

**CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
SCHOOL COMMITTEE**

Monday, August 10, 2025 – Special Meeting of the Whole

7:00 p.m. – Zoom Webinar

Members present: City Council President Davis, SC Rep Pitone, SC Rep Eldridge, SC Rep Green, SC Rep Dr. Stellman, Mayor Wilson, SC Rep Biton, and Chair Ackman **Absent:** SC Rep Lippens

I. MSBA

Chair Ackman opened the meeting by explaining that the special meeting was focused on moving the MSBA process forward. She noted that the committee had received a large number of documents and said the goal was to identify the most important items, ask questions, and prepare for a vote the following week authorizing the chair and mayor to sign the submission to MSBA.

- PSR process and project schedule

Perkins Eastman reviewed the PSR process and overall schedule.

- The team said Module 3, the feasibility study, was nearing completion.
- Module 4, schematic design, is expected to begin in September and take about six months.
- The next MSBA submission is expected in February 2027.
- Work completed during PSR included subsurface investigations at 115 Sycamore Street, educational program refinements, space summary refinements, building system options, sustainability goals, and pricing from two estimators.
- The school building committee evaluated the options and selected a preferred direction.

- Educational program updates and MSBA questions

Robert Bell and the school district team explained that MSBA had reviewed the educational program and returned comments asking for clarifications.

Questions raised by MSBA included:

- How schedule changes would work if the number of specials increased.
- How more hands-on and interdisciplinary teaching methods would affect space needs.
- What was meant by the school's "community innovation" component.
- Whether administration, support services, and professional development needs were adequately described.
- Whether one pre-K classroom was enough.

Program updates made in response:

- Kindergarten was re-evaluated using a 22-student average rather than 18, reducing the need from 6 kindergarten classrooms to 5.
- The sixth kindergarten classroom was reclassified as a second pre-K classroom.
- World language was expanded in description and later moved in the space summary to core academic space, not specials.
- Science and digital literacy/computer science space needs were clarified.
- Exploratory culinary was added as a refined strand in the educational program.
- Professional development space was clarified and incorporated through the media center and related flex spaces.

Question/Comments

SC Rep Pitone asked why the space seemed to move from a tech engineering orientation to a culinary orientation, calling it a surprising shift.

Robert Bell: explained that tech/engineering was not being removed, but the space was being refined and relabeled.

Superintendent Carmona said the decision followed conversations with Jim Hachey at the CT center, who recommended a scalable option with a through line to high school. Culinary was seen as a practical option for a middle-school-to-high-school pathway, especially since the district does not currently offer middle school CTE programming. The team emphasized that the space is intended to remain flexible and adaptable over time.

Vice Chair Biton: asked why the media center footprint was so large and what programming would happen there.

Superintendent Carmona: explained that the school often struggles to find a functional professional development space for staff. The media center is intended to support library/media functions while also serving as a gathering space for faculty training and after-school meetings.

SC Rep Pitone: asked about the effect of adding another pre-K classroom on the district's early childhood system, especially at Capuano.

Superintendent Carmona: said the district is working with Principal Barros to repurpose five classrooms at Capuano. He said other spaces at Capuano are already heavily utilized for small-group instruction and intervention. He also noted that demand for pre-K remains high across the district, with waiting lists and families seeking more seats. He said broader district implications, including zoning and catchment zones, would be discussed later.

SC Rep Stellman: asked how much wiggle room exists later in a project like this if new information about enrollment or district needs emerges.

Robert Bell: said enrollment is already certified and agreed to with MSBA. The program is being vetted now, and final scope will be locked in during schematic design through a project scope and funding agreement. He said the design is expected to be flexible and adaptable, but the educational program itself must be supported.

Superintendent Carmona: added that Somerville has a history of using buildings above their original capacity.

- **Building organization and grade clusters**

Perkins Eastman presented a bubble diagram and axonometric massing diagram showing the preferred organization of the school.

- Main office is positioned near the entrance with visibility of approach.
- A community/shared-use zone includes arts, tech, specials, cafeteria/commons, SFLC, health and wellness, gym, media center, and after-school spaces.
- Grade clusters are organized into:
 - Pre-K through Grade 3
 - Grades 4 through 6
 - Grades 7 through 8
- The design is intended to create a neighborhood feel instead of a traditional "cells and bells" corridor layout.
- The lower level is partially daylit because the site slopes, so it is not a typical basement.

Questions/ Comments

Vice Chair Biton: asked whether the lower level should be considered a basement.

Robert Bell: said the level is exposed and daylit along parts of Medford Street and Sycamore Street because of the slope. He explained that the team shifted the pre-K wing to avoid creating a narrow areaway and to make a wider light well. He said the goal is to create a better environment for kindergarten and pre-K classrooms.

Vice Chair Biton: then asked for interior renderings or some visual indication of what the lower-level spaces will feel like, saying he wanted to know where the project was heading before voting.

Robert Bell: said the project is still at feasibility level and could provide diagrammatic examples, but more detailed interior renderings will come later in schematic design.

SC Rep Eldridge: asked for more detail on the placement of special education classrooms and how that supports inclusivity.

Robert Bell: said AIM classrooms are distributed across grade levels. The project includes multiple OT/PT rooms and small-group rooms, also distributed within grade clusters.

The team said the intent is to avoid isolating special education spaces at corridor ends or in stigmatized locations. They want each pair of classrooms to be supported by nearby special education or small-group space.

SC Rep Eldridge: noted that some spaces still appeared to be at the ends of hallways and asked whether there was more room to spread them out.

Robert Bell: said there may be some wiggle room and gave an example of how classroom shifts might improve distribution, but acknowledged the plan is still being refined.

SC Rep Pitone: followed up with questions about balancing inclusion and sensory sensitivity.

Robert Bell: Said the design aims to soften the building's approach and reduce anxiety from arrival, cars, noise, and sharp architectural patterns. He said the team is thinking about biophilic design and integrating landscape. He described "respite spaces" or quiet spaces throughout the building. He pointed to a quiet area within the cafeteria and an adaptive PE zone in the gym area. He said the school is being designed to allow students to participate in large community spaces without being overwhelmed. He emphasized again that detailed design work is still ahead in schematic design.

SC Rep Pitone: asked whether the cafeteria/gym relationship was set up to allow the kind of combined assembly space common in other schools.

Robert Bell: said the cafeteria and gym are separate spaces in this design. He explained that the site and vertical stacking make it difficult to combine all community space on one floor. The cafeteria is sized larger than required and includes an operable partition. It can be expanded for larger gatherings, though it is not the same as a full auditorium.

Vice Chair Biton: asked whether a stage could be extracted from another part of the building.

Robert Bell: said a stage could potentially be connected to the gym or other performance functions, but the project is constrained by MSBA participation and site limitations.

Vice Chair Biton: suggested that a stage might fit thematically with the media center, which could serve as a gathering/performance venue.

SC Rep Eldridge: asked whether AIM classrooms include restrooms and what the square boxes shown on the plan represented.

Robert Bell: said most of the AIM spaces are tier three and include bathrooms. A tier one space was intentionally designed without an in-room bathroom so students would use general classroom toilets.

Principal Gosselin explained the tier system:

- Tier 1: general education-type classroom, bathrooms generally not in-room for older grades.
- Tier 2: small-group or pull-out setting, not substantially separate, and no in-room bathroom.
- Tier 3: substantially separate classroom, typically requiring an in-room bathroom.

- **Option review and preferred schematic direction**

Perkins Eastman then reviewed the 11 evaluated options.

Options reviewed included:

- Base repair for Winter Hill School

- Base repair for Benjamin Brown School
- Addition/renovation options for Sycamore Street for 690 and 925 students
- Addition/renovation for the 201 Willow site
- New school options for Sycamore Street at both 690 and 925 students
- New school options at 201 Willow Street
- Variations that studied ledge conditions and construction impacts

Preferred option:

- Option 4, a new 925-student school at Sycamore Street, was identified as the preferred schematic direction.

Why Option 4 was preferred:

- Best fit for the educational program
- Better relationships among cafeteria, gym, and play space
- Better support for grade clusters and shared community use
- Better overall response to site conditions

Why some alternatives were less preferred:

- Option 4.1 moved pre-K and kindergarten higher in the building, reducing direct access to outdoor play and complicating circulation.
- Option 4.2 created more exterior wall area and also created disconnects between cafeteria and play areas.
- Members noted the MSBA had specifically requested the Willow Street alternative, even though it was not the city's preferred direction.

Comments/Questions

Andre Green: raised the issue of parking, saying the community would definitely ask about it. Concerns about how staff, families, and community members will park for a school in the center of town. Possibilities such as under-building parking, shared parking, off-site parking, and shuttles.

Dan Arons: said the team could study whether a partial or full parking level under the building is possible, though rock and ledge make it costly.

Richard Raiche: said parking and mobility decisions will be part of the ongoing monthly school building committee process.

SC Rep Pitone: noted that the high school parking plan had previously added substantial cost and was removed, and that the city needs to balance expenses with community needs.

Mayor Wilson: noted that the Evergreen Terrace / Annex site could eventually be part of a future parking or city space strategy, but that would require other dominoes to fall first.

SC Rep Pitone: asked why costs were not highlighted in the summary and later asked about the Brown School base repair number.

Perkins Eastman said cost detail is in the report and appendices rather than the cover sheet.

Sean Burke: said cost is usually not emphasized first because the educational plan is the main driver.

Vice Chair Biton: asked about the Brown School base repair estimate and what it includes

Robert Bell: said the base repair estimate covers code, accessibility, envelope, structure, and mechanical systems, but not a full educational program upgrade.

Richard Raiche: said the Brown base repair work would likely not deliver the full educational program and could still require loss of usable spaces.

The mayor and Raiche discussed that maintenance of two separate buildings would be more expensive than one.

SC Rep. Pitone: Clarified that an earlier Brown estimate she had seen was more like a full programmatic renovation and not the same as the base repair number.

Rich Raiche: explained that the larger Brown concept would provide a full range of educational spaces for roughly 235 students if the building were not consolidated.

SC Rep. Pitone: asked whether there would be enough contingency in the budget to deal with soil or environmental surprises like those encountered in other projects.

Sean Burke: said the team has already carried contingencies for multiple levels of soil removal and contamination risk. The project team has done limited subsurface investigation while the building is still in place. Early demolition is part of the plan so that additional subsurface work can happen sooner.

Rich Raiche: said this project will likely reveal issues earlier than the high school project did, which should help manage schedule and cost risk better.

Robert Bell: added that the initial borings have not shown major concerns so far, though further testing is still needed.

Chair Ackman asked if there were any final questions or comments before closing. She thanked the team for their work and said the committee needed to feel comfortable signing off on the project and noted the committee would vote on August 17.

II. Acceptance of FY26 and FY27 Grants Funds:(recommended action: approval)

MOTION: There was a motion by SC Rep Biton Lippens, seconded by SC Rep Pitone, to accept all federal entitlement and continuation grants and all state continuation grants awarded to the Somerville Public Schools listed below:

FY26-Grants

Private

- ***The Joy of Nature- MLE- Summer SPELL Programming Services*** -\$3,000
- ***ASPEN Institute- District Wide- Grant Increase***- \$500.00
- ***Morris Bender Foundation- SFLC Dept***- \$2,000

FY27 Summer Grants

Private

- ***Coordinated Family Community Engagement-SFLC- Family & Community Support*** -\$371,477
- ***Barr Foundation/ La Mariquita Fund- SPELL Summer Programming***-\$950
- ***Mass Life Science OST Grant- Robotics Program*** - \$29,924

State

- ***Early College Planning Grant- College & Career Readiness Infrastructure Planning Resources for protentional Partners***- \$20,000
- ***High School Equivalency- SCALE Chief Examiner to oversee test Centers***- \$17,717
- ***Comprehensive School Health Gr.- District Wide- Health Related courses and Language services for Nurses***- \$85,500
- ***CS Engagement District Wide Professional Developt***-\$37,001.00

Federal

- ***Homeless Transportation***- \$139,562
- ***CTE Frameworks & Competency Based Imp.*** - CTE Professional Development-\$35,000
- **Strengthening Career & Technical Education-CTE-** \$87,015.00

Roll call vote: President Council Davis- Y, Member Pitone- Y, Member Eldridge-Y, SC Rep Green- Y, SC Rep Stellman -Y, Mayor Wilson-Y, Member Biton-Y and Dr. Ackman-Y, Motion passed Yes: 8 No: 0, unanimously.

III. ADJOURNMENT

Meeting was adjourned 8:53 PM p.m.

Related documents:

[Perking Eastman Presentation](#)

Submitted by: E Garcia

Attach Documents Starting on the next page