

CITY COUNCIL AND SCHOOL BOARD JOINT WORK SESSION

STUDY CIRCLES

June 18, 2007 – 6:30 p.m.

Eileen Dondero Foley Council Chambers

City Council Present: Mayor Marchand, Assistant Mayor Ferrini, Councilors Grasso, Dwyer, Reynolds, Pantelakos, Whitehouse, Smith and Hynes

School Board Present: Ann Walker, Nancy Clayburgh, Henry Hayward, Sheri Garrity, Kent LaPage, Carson Smith, Brendan Ristaino and Mitchell Shuldman

Officials Present: John P. Bohenko, City Manager; Robert P. Sullivan, City Attorney; Alan Brady, Communications Supervisor and Kelli L. Barnaby, City Clerk

I. Call to Order

At 6:35 p.m., Mayor Marchand called the meeting to order.

Presentation and Proclamation

1. Portsmouth High School Girls' Lacrosse Team Division III Champions

Mayor Marchand read the Proclamation and presented Mayor's Awards in recognition of the Portsmouth High School Girls' Lacrosse Team perfect 16-0 season and congratulated them on winning the Division III State Championship Title. He announced that this is the first State Title in the young history of the Portsmouth High School Girls' Lacrosse Program. Mayor Marchand presented the Proclamation to Coach Cindy Fitzgerald who accepted it with thanks and appreciation.

Mayor Marchand announced that the School Board would make the decision regarding the site of the middle school and the City Council approves the bond issue for the funding of the project. He advised each group that they will be given 8 minutes to make their presentation.

II. Introduction from Portsmouth Listens – Jim Nocas and John Tabor

John Tabor thanked the City Council and School Board for allowing Portsmouth Listens to conduct Study Circles regarding the Middle School. He announced that 16 study circles would be providing presentations to the City Council and School Board this evening. He reported from the initial 171 responses, 135 participants made it through the entire process, and 107 completed surveys about the experience. Demographically, participants were representative of the city with notable exceptions:

- With a median income of \$106,175.00, participants were wealthier than average.
- With a median years of education of 16.8 (53% with graduate degrees), better educated than average.

- Parents of schoolchildren were overrepresented. 40.2% of participants had children in the Portsmouth schools. In the 2000 Census, only 21.3% of city households contained individuals under 18. Recruiting through school email lists, layered on top of the mail piece, insured we “double recruited” the school parents, who were the key community of interest for the question.

Mr. Tabor also thanked Dr. Lister, Superintendent for his assistance in the process as well as Communications Supervisor Brady for assisting with the PowerPoint presentations this evening. In addition, he thanked Public Works Director Parkinson and Deputy Public Works Director Allen for the tour of the Jones Avenue site.

Jim Noucas thanked Kim O’Connell from Portsmouth Listens for her assistance with this process. He reported that the study circles engaged in wide and deep dialogue with over 1,200 hours of time invested. He urged the City Council and School Board to review each of the reports in their entirety and thanked the city for having the open-mindedness to give citizens a deliberative role in such a major decision.

III. Group Presentations

Group L

Heather Hurtt and Terry Wyman Allen represented Group L in providing the presentation to the City Council and School Board. Ms. Hurtt and Ms. Allen reported that this group is recommending the renovation of the Parrott Avenue Middle School. They provided the City Council and School Board with copies of an article from the National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities regarding Historic Neighborhood Schools Deliver 21st Century Educations.

The guiding principles of their report are to follow the Master Plan and Fiscal Responsibility. The Master Plan shows true leadership, retains core values/historic identity and ensures a successful/vibrant future. In addition, demonstrating fiscal responsibility would be to receive multiple designs and construction bids as well as hire historic school renovation experts to review the existing building. Financial efficiencies can be gained through shared resources.

The Five Criteria of Group L

- Environmental Impact
- Sense of Community
- Urban Sprawl Impact
- Optimal Learning Environment
- Healthy and Safe Environment

Ms. Hurtt said that the Parrott Avenue site limits the negative environmental impact and that the site preserves and nurtures a sense of community. She also reported that the Parrott Avenue site can create an optimal learning environment and ensure a healthy and safe environment.

In conclusion, Ms. Hurtt said that the process should be open and transparent with community. She said that we need to restore community's confidence in school board process, ensure all renovation design options fully explored and ensure fiscal responsibility in renovation.

Group N

Gary Epler represented Group N in providing the presentation to the City Council and School Board.

The Five Criteria of Group N

- Community
- Design and Construction issues
- Safety
- Impact Upon Students and Teacher
- Land Issues

Mr. Epler advised the City Council and School Board that the group reached a unanimous consensus that the middle school should be renovated. The present site allows for walkability and the Jones Avenue site increases the distance from the downtown. The group recommends that there should be more than 1 design team looking at the site. The design team needs to consider that the plan traffic would be a concern with the Jones Avenue site and that the school would be built on a landfill. He expressed concern with the impact upon students and teachers during the construction period and asked if there is a realistic plan for minimizing any disruptions. Mr. Epler also spoke to the impact of the proximity of the landfill at the Sagamore Creek site and if it has been adequately investigated. The key obstructions and conclusions of Group N are as follows:

- Do not believe that an adequate investigation or due diligence had been performed; not apparent what criteria has guided the process.
- Important to be guided by the pre-eminent place that preservation of Community, of the center of Portsmouth, is given in the Master Plan.
- Critical to have separate design teams advocate on behalf of each site.
- The renovation of the current Middle School can become a unifying community experience, generating excitement and interest even beyond the City, much the same way as did the renovation of the North Church Steeple and the Wentworth Hotel.

Group M

Mary Lucas represented Group M in providing the presentation to the City Council and School Board.

The Five Criteria of Group M

- Legitimate and Thorough Process
- Municipal Priorities
- In Town vs. Outskirts
- Longevity & Versatility of School/Building/Fields
- Long Lasting Impact vs. Temporary Inconvenience

Ms. Lucas reported on the top 5 criteria as it is applied to the Portsmouth Middle School. She advised the City Council and School Board that Group M does not feel the selection process was thorough, and therefore not legitimate. She reported that there was no appraisal from firms with expertise in historic building renovation. Ms. Lucas said that there was no competition in initial design and costs as well as the Sagamore Creek site will not be LEED certifiable as stated. In terms of Municipal Priorities the Master Plan is contradicted by the Sagamore Creek site. She also addressed future projects for the City and the potential costs associated with them. Ms. Lucas informed the City Council that the Parrott Avenue site has a strong sense of community. The Sagamore Creek site will reduce student safety before, during and after school as well as it encourages the urban sprawl mentality. The decision to renovate the existing facility or to build a new school should not be based on temporary inconvenience. She indicated that it is not acceptable to build a new school simply to make an easier transition. The final site selection is just that: FINAL.

Ms. Lucas stated that by building and paving over green open space, it is gone forever and the impact to the wildlife, land, water and citizens is long lasting and permanent. She urged the City Council to remember that the Sagamore Creek land was originally purchased with a grant from Land and Water Conservation Funds.

Ms. Lucas suggested relocating the senior center to allow for the expansion of the existing site and the creation of a middle school campus.

In conclusion, Group M unanimously believes that the School Board and City Council should agree to renovate the existing Parrott Avenue site balancing the educational needs of students, preserving the sense of community that the downtown location provides, and protecting the Sagamore Creek for the future enjoyment of the citizens of Portsmouth.

High School Group 1

The Five Criteria of High School Group 1

- Incorporate Elements of Beauty into the Facility
- Having a Lunchroom Big Enough to Accommodate the Students Without Having Long Lines
- Having Clean Facilities & Environmentally Friendly School
- Open Windows and Ceiling Fans & Enough up-to-date Computer and Other Technology
- A Safe Environment for All Students.

The group representatives Sarah Fodero and Gallagher Hogan spoke to the importance of incorporating elements of beauty into the facility because the students want a school they are proud of. The students' mentality changes when they are in a building they take pride in. Having a safe environment is important because students don't want to go to a place where they feel threatened or uncomfortable. Having larger hallways/staircases so people aren't so close, and having surveillance cameras on the campus will prevent future crimes. On one hand, the old building has charm and sentimental value to its alumni. The building is full of history and is a landmark for the City of Portsmouth. However, the new building poses the opportunity to start fresh. At the new site, all of the criteria could be met without compromise. At the old site, space is limited and some of the criteria would have to be compromised to accommodate the amount of space available.

If the Council decides to renovate the Portsmouth Middle School at Parrott Avenue during the renovation, the Middle School students would have to learn in modular classrooms. This would be an uncomfortable and distracting learning environment. It would also be noisy due to the construction. In addition, renovation would cost Portsmouth taxpayers more money than building a new school.

If the Council decides to build a new school at the Sagamore Creek site, there are also a number of considerations that should be studied. High School students will be faced with increased morning traffic and loud noise while the construction is taking place. Also, the new construction will off set the high school's cross-country running course, so a new course will have to be built. The Sagamore Creek site sits on top of a landfill. The threat of environmental hazards may certainly pose valid concerns for students, parents, and teachers.

High School Group 2

The Five Criteria of High School Group 2

- Accessibility
- Traffic and Safety
- Adequacy of Athletic Field
- Impact on Students
- Environmental Impact and Over All Quality of the Facility

The group representatives Gallagher Hogan and Lisa Allard advised the School Board and City Council that how accessible the middle school is, has a strong impact on where the facility should be placed. The new school must incorporate a student drop-off that is safe and where parents can easily come and go. The new school must incorporate a good sidewalk system that doesn't go on main roads or near busy traffic. The police and fire departments must be close in case of emergency and need to be able to access the school quickly.

A new middle school needs large, multi purpose fields to support the growing athletes and the gym classes of the Portsmouth Middle School. The City needs to consider the needs and well being of the students in making a decision. There is a strong need for an environmental friendly facility that allows students to feel comfortable and provide a good learning experience. The group addressed the need for a facility that is large enough to support classrooms for all students.

The Parrott Avenue site:

As the building process starts, you need to consider where the students would be placed during this time. The construction would take 2 years and for some of that time students could be placed into modular homes. Being able to teach in a modular home becomes difficult, but in the long run the current site has many things nearby that will improve the education of the students going through the Portsmouth school system. No roads would need to be built through forests and wetlands and nothing could potentially be harmful to the students nearby. The current facility is a beautiful sight from outside and fits perfectly into the unique structure of the downtown. The facility should be used as what it was meant to be, a place for scholars, instead of it being vacant for years with question as to what would happen to the old school.

Jones Avenue site:

The plan for Sagamore Creek would have only one road leading to it. This road would be off of Route 1 making it hard to access in busy morning and afternoon traffic and very dangerous. The high school students would lose two very valuable fields to the middle schools students, whose athletics are not quite as intense as the high school. At the Jones Avenue site there would be many trees that would be cut down in order to build a new school. The point about the quality of the facility wouldn't be a huge deciding factor in this decision. The group expressed concern with a former land fill site being used for a new middle school.

Group K

Thomas Hindle represented Group K in providing the presentation to the City Council and School Board.

The Five Criteria of Group K

- Adhere to the Master Plan Adopted by the City of Portsmouth in March '05
- Maintain the Quality of Education of Portsmouth's 6th, 7th and 8th Grade Students
- Ensure the Safety, Security, and Health of our Middle School Students
- Minimize the Taxpayer Burden by Thoroughly Examining the Costs and Their Implications
- Construct a Sustainable "Green" Facility that Meets Today's Needs without Compromising Future Needs.

Mr. Hindle spoke to the importance of a facility which allows for walkability and riding. The Master Plan encourages the recognition, preservation, and appreciation of the City's resources which include open space as well as architecture and neighborhood character. He urged the City Council and School Board to support the current Portsmouth Middle School education formula and suggested the creation of a Master Plan for Portsmouth Schools. Mr. Hindle said that there is a need to minimize traffic and support physical health benefits by facilitating biking/walking. The group also felt a strong need to ensure close proximity to community resources (library, Strawberry Banke) and services such as police and fire. He said that the current proposal is based on a single bid. On such a capital project the City has the fiduciary obligation to secure multiple competitive bids. There was no RFP issued to established renovation firms and this is negligent. He informed the School Board and City Council that the "Domino Effect" of building a new school must be acknowledged by the City. He spoke to the need to build a LEED standard facility.

The group recommends the renovation of the Parrott Avenue site. He said that a Citywide Referendum should be considered. There is a strong consensus that a capital expenditure of this magnitude with its broad reaching implications should be subject to a rigorous and thorough examination by multiple external parties and the public at large. This group would like to see a referendum vote at the upcoming civic elections which provides the public with an option to either waive this obligation or ensure that a non-biased mechanism is put in place to evaluate the two alternatives in a fair and thorough manner.

In conclusion, he asked that demographic data be closely analyzed and based on current and future needs. He also indicated the need to segregate athletic fields when evaluating sites. As elected officials, you have the obligation to listen to and adopt the wishes of the taxpayers of the City. In the case of the Middle School issue, the group asks that you will respect this obligation on their behalf.

Group I

Susan Chamberlin represented Group I in providing the presentation to the City Council and School Board.

The Five Criteria of Group I

- Respect and Apply City of Portsmouth Master Plan
- Carefully Evaluate and Minimize Environmental Impact
- Respect and Apply the Education Narrative
- Remain a Multi-Year School of More than 2 Grades
- Design Energy-Efficient Building with Architectural Significance

Ms. Chamberlin advised the City Council and School Board that Group I did not reach a consensus. She said that the group feels that both sites require you to fully apply the Master Plan and show how your final decision is justified.

She spoke to the potential neighborhood storm-water management issues, impact of unknown pollutants, loss of urban green space and the issues with the Peirce Trust land are all items to be considered with the Parrott Avenue site. The Sagamore Creek site would have a negative impact on woodlands and wetlands, the loss of green corridor, the potential damage to cap and contamination as well as the impact of unknown pollutants. Ms. Chamberlin said that no existing plan fully meets the educational narrative.

The Parrott Avenue site has limited space and requires prioritization of the educational narrative. The Sagamore Creek site is better able to meet the needs of the transition and more space would be available. The Parrott Avenue site may limit the number of grades and it is important that the middle school remain a multi-year school of more than 2 grades.

In conclusion, other criteria or considerations that did not make the “top five” but were important to the group are as follows:

- Consider walkability for ALL students
- Start site selection with criteria provided by study circles, then search city for sites or contiguous small sites that fit those criteria
- Make sure we get the highest percentage of state aid
- Have minimal impact on students during construction and transition
- Consider building/land swaps
- Make school accessible to after-school activities
- Integrate the school into the community
- Consider the issue of potential flooding
- Be flexible with regards to grade configuration
- Make site and design secure for safety for well-being of students
- Support all decisions with research
- Evaluate how choice of site meets needs for playing fields and balances public need
- Take into account traffic and safety issues
- Make sure ongoing maintenance and operation is fully funded
- Remain a great educational, warm, and loving place
- Plan for long-range building use and expansion
- Be cost-effective and quantified during transition and ongoing operation
- Provide access to resources/walking tours for educational purposes
- Share resources in the city
- Provide auditorium large enough for the whole Middle School community

Group H

Mike Bliss represented Group H in providing the presentation to the City Council and School Board.

The Five Criteria of Group H

- Integration of School and Community
- Reuse of Existing Buildings
- Multiple Use of New and Existing City Assets
- Successful Student Learning [i.e., Consider Educational Narrative to Ensure Successful Student Learning]
- Environmental Sustainability

Mr. Bliss indicated that the group agreed on many points, in some cases there was a split decision. These splits would be divided in the following way in the group of nine:

- Seven individuals felt the existing facility should be renovated
- Two individuals felt a new facility should be constructed

The integration of school and community is important. The environment that surrounds the school will impact student's educational experience. The school site should establish a sense of history and sense of place for students. He informed the City Council and School Board that which ever site is chosen it's important to take the existing middle school's architecture and historical features and preserve them in the new site to create a sense of historical continuity. The site should not contradict the Master Plan. A multi-use is important for either site for both students and community. The group suggests building a multi-level parking structure at the end of Parrott Avenue and turning the road in front of the Middle School into green space. Mr. Bliss spoke to the need to consider the education narrative to ensure successful student learning. The group endorses the "POD" design with student service rooms within each "POD". He indicated that the funds for building/renovating must not shortchange money for supplies/computers/learning resources/after school programs/and music.

In conclusion, the group feels the school should be a "Green Building" that's LEED – certified and the City needs to preserve the remaining natural acreage wherever possible.

Group G

Tina Wilkinson represented Group G in providing the presentation to the City Council and School Board.

The Five Criteria of Group G

- Quality of Education
- Community Impact
- Environmental & Sustainability
- Transportation
- Full Cost

Ms. Wilkinson spoke to the quality of education for each site. Parrott Avenue allows a connection to downtown, access to community resources and events and the dislocation of students during renovations. Sagamore Creek allows for greater design flexibility, potential for future expansion, space for additional fields, it is a remote location and there would be an increase in transportation and impacts on after school events.

The community impact on each site. Parrott Avenue is a physical anchor for the downtown, staff and students actively and easily participate in downtown community, and Parrott Avenue allows for a multi-generational environment. Sagamore Creek site accommodates potential future growth, it is in close proximity to city pool, it would be the loss of one of the last large open spaces and there would be less opportunity for students to be part of the diverse city community.

The environmental and sustainability impact on each site as outlined: Parrott Avenue allows the ability to walk and bike, the preservation of open space at the Sagamore Creek site, the infrastructure is in place, the possible loss of Peirce Trust land and short-term renovation debris. The Sagamore Creek site is an attractive setting, there would be a loss of wetlands and sensitive habitat, the loss of future park potential and the building and infrastructure would create “heat islands”.

The transportation impact of each site as follows: Parrott Avenue site allows the ability to walk and bike, there would be a lack of parking and car and bus drop-off location would be needed. Sagamore Creek site allows for easier parking, the site would aggravate traffic problems on Route 1/Lafayette Road and there would be a limited ability to walk or bike to the facility.

The full cost impact for each site: Parrott Avenue site, the infrastructure is in place, no use of environmentally sensitive open space, and a Peirce Trust land buy-out. Sagamore Creek site would allow for the possible sale or rent of the Parrott Avenue site, there is a need for significant infrastructure at the Sagamore Creek site, the cost of lost open space, issues with the conservation land trust and the need for wetlands mitigation.

In conclusion, the School Board and City Council could consider reconfiguring elementary schools, either K-8 or K-6 and evaluate additional lands as the site map only included parcels of 28 acres or more as alternatives. The group also suggested the idea of encouraging public use of Sagamore Creek park by publicizing to residents Natural Recreation park, Dog park or Recreation fields.

Group J

John Shea represented Group J in providing the presentation to the City Council and School Board.

The Five Criteria of Group J

- Safety
- Do the Right Thing – Strategically
- Geographic Location
- Educational Philosophy
- Cost

Mr. Shea informed the City Council and School Board that nothing matters more than the health and well-being of our community's children. It is important that we do the right thing – strategically. This includes all our middle school students, teachers, and families as well as the entire pre-k through 12 public school system, the entire Portsmouth/regional community and for our future – several decades out. The location needs to stay true to what makes New England, smaller towns, and Portsmouth so special. He spoke to the educational philosophy for architecture, design, facilities that support good teaching and learning.

In terms of costs, the right school must be designed and built with quality as our first priority. The fiscal responsibility and sound project management are a very close second.

In conclusion, Mr. Shea advised the City Council and School Board that Group J is recommending the renovations of the Parrott Avenue site. He said it is important that we not miss anything, creative consideration of all possibilities needs to be given in the decision making process.

Group F

Jeffrey Cooper represented Group F in providing the presentation to the City Council and School Board.

Criteria of Group F

- Environmental Impact
- Social Environment for Students
- City Planning and Budgetary Issues
- Adequacy of Facility

Mr. Cooper reported that this group was diverse and the environmental impact needs to be considered in order to make the choice that has the least environmental impact, both now and in the future. The Sagamore Creek site would have the greater impact on air quality. Based on the environmental concerns the group strongly favors the Parrott Avenue site.

Mr. Cooper said the Parrott Avenue site is at the heart of the community and the Jones Avenue site would be dependent upon transportation and not allow for walkability. He said that the middle school should remain at the downtown location. Middle school students coming to and from an in-town location keep the city vibrant and keep the students in the hearts and minds of the local community.

In terms of renovation or the building of a new school the taxpayer and their ability to pay needs to be part of the decision making process. Mr. Cooper said according to the School Board quality education can be provided at either location but we need to ensure that the building is sized correctly and more than one firm should prepare a design.

The concept of sustainability is strongly championed by our city and by our Study Circle. They urged the city to obtain other design ideas from other architecture firms who specialize in creative adaptive use of existing buildings, and school renovation in particular.

In conclusion, the group feels that the Sagamore Avenue site should be disqualified and we need to remember that it would not be LEED certified.

Group E

Eric Spear represented Group E in providing the presentation to the City Council and School Board.

The Three Criteria of Group E

- Students
- Taxpayers
- The Environment

Mr. Spear said that the City must take the following actions to explore other grade configurations that might serve the students better, make use of existing infrastructure, and minimize capital costs. He said that the Parrott Avenue site can be renovated as a 21st century public educational facility. The group also felt that the City must continue to preserve the Sagamore Creek parcel as undisturbed wilderness.

Group “E” Criteria

1. Grade Configuration
2. School/Community Symbiosis
3. Economics/Fiscal Sustainability
4. Environmental Impact

In terms of grade configuration we need to determine where the best fit is for grades 6-8 within the entire K-12 spectrum, for both the students and for the taxpayer. Mr. Spear reported that students benefit from fewer transitions and that many communities in NH use a variety of grade configurations. He stressed the importance of keeping our students within our civic center and that it is critical to healthy adolescent development. He said we need to maximize opportunities for walking and biking and reduce rush-hour traffic and pollution. There is a need to control escalating capital costs for near-term projects and minimize operating costs for new buildings. Facilities planning must acknowledge that student population trends point to flat or declining middle school enrollment and in any cost estimate, the city should include life cycle costs. He spoke to the limited forested lands in Portsmouth being preserved for future generations. The

group feels the site work and long-term maintenance for Sagamore Creek makes the fiscal sustainability unrealistic. Parrott Avenue makes smart use of existing infrastructure. The environmental impact of Sagamore Creek site is a concern. In any new construction, the wilderness would be destroyed and this is unacceptable. Mr. Spear advised the City Council and School Board that the US Green Building Council has stated that landfill sites are inappropriate for school buildings and it is unnecessary to expose children to the risks associated with landfills.

In conclusion, we must consider other grade configurations, preserve Sagamore Creek as undisturbed wilderness and the group recommends the renovation of the Parrott Avenue site.

Group D

Carol Chellman represented Group D in providing the presentation to the City Council and School Board. She reported that many residents are in agreement and strongly recommend that the middle school be renovated.

The Five Criteria of Group D

- Maintain the Connection to our Community
- Avoid Building the School or Citing Playing Fields on or near a Landfill
- Honor the Master Plan
- Protect the Environment
- Design and Educational Facility which Allows for the Educational Needs of All Students

Ms. Chellman said by locating the school in the center of the community it is walkable and bikable and provides easy interaction with as many of the City's assets and community members as possible. She said that a school and playing fields on or near a landfill is a strong concern in view of the potential and unknown health risks of exposure to the landfill. The Master Plan needs to be honored by protecting limited open space, wildlife and other precious resources including waterfront. Preserve historic resources and utilize a sustainable building in the center of the community. She urged everyone to consider the negative impact sprawl has on our city's limited open space and rare or endangered species. Reconstruct the middle school as a LEED compliant school. The LEED Rating System categorically excludes sites where there exists a former landfill.

LEED has determined that these sites are inappropriate for schools because children are more susceptible to toxins and environmental pollutants than adults and are thus at greater risk for health issues resulting from contaminants associated with a site previously used as a landfill.

She reported on other criteria or considerations that did not make the “top five” but were important to the group:

- Utilize experts in restoring historic urban buildings when renovating and rebuilding the current middle school
- Fiduciary responsibility refers to the stewardship of all city resources

Ms. Chellman said that the planning process for the middle school has relied heavily on Team Design. If the renovation of historic school buildings is not a major focus of their work, their expertise may incline towards the construction of a new school rather than the renovation of a historic school building. Using funds now to obtain another view of the possibilities for the current school site would be worthwhile, in the long run, to estimate costs, and to obtain another vision. Ms. Chellman said that we have a fiduciary responsibility to find the best long-term outcome for a new or renovated school facility, given the City’s current financial and existing physical resources. Long-term preservation provides a community benefit in the retention of the character of the city.

In conclusion, to the extent possible, the next design team should be asked to design a flexible building that can accommodate different teaching theories. The Parrott Avenue school should be used as a teaching tool for its historical and environmental significance. The current middle school should be renovated and improved.

Group C

Michael Griffin represented Group C in providing the presentation to the City Council and School Board.

The Five Criteria of Group C

- Environmental Impact
- Cost to Taxpayers
- Location
- Flexibility
- Educational Philosophy

Mr. Griffin reported that evaluating and rating the environmental impact of the middle school sites was important and necessary to determine the impact of a change in land use. He informed the City Council and School Board that the burden of the expenditure could have a significant impact on the “cost of living” to the citizens of Portsmouth. He said that there are unique characteristics of each site. He indicated that the group supports the middle school teacher and administration in their education narrative.

Mr. Griffin reported that the group considered what would be best for education of middle school children, while considering all the vital and practical strong resources that form and constitute our community.

Environmental Impact as it relates to each site:

- Development on Conservation Land/Loss of Open Space, Vernal Pools and Wetlands
- Compliance with LEED Guidelines
- Vital Wildlife Corridor
- Ash Landfill Best Left, Untouched
- Old Landfill Practices “Open Dumping”
- Archeological Resources?

Mr. Griffin, by use of a map, showed the environmental corridor and how it pertains to each site.

Cost to Taxpayers as it pertains to each site:

- Future use of Parrott Avenue Building, the Costs Related to Building a New Facility Versus Renovation of Existing School
- Road Maintenance
- Fire, Police and Security

Location as it relates to each site:

Parrott Avenue provides a sense of community/social connection, culture, social activities, supports the master plan, is close to the new library and municipal government agencies.

Jones Avenue site is too isolated, traffic impact to the area, there is no walkability and it is not close to neighborhoods.

In conclusion, based upon the review of discussion, through the open dialogue of ideas, and concerns, the group supports the concept of renovation at the existing school on Parrott Avenue, as opposed to new construction. When comparing the two most viable options, and applying their criteria, this option makes the most sense to the group. This will provide the best quality of education, while incorporating the best practices of modern and efficient construction design, and building practices and technology.

Group B

Charlie Griffin represented Group B in providing the presentation to the City Council and School Board.

The Five Criteria of Group B

- Consistency with Relevant Adopted Policies: the Master Plan; and, the Educational Narrative;
- Preservation of Conservation Land;
- To Seek the Best Design for a Long Term Solution;
- Connection to Community/Walkability; and,
- Sustainability/Long Term Energy Conservation

Mr. Griffin reviewed the mission from the Master Plan: “Portsmouth should be a livable, walkable city that preserves its history, lives in balance with its natural resources, and protects its waterfront and views.” “Portsmouth should take steps to build community through citywide events, enhances and beautified common living and recreating spaces and neighborhood connectedness.” He urged the City Council and School Board to preserve and restore identified critical habitats and enhance wildlife corridors. Explore opportunities to protect land adjacent to existing open space parcels to create a connected network of greenways. Citizens have made it clear their preference for investing in long term solutions that will provide sound stewardship of the community over short-term fixes and temporary remedies. Mr. Griffin spoke to the need to continue the integration of our schools with the greater community. The group believes that you need to direct new growth to areas that are already developed and where adequate infrastructure for growth is in place. Sustainability encourages development that supports the revitalization of community centers and neighborhoods; and that reuses and rehabilitates existing infrastructure.

In terms of the Jones Avenue site nobody knows what is in the landfill only what is coming out of it. He reported that it is not presently leaking but construction and blasting on or near the landfill equals needless risk. Landfill sites are categorically excluded by LEED.

In conclusion, the group understands that the choice is difficult, but that the best choice, in light of all the above is clear: the Middle School on Parrott Avenue needs to be rebuilt/renovated, with new thoughts.

Group A

Joy Page and Tony Coviello represented Group A in providing the presentation to the City Council and School Board. Ms. Page and Mr. Coviello reported that there was unanimity among the members of the group that the following criteria should be taken into consideration when developing plans to improve the educational facilities for Portsmouth’s 6th, 7th and 8th graders:

The Five Criteria of Group A

- Preservation
- Community
- Accessibility
- Cost
- Logistics

Ms. Page and Mr. Coviello reported that the group believes that the final design for either site under consideration would meet the requirements set out in the educational narrative. In addition, they also agree that the so called “Peirce Trust” is a non-issue. There is ample evidence that Alumni Field was purchased at fair-market value from the Peirce Estate; it was not a gift. Mr. Coviello advised the School Board and City Council that the City paid \$2,500.00 in 1913 for the land which was fair-market value.

In accordance with the City’s Master Plan, the Middle School decision should take into consideration the importance of the preservation of buildings, the preservation of the environment, the preservation of wildlife corridors, and finally, the preservation of the identity of Portsmouth and its vital connection to its past. Ms. Page spoke to the 1960’s decision to preserve the South Mill Pond over the Chamber of Commerce recommendation to fill it in for a parking lot; the decision to preserve 40 homes in the South End and create Strawberry Banke rather than demolish the homes for low income housing as recommended by the federal government; the decision to be the first City in New Hampshire to adopt historic districting, adding to Portsmouth’s specialness, despite resistance from various realtors; and the decision in the 1970’s to preserve and beautify Market Square despite opposition by the Portsmouth Herald.

Ms. Page and Mr. Coviello said that the school’s location should promote students’ development of values about themselves and their identity with their historical community. Frequent contact with their wider world affords students opportunities to participate as young citizens and to enhance and reinforce their academic learning. As a community we need to promote the health of our middle school students by encouraging them to walk to their school, and ensure that they have the security to do so within a vibrant community - not in the woods or outskirts of town.

A well-located facility can accrue a variety of benefits. It can serve as a site for many community functions. Further, a school located in the heart of vibrant, densely populated neighborhoods also provides security for students.

The group recognizes the obligation to balance all municipal costs in order to keep Portsmouth a livable and diverse community. The group supports the recommendation by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, that separate architects should be engaged for concept-design and for building. There is a cost to losing a key public-school building in a prominent location.

The logistics for each location under consideration poses challenges that require careful planning to manage. The group strongly believes that the inconvenience of two years must be weighed against the permanent impact of new construction on the environment and infrastructure. The lasting benefit of the best site and design should ultimately outweigh the concerns over temporary inconvenience.

In conclusion, the group believes that creative ways to address current and future needs for the education of our middle-school children can be devised through renovation of the current school. An investment will be of greater lasting value financially and culturally to the entire community now and into the future.

IV. Questions and Discussions

Mayor Marchand thanked everyone for their participation in the process and their detailed and thorough presentations. He requested that specific questions to specific groups should be directed and asked by the City Council and School Board members.

Councilor Pantelakos asked Mr. Tabor and Mr. Noucas if letters were sent to every household in Portsmouth. Mr. Tabor responded that letters were sent to all households as well as outreach through the school system to reach all parents in the community. Councilor Pantelakos said she felt it was strange that no comments were received from Gosling Meadows residents. She also questioned the median income and how that was arrived at by the Study Circles. Mr. Tabor said that an estimated average was used with a broad number.

Mr. Noucas said that statistics provided relative to median year of education showed that individuals that responded had higher education, with 53% having graduate degrees. He said that this was the most recruitment received in the Study Circles process. Councilor Pantelakos advised Mr. Tabor and Mr. Noucas that her household did not receive a letter and that is why she asked the question of who letters were sent to.

School Board member Mitchell Shuldman said that he is familiar with the process of the Study Circles as he participated in them during the Master Plan process. He thanked those who participated and the presentations provided this evening. Mr. Mitchell requested that the School Board receive copies of each of the PowerPoint presentations provided this evening for their reference. City Manager Bohenko said that we have the reports and a disk would be provided to Dr. Lister for the distribution of copies to the board.

Councilor Grasso said the Group C indicated that there would be room at the High School for the 8th graders to be relocated during the renovation process and asked Dr. Lister to respond. A representative of Group C advised Councilor Grasso that it was implied that the High School could take an additional 500 students. Dr. Lister said that the 8th graders would require 10 class rooms and there are not 10 classrooms available at the High School. He also indicated that there are not enough classrooms available to move the 6th graders into the elementary schools.

Councilor Dwyer addressed Group H and their ideas relative to reconfiguring traffic at the Parrott Avenue Site. Judy Howard representative of Group H said that the City could close off Parrott Avenue at Rogers Street and create a parking garage at the Parrott Avenue parking lot in order to provide more parking for the community.

Councilor Whitehouse spoke to Group K who was the only group to recommend a referendum vote on this matter and asked how much discussion was held on this issue. Nancy Emerson said that a great deal of discussion took place regarding a referendum. She said that the group feels that the City needs to obtain multiple bids for the costs related to construction or renovation.

School Board member Brendan Ristaino asked City Manager Bohenko how the School Board looks at the ideas in a feasible manner and moves the discussion forward. City Manager Bohenko said that the School Board should go back and deliberate and come back with a list of questions they need the City staff to answer. He advised Mr. Ristaino that he would work with Dr. Lister and approach the entities that have interest.

School Board member Kent LaPage announced that the School Board would be meeting tomorrow evening in a Work Session to discuss the middle school.

Councilor Pantelakos said that Group A indicated that they have documentation indicating that the Jones Avenue site could not be LEED certified and asked for a copy of that information. She also requested a copy of the information provided by Group A relative to the land being purchased at fair-market value. Mr. Coviello advised Councilor Pantelakos that he could provide that information as requested. City Manager Bohenko advised the City Council that he would receive the information from Mr. Coviello and provide copies to the City Council.

Assistant Mayor Ferrini said that Group G addressed that the site map only included parcels of 28 acres or more and asked that a representative address that matter. Ms. Wilkinson reported that additional land needs to be reviewed. The site map included parcels of 28 acres or more but the Parrott Avenue site is less than 28 acres therefore, additional sites could be reviewed.

School Board member Kent LaPage asked how many non-residents participated in the Study Circles. Mr. Tabor and Mr. Noucas advised Mr. LaPage that all participants were Portsmouth residents. Mr. Noucas advised Mr. LaPage from the initial 171 responses, 135 participants made it through the entire process, and 107 completed surveys about the experience.

V. Adjournment

At 9:45 p.m., Mayor Marchand closed the meeting.

Respectfully submitted by:

Kelli L. Barnaby, CMC
City Clerk