

Minutes of the Capital Building Committee Meeting of Wednesday, August 24, 2022. Present were Derek Heim, Chairman, Marc Lapointe, Vice Chairman, James Carvalho, John Salzillo, Chris Hajder, James Devol, Tom Blakey, John Hansen, and William Anderson. The meeting convened at 6:01 p.m. at the School Administration Building, One Gardner Neck Road.

Also present at this time were Mallory Aronstein, Town Administrator; John Robidoux, Superintendent of Schools, Sarah Carlson and Paul Burke. Mr. Robert Alford II arrived at 6:25 p.m.

Chairman Heim called the meeting to order.

The Committee reviewed the Minutes of August 2, 2022. Mr. Carvalho **MOVED** to approve the minutes of August 2, 2022. Seconded by Mr. Devol and so voted unanimously.

Mr. Robidoux, Superintendent of Schools, discussed the School Capital Plans with the Committee. Mr. Robidoux said the School was committed to building a new middle school. He said the current building is about 150 years old and has outlived its usefulness. He said the School Department puts money into it each year to maintain it and keep it up but it is difficult to continue to retrofit it. He said the building does not lend itself to 21st Century learning and that technology, electrical, HVAC, and other repairs are becoming more difficult.

Mr. Robidoux discussed the Town's purchase of the Del Mac Orchard for use of constructing a new school. He said the school was not selected in their first application for a feasibility study with the Massachusetts School Building Authority but they applied again and the MSBA is conducting a senior study of the property in September which will result in their officials touring the school, review the information and make a final decision on whether the Town would be invited to participate in the program. He said we will not know the results of whether we are accepted until the end of December or in the new year.

Mr. Robidoux said the School Committee would not seek to retain that building once the middle school was vacated from it.

Mr. Devol asked what the earliest possible date Mr. Robidoux foresaw as occupancy for a new school if all went according to plan. Mr. Robidoux said before Covid, towns were experiencing about 5 years but now it is more like 7 years at the earliest.

There was discussion of the process for surplusing a property from School Department ownership. Mr. Robidoux said previous discussions had included using the facility for an elementary school or repurposing other grade levels but that there is no place to put a playground and it is not suitable.

Discussion continued regarding the benefit of having capital planning in place.

Mr. Carvalho said once the school was vacant, the School Committee would vote to give the land to the Town for their use and/or disposal.

Mr. Heim said that the process for a new school is seven to eight years at a minimum and that he said he believed to be actually longer than that. He asked if it was the intention of the School Committee to build the new middle school at the Del Mac Orchard.

Mr. Robidoux said absolutely. He said the plan was to build a middle school and join it to the current high school and then eventually build an elementary school there as well.

Mr. Heim said so the Town could be faced with other surplus property in the future, such as the Brown School or Gardener.

Mr. Robidoux said potentially but it's premature to discuss those properties without a plan in place for the middle school.

Discussion continued regarding the MSBA process of determining eligibility with the senior study. Mr. Heim said sometimes a town who has taken care of their building is not selected because other competing towns may be worse off and the timeline is extended further from the 7 to 8 years.

Mr. Carvalho said the feasibility study itself takes a year to a year and half to study and design a school.

Mr. Hansen asked about the acreage needed for the school to follow through on this plan. Mr. Robidoux said currently the High School is on 31 acres and that the school is seeking 27-28 acres to allow for a new school and fields. He said he was unsure about the requirements for a second school at that location.

Mr. Blakey asked how the School Department felt about having a DPW building adjacent to a school. Mr. Robidoux said that this has been discussed previously and that if the DPW building isn't too close to the school it can work. He said he'd like to collaborate to meet both needs.

Discussion continued regarding wetlands of the area and the need for secondary egress.

Discussion continued regarding the Sousa property adjacent to the High School. Mr. Heim asked if the School Department had any further conversations with the property owners to acquire that property. He said adding the acreage from that property could change the whole trajectory allowing space for everything.

Discussion of the Sousa property continued.

There was discussion of the Del Mac Orchard property concerning the intent of purchasing the land. Mr. Hajder said that the Capital Building Committee's task is to find homes for multiple entities and to do so expediently. He asked if these entities are built within the next three to five years, how does that impact the School's plans.

Mr. Robidoux said that the Town may take too much room and the School wouldn't be able to locate there, but purchasing the Sousa property may change that.

At 6:25 p.m., Mr. Robert Alford II entered the room.

Discussion continued regarding wetlands and the constraints of the Del Mac Orchard because of the wetlands.

Mr. Blakey discussed the priority of building a DPW and Town Hall, noting the inefficiencies of the current set up within the Town. He said the Committee is supposed to be looking at the current and future needs of the Town.

There was discussion of the School Committee's review of the use of the Del Mac Orchard as shared with municipal functions. Mr. Anderson discussed the proposal sent to Mr. Robidoux with the Town Hall placed on the Del Mac Orchard. He said it doesn't seem as though both the DPW and the Town Hall buildings can fit and accommodate the school on the property due to the wetlands and topography. The Committee reviewed the proposed plan developed by Mr. Anderson. Mr. Anderson said it would be helpful to have a conceptual plan for the school to truly determine the need for acreage. Mr. Robidoux said there is no conceptual plan at this time.

Mr. Devol said that the idea of building a municipal complex on the Del Mac Orchard is really contingent on buying the Sousa property.

Discussion continued regarding the need to see the school's conceptual plan. Mr. Heim said all the town needs is square footage as it is based upon a formula. Mr. Hansen suggested using neighboring communities as an estimate and noted that Somerset is going through this process so using their proposed square footage could give a close estimate.

There was discussion of sketching out a drawing for the next meeting based upon square footage needs of the school.

Mr. Heim asked how the School Committee voted regarding the use of the Brown School Site previously identified by the Capital Building Committee for potential location of a municipal structure.

Mr. Robidoux said the School Committee voted that down. Mr. Carvalho said there were concerns over safety and disruption to education. He said also the traffic in the area at drop off and pick up is prohibitive. Mr. Robidoux said the school actively uses the field now and that they recently invested in it. He said the idea also utilized the bus and van storage area which is also actively used.

At 6:45 p.m., Mr. Robidoux left the room.

The Committee discussed use of the Joseph Case Middle School as a potential site for municipal offices. Mr. Alford asked for an update as he missed some of the information passed along during Mr. Robidoux's presentation. Mr. Heim stated that at a minimum, the town is 7 to 8 years away from walking in the door on a new middle school. He said the MSBA will be visiting the location on September 14 to conduct a survey on the school's condition and whether it is eligible

to be placed on the list for consideration of the grant. Mr. Heim said the Town will not be notified of the result of acceptance into the program until December 2022 or January 2023.

Mr. Blakey said the Committee needs to act quickly and cannot wait for the school. Mr. Hajder agreed and said the Junior High School should be eliminated from any further discussion. He said it is not viable in any discussion of plans over the next three to five years. Mr. Devol agreed.

Mr. Lapointe said that even after the building is vacated, the building would need to be rehabbed and retrofitted. He said the Town would also be forced to make the building code compliant to current codes as it would constitute a change of use.

Mr. Alford said the construction of the Town Hall buildings should be finalized well before the school project as town voters will have little appetite to fund it if they are requested too close together.

Mr. Salzillo discussed concerns about empty buildings lingering around the Town. He said there could be a true government center if we utilized the building.

Mr. Devol said delaying and waiting for use of the school building as a complex of some sort would require the Town to lease office space in the interim. He said if the building was sold as a surplus, the Town wouldn't have to worry about its future use and it would be up to a developer. Mr. Devol said the structure would have to be gutted bare and the building would only be an exterior shell. He said there may be some savings with that, but that it will not be cheaper to build a new building today versus renovating that building ten years from now.

There was discussion regarding the shared use of the Del Mac Orchard property amongst a Department of Public Works, a Town Hall and a Council on Aging. The group reviewed a plan of the Del Mac Orchard showing a proposed Town Hall facility on the site. Mr. Anderson said both the Highway Garage and the Town Hall and Council on Aging combined facility will not fit and also fit the school needs.

Mr. Heim said the Committee needs to be discussing the Case Middle School site. Mr. Hansen said the middle school is about 70,000 square feet; the proposed Town Hall at the Annex site was 10,000 square feet and the Request for Proposals from April 2021 for municipal office space requested at least 25,000 square feet.

Mr. Paul Burke, Moderator, said that the Town Hall Committee began discussions of having a facility with 60,000 square feet and that they decided to lessen the square footage request to cut costs.

Mr. Alford said that the Town is hoping to renovate the current Town Hall facility to a meeting space as well.

Discussion continued regarding the financial impact to the taxpayers knowing that a request for the schools will be coming. Mr. Anderson said discussion of the finances is the most important

factor and that the longer the Town waits on these decisions, the more the financial toll on the Town.

Discussion continued regarding suitability of locating a highway garage near school buildings.

There was discussion regarding the Capital Building Committee needing to act expediently.

Mr. Hajder said he cannot in good faith after visiting the different offices and delay action. He said use of the Junior High School is off the table for him.

Mr. Devol **MOVED** that the Committee exclude consideration of the site of the current middle school due to the uncertainty of the middle school project and the length of time it would take to complete. Seconded by Mr. Hajder and so voted. Heim, yes; Lapointe, yes; Carvalho, yes; Alford, yes; Salzillo, no; Hajder, yes; Devol, yes; Blakey, no; Hansen, yes; Anderson, yes.

The committee reviewed the privately-owned sites highlighted at the previous meeting for further exploration. These included: Stevens Road (vacant land); Almeida Farm (Route 6); Almeida Farm II (Rear of Mr. Peepers); Berard Property (Rt 6 at Bushee Road); the Swansea Grange; the Sousa Property (adjacent to Del Mac Orchard); Swan Finishing (Ledge Rd); 463 Swansea Mall Drive; and the Stevens Home (Ledge Road – Ball fields).

Mr. Carvalho said he would like to add a parcel for review. He said the parcel across from St. Dominic's Church was about 6 acres and may be of interest to the Committee. He said it's a house and land behind it adjacent to the Post Office.

Mr. Lapointe said the Committee previously removed Route 6 properties from consideration due to lack of left-hand turns and taking viable commercial property. Mr. Heim said he has difficulty processing purchasing new land when there are viable town-owned sites to be utilized.

The Committee reviewed the Town-owned sites in comparison with the privately-held parcels. These sites were: Brown School Site; Del Mac Orchard; Town Annex Property; Sears Farm Property; East Salvation Army. Mrs. Aronstein stated that the Sears Farm Property and East Salvation Army property were only considered for DPW functions.

The Committee removed the Brown School Site as the School Department will retain ownership. The Committee is still considering the Del Mac Orchard, Town Annex property, Sears Farm Property (DPW), and East Salvation Army (DPW).

The Committee discussed Stevens Road property. Mrs. Aronstein said she very informally approached a board member at the Stevens Home regarding the vacant property and the ball fields. She said they were not interested in parting with the ballfields but that a portion of the vacant land may be a conversation. She said they just renewed the Chapter 61 exemption. Mr. Devol said that it may be a lower cost due to the exemption. He said it is on a main road and suitable for a Town Hall.

There was discussion of the Almeida Farm II property (rear of Mr. Peepers). Mr. Blakey said that would only be for a Town Hall. Mr. Hajder discussed reservations about Route 6 and the dividers along the roadway. Mr. Hansen said that the Gardeners Neck Intersection nearby this property would not be included in that plan.

There was discussion of the Berard Property. Mr. Anderson said it was located nearby the police and fire stations.

The Committee discussed the Swansea Grange and existing title issue.

The Committee discussed the SwanFinishing site on Ledge Road and the hazardous waste area. There was discussion regarding not being able to build under the concrete slab and the crossed ownership of lots in the area. The Committee discussed the limits of Ledge Road handling municipal operations traffic.

The Committee discussed the site at 463 Swansea Mall Drive. Mr. Lapointe discussed renovating the property and it seems like the building has been kept in good shape. He mentioned the benefit of being able to move the Annex offices first and then the Town Hall offices after the renovations were complete and allows for expedient action.

There was discussion of renovations being cheaper than new construction.

At 7:31 p.m., Mr. Salzillo left the room.

The Committee agreed to continue exploring the following privately-owned parcels:

- Stevens Road vacant land – Town Hall/COA
- Almeida Farm II (Rear of Mr. Peepers) – Town Hall/COA
- Berard Property – DPW
- Sousa Property
- 463 Swansea Mall Drive – Town Hall/COA and maybe the DPW

The Committee agreed to continue exploring the following town-owned parcels:

- Del Mac Orchard
- Town Hall Annex property
- East Salvation Army (DPW)
- Sears Farm Property (DPW)

There was discussion about continuing to explore maintaining the Highway Department where it is currently. Mr. Anderson expressed concerns about this being viable at a Town Meeting due to the Fire Department historically wanting this site for a new station.

Mrs. Aronstein updated the Committee on the status of the Fire Feasibility Study. She said they were selecting a top candidate and expected to award the bid at the next Board of Selectmen's meeting.

Discussion continued regarding the Berard Property having salt shed issues and not being habitable for a DPW function. The Committee removed the property from the list of properties to explore.

Mr. Heim invited Committee Member Reports. Mr. Heim said that he presented a progress report to the Board of Selectmen. There was discussion of Town Meeting. Mrs. Aronstein said there is a placeholder article on the Warrant for an Owners Project Manager and a Designer because that is required regardless of a renovation or new construction. The group agreed to discuss it at the next meeting.

The Committee established the next meeting date for August 31 at 6:00 p.m.

At 7:44 p.m. Mr. Alford **MOVED** to adjourn the meeting. Seconded by Mr. Anderson and so voted unanimously.

Respectfully submitted by Mallory E. Aronstein, Town Administrator.

Documents reviewed by the Committee:

Minutes of August 2, 2022

Conceptual plans of Town Hall property on Del Mac Orchard Property

Email of William Anderson describing conceptual plan

Memorandum from John Robidoux, Superintendent of Schools, concerning Del Mac Orchard and Brown School Site

Property Information sheets and Assessors Cards:

Almeida Farm

Almeida Farm II (rear of Mr. Peepers) with notice of sale price (March 4, 2022) and MLS listing

Berard Property (Rt 6 at Bushee Road)

Sousa Property (adjacent to School Property and Del Mac Orchard)

Swansea Grange

Stevens Road (vacant land)

Stevens Home (Ledge Road – Ball fields)

Swan Finishing (Ledge Road)

463 Swansea Mall Drive