of the broad community input survey. The survey is scheduled for distribution in January and the CAG can expect a presentation of preliminary data in March 2025. Ms. Gartman asked the Advisory Group what topic areas should be included in the survey.

Members' discussion and questions are summarized below.

- Members recommended that people rank choices. A few members recommended adding a feature that identifies tradeoffs between options. One example would be giving people a certain amount of fake money they can spend across priorities.
- Members urged that the survey be very focused and only include questions that are relevant to the CAG's deliberations.
- A few members were concerned that the survey would confuse people or overpromise on the features of the school.
- One member recommended the characteristics of participants section of the survey should specify whether the person surveyed is a part of the special education community and has students with 504 status.

Public Comment

One person spoke during public comment and suggested that Somerstat speak with someone in the Enrollment Office to gain a better understanding of the process people undergo to enroll prospective students in Somerville Public Schools. The member of the public emphasized that parents of prospective students may not entirely understand their own priorities yet.

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

Planning Team and City Staff

Facilitation Team: Consensus Building Institute	Stacie Smith
	Meira Downie
City of Somerville	Magda Gomez
	Nikki Spencer
	Rich Raiche
	Kristine McNulty
	Denise Taylor
	Mayor Katjana Ballantyne
	Anna Gartsman