

Somerville School Construction Advisory Group

Meeting Summary- October 27, 2025

The Somerville School Construction Advisory Group (CAG) held its twelfth meeting on Monday, October 27, 2025. The key objectives for the meeting were to share the findings from the community survey and focus groups with the CAG and further the discussion and evaluation of options as the group prepares to make their final recommendation in November.

Links to summaries, presentations, and recordings from these 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Draft the October meeting summary• Share a survey for members to share their individual thoughts on the recommendation• Compile and synthesize survey results
Advisory Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Complete individual reflection survey
DREAM Collaborative	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Conduct additional analysis requested by the CAG regarding Question 4

Summary of discussions

Welcome

Stacie Smith greeted the Advisory Group and reviewed the meeting agenda. She mentioned that one member would be attending via Zoom.

Community Survey

Diana Marsh, DREAM Collaborative, presented a high-level summary of the community survey results. DREAM Collaborative, with input from CAG representatives and the City of Somerville, prepared the survey to gauge public opinion on the three building options and assess the community's underlying priorities. The survey was open from August 7 to September 22, 2025 and received 2,429 responses achieving representation in 73 of 81 demographic categories. Diana highlighted that most survey respondents were familiar with the need for a new Winter Hill School prior to taking the survey. DREAM Collaborative's full report of survey results and analysis is linked [here](#). Diana shared the following key findings for each question:

Question 1- Separate or Combined Schools

Respondents were largely split on their preference for building a combined school building now vs maintaining separate schools and deferring a decision on the Brown. There was a slight

preference (45%) for maintaining two separate schools over a new combined school (41%). Diana noted how demographic factors such as ward, parental status, income, race, and age affected the respective responses, with the directly affected communities more in support of keeping the schools separate.

Question 2- Use of Trum Field

The survey indicated widespread opposition across all demographic subgroups to using the Trum Field site for a school building. Diana raised that the use of the word “acceptable” in describing the Trum option could have resulted in different interpretations among respondents.

Question 3- Overall Preference

When asked to pick one of the three options, or support any option, the results indicated a preference for maintaining separate schools and showed that Trum Field remained the least popular option. Diana noted that because the combined school preference was split between two locations, that the combined results of those who supported a combined school were slightly higher than those selecting separate schools. Diana mentioned that ward was the most significant predictor of preferences on Question 3.

Question 4- Factors for Decision

When asked to rank a list of factors influencing their decision, Diana noted that participants across the City as a whole selected “Walkability for Students” most often as one of the top three factors. “Maintain School Communities” and “School Facility and Amenity Needs” were also popular selections for respondent’s top three factors. Diana shared the results based on respondent’s preference on question 1 regarding the separate or combined schools.

Question 5- Additional Comments

Comments largely focused on the use of Trum Field, the debate over consolidation and separate schools, the project’s pace, and the new building being designated as a middle school.

Question 6- Funding Priorities

Overall results for funding priorities indicated that the top Citywide priorities are community facilities, affordable housing, and open space/parks. Diana reviewed analysis of respondent’s ward and income and its influence on the results.

Members’ questions and comments are summarized below, with responses from the City italicized.

- How many people submitted comments about a citywide middle school compared to other comments?
DREAM: We can look into the number of responses that are related to a building dedicated to middle school.
- Regarding the effect of race on Question 1, were Black/African American and Hispanic Latino respondents analyzed as one group or were you indicating that these subgroups respectively felt the same way?
DREAM: We evaluated them as separate groups and they indicated a similar preference.
- I would like to know the demographic breakdown of who offered additional comments. It is important to consider whether these comments primarily came from one subgroup.

- Why does the number of respondents vary based on the question?
DREAM: In some cases we made a response optional. For some of the questions respondents could select more than one choice.
- In your analysis did you check for duplicate or fake responses?
SomerSTAT: Yes, we checked how many responses came from an individual IP address. For responses from within the city and school networks, which is one IP address, we checked if participants provided the same responses to questions.

Synthesis of Focus Groups

Meira Downie and Stacie Smith, Consensus Building Institute (CBI), shared the key takeaways from six focus groups conducted throughout October aiming to provide deeper insight to the CAG and city about the priorities, interests, and concerns underlying the community's preferences on the school building options. These groups included:

- Somerville Public Schools Staff
- Parents/Guardians and Abutters of Winter Hill & Brown School
- Abutters and Users of Trum Field
- Parents/Guardians of Children in Early Childhood Years (ages 0-4)
- Parents/Guardians of Multilingual Learners
- Parents/Guardians of SPS Special Education Students

Meira highlighted themes that emerged across all or most focus groups as well as a summary of each of the distinct focus groups perspectives on the three school building options. A written synthesis of all the focus groups is linked [here](#) and the summary slide presentation is linked [here](#).

CBI reported that the most frequent themes across focus groups were:

- Prioritizing Success of the Debt Exclusion
- Preserving Trum Field
- Expanding Community Space
- Maintaining Neighborhood Schools
- Resolving the Untenable Brown School Building Condition
- Concern about Vacant Buildings
- Plan Transportation and Walkability
- Enhancing Equity

In terms of preferences for options, Somerville school staff and abutters/users of Trum field unanimously supported a larger school at Sycamore, while parents and abutters of Winter Hill and Brown unanimously preferred keeping schools separate. Participants of the other groups were divided, and almost all participants opposed rebuilding on Trum field.

Members' questions and comments are summarized below, with responses from the City and CBI italicized.

- I heard feedback from some focus group participants that felt like the groups were not diverse. Did the city do analysis about the diversity and demographics within the respective subgroups?
Mr. Alakel: That is important feedback. I think a limiting factor is the amount of time it takes to participate in a focus group. In the future we hope to find ways to diversify participation.

- I heard that some of the focus group dates conflicted with Jewish holidays, were other dates offered if someone reached out to say they could not participate?
Mr. Alakel: Thank you for passing that feedback along. We offered a number of options to people who indicated interest in participating. We then selected the option that worked best for the majority of the group. No focus groups took place on Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur.
- I am surprised by the small number of participants, how did you conduct recruitment for these focus groups?
Mr. Alakel: Our intent was to keep the focus groups relatively small to allow as much time as possible for discussion. Our outreach was very targeted because we did not want to turn people away from participating.
- Some Advisory Group members felt that the key findings from the focus group discussions seemed representative of the results of the survey and in line with the CAG's discussions over the course of the last year.

CAG Discussion of Takeaways from Community Process

CAG members were invited to share their reflections and take-aways from the community input. Below is a thematic summary of the CAG's discussion. Clarifying points from the City are italicized below the relevant comments.

School Building Size

- One CAG member stated their discomfort with a large school facility and advocated for prioritizing the perspectives of demographic groups most closely tied to the schools.
- Several members acknowledged that the community expressed interest in separate smaller schools but believed that school size was an insufficient rationale to forgo maximizing MSBA funding. They also noted that the MSBA funding approach prioritizes larger school buildings..
- A few members pointed out that stating the total capacity as ~ 900 students might misrepresent the actual enrollment when the school first opens. They suggested careful consideration of how the debt exclusion question is phrased.
- One member recalled that the old Winter Hill building lacked an adequate number of general classrooms and stressed the importance of dedicating sufficient spaces for students who require one-on-one meetings with special education teachers and specialists in the new design.
Ms. Anosike: The City's MSBA application included an educational profile questionnaire which accounted for spaces for special needs programming. The City is convening an Education Team that will provide input on the building design, and the Superintendent meets with SEPAC leaders monthly
- One CAG member requested clarity on the enrollment capacity options for the new school building and wondered if you could have a building for the enrollment of Brown and WHCIS without the additional capacity.

Educational Considerations

- One CAG member shared that while discussing the school building project with teachers, they frequently raised using the new school facility as a citywide middle school.
Dir. Raiche: The City's MSBA application was for a K-8 school.
Ms. Anosike: The School Department did ask the MSBA if we could pursue the middle school option with the current application and they indicated we would need to submit a new application.

- Members expressed frustration regarding the lack of clarity from the School Committee concerning educational preferences, which made it difficult to offer a recommendation. Members reinforced the importance of the School Committee presenting a long term vision of education in Somerville and proposing programming at the new school building.
- A CAG member highlighted that, based on the School Department's spring presentation, there was no distinct educational advantage between the available options and suggested that the ultimate decision would likely hinge more on community appeal and cost than on educational factors.
- One CAG member highlighted the perspectives of School staff as a group that has not been heard as much throughout the process, and raised interest in a thorough evaluation of their preferences.

School Location

- One member expressed concern with the basis of design and feasibility of a larger capacity school on the Sycamore Street site.
Dir. Raiche: All three design teams massed out a building of that size on the Sycamore St. site and shared great ideas on how to leverage the site.
- One member noted that pursuing the Trum Filed option regardless of its unpopularity has led to frustration and confusion within the community. Another CAG member asked why the Trum field site was considered if it was disqualified when evaluating locations for a new Somerville High School building.
Dir. Raiche: The MSBA process requires us to explore a range of options for locations, and Trum Field is the only other feasible option. Despite its lack of popularity, we will need to continue to explore the Trum Field option for the MSBA feasibility study. We can use the focus groups and surveys as data to show that the option is unsupported. This school would be smaller than the high school which is why it was under consideration as an option.

Transportation and Walkability

- The Advisory Group understood walkability and the overall ease of school transportation as primary community concerns, and noted that their final recommendation must address transportation plans.

Cost Considerations

- One CAG member highlighted that in Question 4 the community survey "Cost" ranked lower than "Maintaining School Communities" and other factors.
- Another CAG member emphasized that the group would need to address the interests of those who preferred separate schools even if the CAG decided to prioritize cost considerations.
- Several CAG members believed it did the most community good to ensure the city maximizes the available MSBA funding to build the facility.

CAG Decision Making

- Most of the Advisory Group highlighted that the community is largely divided between addressing the Brown and WHCIS building needs together or separately. One member noted that the Advisory Group must make their best recommendation with the knowledge that it is unlikely to satisfy the entire community.
- Several CAG members noted that the considerations and priorities raised by the focus groups reflected those they have discussed as a CAG, and will be useful for the recommendation regardless of their expressed preferences on the options.
- The Advisory Group discussed the potential second-order effects of their recommendation, acknowledging that unforeseen consequences could arise from their

recommendation. The group largely agreed to provide the City with a set of suggestions that would detail the Group's concerns about potential ripple effects and clearly outline the limitations of their recommendation.

Dir. Raiche: There are additional audiences for the CAGs recommendation beyond the Mayor. It is important to capture the design elements and pass along to the school building committee. Our selected architect has clearly been following the CAG's discussions.

- The group agreed the final recommendation must incorporate majority and minority viewpoints and include additional recommendations outside the group's direct scope such as the utilization of vacant buildings, attention to the needs of special education programs, and the repurposing of the Brown school. The group hoped this approach would enhance transparency for the Debt Exclusion voters.

- One CAG member asked how a new Mayor impacts the CAG's recommendation.

Ms. Spencer: Making sure we have a new school, particularly for Winter Hill students, remains the current mayor's number one priority. While I cannot speak for a new Mayor, our current Mayor is committed to working with the new mayor to promote the outcome of this process as quickly as possible.

Additional Points

- One CAG member urged the group to define and carefully use the word equity while discussing the schools.
- One CAG member reminded the CAG of the challenges for Winter Hill School students and families who have been displaced from their building and emphasized the importance of a new building for students.

Closing Remarks

Stacie Smith presented the next steps for the group to finalize their recommendation. Advisory Group Members expressed a desire to provide individual feedback on the recommendation before the next meeting. It was agreed that members would complete a survey, and CBI would then compile the results to present at the next meeting scheduled for November 10th.

Somerville School Construction Advisory Group Members	
Brown School Parent Representatives	Ryan Williams
	Marta Guerra Pastroán
Somerville School Parent Representatives	Emily Miyares
	Matthew Roberts
Brown School Teacher Representative	Julia Austein
Winter Hill Parent Representative	Matthew Daniels
Community Groups: Padres Latinos	Gandhy Aldana
	Paula Magnelli
Green New Deal for Somerville Schools	Corey Donahue
Somerville Public Schools Representative	Amara Anosike
Somerville School Committee Representative	Andre Green
Somerville City Council Representative	Kristen Strezo

Planning Team, City Staff and Consultants	
Facilitation Team: Consensus Building Institute	Stacie Smith
	Meira Downie
City of Somerville	Denise Taylor
	Ralph Henry
	Nick Alakel
	Rich Raiche
	Nikki Spencer
	Darryl Nash
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DREAM Collaborative	Diana Marsh