

2014-15 Hastings PTA Meeting Minutes

2/5/2015 Hastings PTA General Meeting Minute

Hasting Cafeteria 7:00 pm

Speakers and guests:

Principal Louise Lipsitz

School Committee Chairman, Margaret Coppe

School Committee member, Judy Crocker

PTA President **Sharon Musto** called the meeting to order.

Margaret Coppe spoke first and discussed the Lexington Public School district-wide problem of over-crowding, and updates of steps to address the issue:

- In-migration is a big reason for the enrollment increases in recent years according to the Enrollment Working Group. This group cannot distinguish the increases on a per school basis but as a whole Lexington has seen a system-wide increase in enrollment at 2% per year, roughly 120 new students per year of a school system of about 6,600 students.
- Architecture firm SMMA was hired for \$250,000 (authorized by Special Town Meeting in June 2014) to determine building capacity, and formulate a School Facility Master Plan, which serves as the preliminary groundwork of framing options to best absorb growing enrollment.
- SOI (Statement of Interest) to rebuild Hastings was submitted in 2014 to MSBA (Massachusetts School Building Authority), but was turned down. **Principal Lipsitz** and Director of Public Facilities, **Patrick Goddard**, are working a second submission for 2015. Margaret believed that the likelihood of it being approved is very low considering the economic profiles of Lexington. Estabrook Elementary only got approved for health and safety reasons, but we are NOT filing under that category. Hastings' SOI is being filed based on overcrowding, age of building, and programmatic needs. Currently the total cost estimate for a new building is \$59 million, out of which up to \$18 million could be paid by MSBA if approved. It would take two years longer if it were an MSBA approved project, which will delay the availability of the much needed space, and might increase the construction cost (about 5% inflation each year). Therefore, the School Committee will go to Town Meeting seeking support for the next step in building a new Hastings and the other building projects that are proposed with or without support from the MSBA.
- **Next important meeting date is 3/23/2015**, when a Special Town Meeting will vote on \$4 million spending in architectural schematics, and includes \$800k for Hastings (site evaluation, soil study, swing space during construction, size of school, etc.)
- Margaret emphasized amount of time involved to run debt exclusion, the School Committee will help but the citizens ultimately need to rally behind the proposal. She suggested:
 - Smaller group of parents get together and meet with people who have done debt exclusion overrides in past to learn from their experience.

- Hastings community should solicit help/support from all the schools and larger community.
- Parents write to Town Meeting Members, Board of Selectmen, School Committee, Finance Committees.

Next, School Committee member, **Judy Crocker** presented a slide show from the Ad-hoc School Master Plan Committee to explain the current plan based on recommendations by architecture firm SMMA. This plan is still being refined. The presentation included:

- Proposal of Elementary and Middle School solutions that totaled \$118.68 million, of which the new building for Hastings is \$59 million.
- Timelines for the above mentioned projects to add capacity. Hastings new building could be completed in the fall 2018 without MSBA funding. (The Ad Hoc committee recommends going forward without MSBA funding but that to be fiscally responsible we need to also re-submit the SOI).
- Stated that 8 of 9 LPS schools are at or over capacity
- Ad Hoc Committee will present its final presentation to School Committee this Tuesday, February 10, and then be dissolved
- Building process includes 5 steps:
 1. Master Plan (completed), with further questions: Pre-K to be located at Harrington, Hastings or stand-alone building; how big to build Hastings; the best location for 3 teams in one of the existing middle schools.
 2. Request approval for \$4 million Architect & Evaluation Design funds at 3/23 STM (and include short-term modular construction). More information beyond the SMP scope is needed to move forward in a fiscally responsible manner. Goal is to not over or under build.
 3. Design and Construction Program, in early fall 2015. It includes request for prefab construction.
 4. Brick and Mortar construction (winter of 2016).
 5. Redistricting only after spaces in each building are completed.

Discussion Points/Questions:

1. What can parents do to help move things forward, prepare for debt exclusion, especially given taxpayers concern with \$118M price tag?
 - Present to taxpayers the idea that Hastings is “one of Lexington’s schools” and belongs to the community as far as responsibility and right thing to do (e.g., community Zumba class in gym going on during our meeting)
 - Have a united and positive front when addressing the issue with the larger community in town.
2. Concern about size of new Hastings given need to build extra capacity onto building to help address town-wide enrollment challenges (e.g., students from Bridge and Fiske and other schools could be redistricted to Hastings) and potentially pre-K space would be part of a new school

- **Principal Lipsitz** reiterated that it's doable to have 600-650 (Estabrook is 600) and that the people, staff, families, neighborhood, and community overall are central to the feel of the school community, not just the size of building.
- Design can be carefully thought through and used to help address this, promote belonging, etc.
- Importance of town-wide view that it is a systemic problem, not just that the Hastings facility needs to be replaced

3. Concerns about wetlands, swing space, etc. during construction

- To be addressed in next phase of design schematics/evaluation (3/23 vote for \$4 million)

4. Should we reapply for the SOI if we lose two years and we don't think we have good chance of getting the funding? How do we educate people about this?

- \$18mm in potential savings from MSBA may be eaten away by annual construction cost escalation
- 5% and potentially higher interest rates.

5. What can the town do to increase revenue from businesses and lessen the load for residential tax payers?

- The town has hired a full time Economic Development director, Melisa Tintocalis. The latest initiative to increase business interest in the Town is a free bus from Alewife to Hartwell Ave. More information can be found on the town's website.