

School Facilities Study Committee

Minutes

Monday, May 8, 2023

7:00 p.m.

Present:

School Facilities Study Committee:, Eileen Moynihan, Kerry Darby, Robert Hetrick, David Murphy, Scott Nicol, Michael Hernandez, Meg Scata, Peter Filanda

Others Present: Ryan Curley (First Selectman), Charles Britton (Superintendent of Schools), Stephanie Fragola (Business Manager), Bob Shea (Director of Buildings & Grounds)

Absent: Lou Pear

1. Call to Order

Meg Scata called the meeting to order at 7:00pm.

2. Approve Agenda

Motion to approve the agenda by Kerry Darby, seconded by Eileen Moynihan, unanimously approved, motion carried.

3. Approve the Minutes

Motion to approve the minutes of April 3, 2023 made by Michael Hernandez, seconded by Robert Hetrick, unanimously approved, motion carried.

4. Audience of Citizens

- Jesse Revicki, Administrator of Youth & Family Services – spoke on behalf of Youth & Family Services only, he is not a resident of Portland. Jesse brought up concerns about BIS being partially turned over to the town and only renovating the part of the building that will be used as a school. He also feels that if the whole building was turned over to the town it opens up a lot more opportunity for Youth Services, Parks & Recreation, Senior Center and Food Bank with possibilities of renting out the classroom space.
- Two letters received and entered into record.
- An email was received and entered into record.

5. Discussion/Approve of Facility Study Report

The Facility Study Report, written by Charles Britton and Lou Pear was reviewed. This report will be presented to the BOS/BOE in a joint meeting. The report includes the Historical Background 1999-Present, Facility Analysis, Priorities, Options, Demographic Study, Focus Group Feedback, Staffing Analysis, Financial Analysis, and finally the Committee's recommendations. Discussion followed. A motion to accept the report as presented was made by Scott Nicol, seconded by Michael Hernandez, unanimously approved, motion carried. A vote was taken to accept the report: 7 approved, 1 abstained. Report accepted and ready to present to the BOS/BOE.

6. Adjourn

Motion to adjourn the meeting made by Scott Nicol, seconded by Eileen Moynihan, unanimously approved, motion carried, meeting adjourned at 7:39pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Liz Paternostro, Recording Clerk

Good evening,

I am writing as both a parent and educator with regards to the plan concerning the future of our school buildings. While there are many considerations going into this process, the main objective should be made abundantly clear: how is this going to affect our students? How is this going to impact learning and instruction?

Coming out of the pandemic, we have seen the need for a robust social-emotional program to support our students through their many steps through the educational process. One avoidable pitfall that we can sidestep in this process would be having needless transitions that serve only to disrupt. We can avoid this by reducing the number of buildings to 2.

Why are transitions detrimental to student performance? Trust is at the heart of education and by requiring our students to acclimate to new environments and new people, while leaving behind trusted adults and champions can disturb that trust. The pandemic saw a higher awareness of what transitions in plans can do to students who are neurodiverse or anxious - they exacerbate those social and emotional issues, causing a large population of our student body to be unavailable for learning.

By reducing the number of school buildings, numerous benefits emerge: students will have a continuum of support that follows them through their educational path, communication is more consistent, and it is easier to cultivate a more unified culture.

While I understand that there are costs associated with the plan of reducing the number of schools, it is important to remember that it is over the course of a 30-year plan and will set up our district for future saving in staffing, fuel, repairs, and transportation routes.

Ultimately, I am a member of the community who will support our schools and see the value in investing in education. Today I voted in favor of the budget as I want to continue to see the vision of Portland Public Schools to continue to reap benefits for our small community. As an educational ally, I provide my input on what I think would be the most beneficial plan in the long run so that we can see our district continue on its upward trajectory.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Regards,

Christopher R. Pickett
22 Fox Run Rd.

5/8/23

Portland Facilities Committee,

I am writing tonight as a Portland parent of two and also a Portland Teacher of 16 years. I am writing to express my opinion that we should build one elementary building, and not renovate and keep two elementary buildings.

In my 16 years of teaching I have been on both sides of the transition for Portland's youngest learners. I started my career sending second graders to Gildersleeve at the end of the year, and now receive first graders to start their second grade year at new school. Transitions are hard for every kid. There is always anxiety leaving behind teachers and a school when you are 6 years old. This doesn't change when you are a 9 year old going to BIS. The way to eliminate this anxiety is to put students in a situation where they have the same trusted adults over their elementary career. This helps calm anxiety and helps prevent bullying. Now, more than ever, in the wake of the Pandemic, anxiety among kids is at an all time high. Less transitions is better for kids.

Less buildings also benefits teachers. Each Portland school, even though the staff works so hard to work together, is an island. Teachers see each other once or twice a year and have to communicate through email about issues that would be best to have in- person conversations about. Walking down the hall, or seeing a student's previous teacher in the building would benefit staff, teachers and ultimately students. Having one climate and vision and sharing the same professional development and training would all be easier if we shared one elementary building.

Less buildings benefits parents and the community. I am just starting to feel it now, as my children will next year be in two different Portland elementary buildings, and myself in a third, how hard it is as a family to handle different calendars, spirit days, and school and PTO events. Also, having one elementary building next door to the Middle School/High School building would simplify pick up or drop off for the community into a school complex - not one school across town from the others.

These reasons, and many more, are why one elementary school building is better for students, teachers and learning in our community. This is a once in a generation opportunity to create an environment that is conducive to developing the whole child and prepare our students for future success. That being said, I am a supporter of the schools in Portland. If the committee ultimately decides to keep two elementary buildings I will support that plan.

Thank you for your consideration,
Jennifer Pickett
22 Fox Run Road

From: Jennifer Martinez <jennmartinez1984@gmail.com>

Date: Mon, May 8, 2023 at 4:42 PM

Subject: Facilities Committee

To: <dmurphy@portlandct.us>, <kerrydarby@yahoo.com>, <louisjpear@gmail.com>, <MHernandez@portlandct.org>, <pfilanda@yahoo.com>, <snicol@ellingtonschools.net>, <mscata@portlandct.us>, <RHetrick@portlandct.org>, <emoynihan@portlandct.us>

5/8/23

Dear Portland Facilities Committee,

I am writing tonight as a Portland parent of two and also a member of Portland Public Schools for 5 years. I believe Portland students and teachers should be in one elementary building, and not two elementary buildings.

In my 10+ years of teaching I have seen the benefits of having all elementary students in one building. At my former teaching job at Hanscom AFB, MA, I was in a 4-8 building with a 1 minute walk to the K-3 building. In my time there I was able to talk to my students' former teachers about their successes and areas for improvement across multiple grades easily during a planning period. It was wonderful to have former students show up at my door on the way to their new classroom or at the end of the day to give me a hug and talk about new events going on in their lives. Transitioning to a new grade is hard on every child and parent. There is always anxiety about leaving behind teachers and trying to navigate a new building. The way to eliminate this anxiety is to put students in a situation where they have the same trusted adults over their elementary career. This helps calm nerves and helps prevent bullying. Now, more than ever, in the wake of Covid, anxiety among kids is at an all time high. Less transitions are better for kids.

One building also benefits teachers. Each Portland school, even though the staff works so hard to work together, is an island. Unfortunately, teachers only see each other once or twice a year to communicate in person, and the rest of the year is through impersonal emails about issues that would be best to have in-person conversations about. Walking down the hall, or seeing a student's previous teacher in the building would benefit staff, teachers and ultimately students. Having one climate and vision and sharing the same professional development and training would all be easier if we shared one elementary building.

One building benefits parents and the community. When my children have been at different elementary buildings, and myself in another, it is hard as a family to handle different calendar happenings, spirit days, and school and PTO events. Also, having one elementary building next door to the Middle School/High School building would make it easier to pick up or drop off for the community into a school complex - not one school across town from the others.

These reasons, and many more, are why one elementary school building is better for students, teachers and learning in our community. This is a once in a generation opportunity to create an environment that is conducive to developing the whole child and prepare our students for greater success. That being said, I am a supporter of the schools in Portland. If the committee ultimately decides to keep two elementary buildings I will support that plan.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Martinez

85 Meshomasic Trail