

PORTLAND BOARD OF EDUCATION  
Special Joint Meeting with the  
BOARD OF SELECTMEN  
May 14, 2024 AT 6:30 PM

BOE Present: Laurel Steinhauser, Tim Lavoy, Meg Scata, David Murphy, Kim Nagy-Maruschock,  
Sarah Spear

BOE Absent: Angela Hammond

BOS Present: First Selectman Ryan Curley, John Dillon, Shaun Manning, Robert Hetrick, James Tripp, Michael Pelton  
at 7:11pm

BOS Absent: Michael Hernandez

Others Present: Superintendent of Schools Dr. Charles Britton  
Mike Sorano and Bryce Sens from FRIAR Architecture  
Stephanie Fragola, Assistant to the Superintendent for Business and Financial Affairs  
Ryan Walstrom, Gildersleeve Elementary Principal  
Bob Shea, Director of Facilities

**1. First Selectman Ryan Curley called the special joint meeting to order at 6:37 p.m.**

Mr. Curley informed the audience that a juvenile male was struck on Main Street and is in transport to CT Children's Medical Center. Thoughts and prayers are with him and the family.

**2. Board Discussion on School Facilities Plan**

Mr. Curley stated there was quite a bit of information at the last joint meeting. We have reconvened today to continue the conversation and pose any questions Board members may have.

D. Murphy addressed cost concerns among constituents. He stated we are not putting in soft costs. He gave percentage cost comparisons. Open choice may also offer percentage savings on cost. May be looking at \$34 million vs \$44 million after eligible reimbursements.

S. Fragola reviewed Open Choice calculations. We can receive up to 10% reimbursement depending on the Open Choice to Portland student ratio from grades K-5. Based on this year's calculations it would be 4% extra reimbursement.

The grant needs to be submitted by June 30<sup>th</sup>. Due to this being an election year, we can apply for the grant prior to bonding. The number that would be stated on the bond question is the full amount of the project. The statement of an anticipated reimbursement amount can be included as a separate amount.

L. Steinhauser asked if question can be amended at any point. Mr. Curley stated he would have to check with bond council.

M. Sorano explained how the bonding process works, including a series of short term bonds.

S. Manning confirmed that one focus of this project is for the safety of children. He stated we can cut costs to construction to bring the price down further. Questioned why a second floor is needed. Stated we can save cost on stairwells and an elevator. M. Sorano stated there is an efficiency to stacking floors. S. Manning inquired on ceiling height for classrooms and foyers. M. Sorano stated the starting is 10ft ceiling height for energy reasons. May go to 9 to 9.6 height. S. Manning stated he's not against the plan but against the numbers.

J. Dillon inquired about the secondary schools cost. Asked about additional bond costs for repairing the secondary schools. He feels the cost is a concern for tax payers. Dr. Britton stated we have one more year on reimbursement opportunity for the HVAC grant, which would knock the cost lower. Also need to consider the impact of bonding coming off in August 2025 for the secondary school.

D. Murphy stated we need to get ahead of the curve by putting funding aside for capital improvements.

S. Manning stated we need to also focus on the other buildings about what to do with them once they are decommissioned. Gave examples of previous buildings that sat unused for extended period of time.

Discussion on building solutions. L. Steinhauser stated we have learned from those mistakes, and we can work on a plan on what to do with the buildings.

Mr. Curley stated we have very talented people on the Land and Building Usage committee. There is no easy answer on what to do with the decommissioned schools. Selling the buildings is most likely not an option due to cost. The town would need to update and maintain the buildings. If we sell, the developer would most likely be asking for a tax abatement. He encouraged people to attend the next Building and Land Usage committee on Monday, May 20<sup>th</sup>. The meetings are held in person and online.

T. Lavoy stated the solution may be not to close Brownstone but rather keep it.

L. Steinhauser clarified the number of students projected is 648.

M. Sorano reiterated that the town has the control on the numbers. The budget amount doesn't mean you spend it all. He advised not low balling it now, but rather save costs as you go through the design planning. The projected budget is reasonable for square foot per pupil. Stated there may be an option to look at including cost of demolition for our swing space at GS.

R. Hetrick inquired why the renderings show a flat roof vs a gabled one. M. Sorano stated there is a pitched roof on the new wing, but has not worked through final architecture. R. Hetrick advised it would be smarter to do a pitched roof overall now so we won't have water problems. M. Sorano stated we can certainly do that.

B. Shea informed that there was a tour held at the schools with the developer. The developer will be at the next Land and Building Usage committee meeting. He'll bring some good information to help move forward with good options.

Mr. Curley reiterated that he wants to be transparent on the potential decommissioning of the schools. He stated that we are here at this point due to the Great Blue survey to town residents. Moving forward with this option was the overwhelming response as to the direction resident's wanted to explore. He noted that after the survey was complete, anyone who submitted an email address to be added to a mailing list was verified. Out of 1,000 respondents, 467 people put email addresses.

S. Spear believes as elected representatives, we should listen to the people, and approve the Ed Spec Plan and then send to referendum. Otherwise she feels it's a disservice to those that have spoken through the survey.

S. Manning posed the question if this option makes sense for all segments of the community.

K. Nagy-Maruschock appreciates people have a vested interest in the impact of taxes, but the students are what we are about. She has many concerns regarding this plan and doesn't think this is the best option in the interest of students.

R. Hetrick stated we should vote to move it forward and let the people have their say.

M. Sorano gave an overview of how the Ed Specs reflect security, sizing, location, and design. The rendering is an estimate to be able to have a starting point to gather cost estimates to build a budget. Everything along the way can be redesigned according to need.

R. Hetrick asked about a turn only lane on High Street. He anticipates an influx of traffic having all the schools on one street. M. Sorano stated the rendering is the point to ask those questions so we can plan that into the project.

L. Steinhauser stated the traffic study would be done and it would be reimbursable. J. Tripp stated the Water and Sewer commission found that there is more room to work with on High Street.

J. Tripp inquired on the capacity of the cafeteria. He noticed the mock scheduling indicated some kids would have to eat lunch very early. M. Sorano stated the cafeteria is designed at 18square foot per student, with four lunch waves.

R. Walstrom stated the schedule for lunch was just an estimate. J. Tripp asked about whether the gym can be split for two classes at once. M. Sorano stated that yes, the gym can be split.

Discussion on enrollment projections. 648 is highest projection over the next 10 years.

Dr. Britton stated the grant application is now open, and is due 6/30/24. He asked for consensus on going ahead to write the grant. The grant must include the approved bonding question and three resolutions. When the town meeting adjourns to referendum, this is when the silent period starts. Then referendum in November. Bond council will need to direct us if we can communicate factual information during the silent period.

R. Hetrick stated that financially we should not wait any longer. J. Tripp explained that the annualized savings against this year's budget is around 2-3% of budget. That's significant savings.

L. Steinhauser stated that at the next Board of Education meeting on 5/21 there will be an agenda item to move the question.

Mr. Curley stated that it will be an agenda item on the 6/5 Board of Selectmen meeting.

Discussion on a second question regarding the HVAC. The window to apply for this grant opens in September and closes in December.

### **3. Audience of Citizens**

Mr. Curley received correspondence (attached).

L. Steinhauser received correspondence from E. Livensparger who endorses the consolidation, and N. Livensparger who endorses the consolidation.

Jen Witchy, Cody Lane – in support of consolidation. Spoke about school family idea.

Jen Picket, Fox Run Rd - in support of consolidation. Excited as an educator and a parent for this plan.

Beth Anderson, West Cotton Hill Rd – in support of consolidation. Feels there is continuity for kids with this plan.

Urges transparency with residents along the way on costs.

Bethanne Vergean, Summer St – in support of consolidation. Feels this will be better for our community.

Jessica Rosenthal, Edwards Rd. – in support of consolidation. Encourages Board members to understand the impact the construction will be on facilities at schools during transition.

### **4. Adjourn**

**S. Manning moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:18 p.m., seconded by R. Hetrick. Unanimously approved. MOTION CARRIED.**

Respectfully submitted,

Tricia Dean

Executive Assistant to the Superintendent/Board Clerk

## Ryan Curley

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**From:** Liz Trojanowski <ettrojano@comcast.net>  
**Sent:** Monday, May 13, 2024 9:39 PM  
**To:** First Selectman Ryan Curley  
**Subject:** Portland School Consolidation

Dear Ryan Curley and Board of Selectmen,

My name is Elizabeth Trojanowski and I live at 77 Old Marlborough Turnpike.

I'm writing today to ask you to please endorse the proposed plan for consolidating our three elementary schools into one, renovated school.

Having young kids transition between 3 different schools is hard on both students and parents - the best year we had was when 2 of my kids were at Gildersleeve and could support one another. Pick up was great because they were at the same place; now I am rushing to pick them up between 3 different schools, but one dismissal time. Not to mention, these old buildings are a hazard for the people working and going to school between floodings and heat that leaves parents scrambling for childcare!

The Board of Education has worked tirelessly to put together a plan that works for our current and future students. Please support our schools by endorsing this plan and placing it in the hands of the voters in November. Parents need their voice to be heard.

Sincerely,  
Elizabeth Trojanowski

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You received this message because you are subscribed to the Google Groups "Town of Portland Employees" group.

To unsubscribe from this group and stop receiving emails from it, send an email to [TownOfPortland+unsubscribe@portlandct.us](mailto:TownOfPortland+unsubscribe@portlandct.us).

To view this discussion on the web visit

<https://groups.google.com/a/portlandct.us/d/msgid/TownOfPortland/1607494824.290018.1715650712862%40connect.xfinity.com>.

## Ryan Curley

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**From:** Julie McGovern <juliemcgovern517@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, May 14, 2024 10:23 AM  
**To:** Ryan Curley; John Dillon; Michael Hernandez; Michael Pelton; Robert Hetrick; Shaun Manning; Jim Tripp  
**Subject:** Consolidation

Dear Ryan Curley and Board of Selectman:

My name is Julie McGovern and I live at 113 Meshomasic Trail.

I'm writing today to ask you to please endorse the proposed plan for consolidating our three elementary schools into one, renovated school. As a resident, parent of two Valley View students, and the multilingual learner teacher instructing students at all the schools, I am invested in the quality of our school system. In addition to the financial savings by running less school buildings, a stronger sense of community will be created by having more grade levels in one school. Consolidating the schools will strengthen the multilingual learner instruction, as the teacher will be traveling less and focusing more on instructional time. This also creates opportunities for flexible groupings. I often instruct multilingual groups together across various grade levels. Having older students that mentor the younger students is a powerful instructional tool that everyone enjoys and benefits from. In addition, the air quality in the elementary schools is a concern for me as a parent and staff member. During the warmer months, I feel a physical difference traveling from school to school. Renovating and updating the quality of the buildings is a priority.

The Board of Education has worked tirelessly to put together a plan that works for our current and future students. Please support our schools by endorsing this plan and placing it in the hands of the votes in November. Voters deserve to be heard.

Sincerely,

## Ryan Curley

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**From:** Gen Keoppen <gmanisouk@hotmail.com>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, May 14, 2024 10:48 AM  
**To:** Ryan Curley  
**Subject:** School consolidation plan

Dear Ryan Curley and Board of Selectmen,

My name is Gen Keoppen and I live at 108 High Street, Portland CT.

I'm writing today to ask you to please endorse the proposed plan for consolidating our three elementary schools into one, renovated school.

I have had my two daughters go through the schools, and I found the transitions every couple of years to be more difficult for them compared to other schools that I have worked at and have gone to myself. The buildings are old and require more money to upkeep, especially the lack of cooling systems that require school to be canceled in the summer.

The Board of Education has worked tirelessly to put together a plan that works for our current and future students. Please support our schools by endorsing this plan and placing it in the hands of the voters in November. Parents need their voice to be heard.

Sincerely,  
Gen Keoppen

## Ryan Curley

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**From:** Alicia Holloway <hollowayala@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, May 14, 2024 4:18 PM  
**To:** John Dillon; Ryan Curley; Michael Hernandez; Michael Pelton; Robert Hetrick; Shaun Manning; Jim Tripp  
**Subject:** School Consolidation Plan

Dear Ryan Curley and Board of Selectmen, My name is Alicia Holloway and I live at 24 Foley Road.

I'm writing today to ask you to please endorse the proposed plan for consolidating our three elementary schools into one, renovated school.

As the Special Education teacher for the Bridge Program at Brownstone, I can speak to two reasons in particular why one PreK to 5 school would be so beneficial for our students. The Bridge Program serves students from K-6. Right now, in order for students who don't attend Brownstone to attend the Bridge Program, they must be bused to or from Gildersleeve and Valley View. This is essential so our students still have the opportunity to participate in classes and activities with their same-aged peers, but obviously costs the district in transportation. If we were in one building, our students would have much more access to their peers, and we would be able to provide seamless services without having to worry about bus schedules. Additionally, as I'm sure you're all aware, the temperatures in Brownstone are atrocious in fall and spring, while the boiler pumps out so much heat in the winter that we have to open windows. An updated building is a must so students can learn without worrying about their asthma or getting sick from the heat.

The Board of Education has worked tirelessly to put together a plan that works for our current and future students. Please support our schools by endorsing this plan and placing it in the hands of the voters in November. Voters need their voice to be heard.

Sincerely,

Alicia Holloway

Sent from my iPhone

## Ryan Curley

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**From:** Ingrid Swanson <ieswanson@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, May 14, 2024 5:27 PM  
**To:** Ryan Curley  
**Subject:** Re: Letter re: concerns about School Consolidation Plan

Hi again,

I realized that at the top of my email, I forgot to do two things:

- 1) Offer a solution! One option is to table the vote tonight, and instead slow the pace, offer a public hearing to get more input and have more questions answered. [Or, vote no and get straight to a better option that doesn't consolidate all three!]
- 2) Please include my letter and concerns in the minutes by either reading it and/or recording it for the minutes.

Thanks!

Ingrid

On Tue, May 14, 2024 at 4:14 PM Ingrid Swanson <[ieswanson@gmail.com](mailto:ieswanson@gmail.com)> wrote:

Hi Ryan!

I hope this email finds you doing well! It was nice to see you at the Filandas' on Saturday night. My husband made me promise I wouldn't bother you endlessly with school consolidation talk at a social event; so I didn't! But, I am sharing a letter that I wrote outlining some of my concerns about the School Consolidation Plan, as I understand that there is a vote tonight. I'm always open to further conversation!

Thanks,

Ingrid

Dear Board of Selectmen Members,

I understand that tonight is a BOS vote that considers propelling forward the process of School Consolidation, initiating the grant proposals, and sending it towards a referendum.

**\*\*I am writing to voice my concern about this plan and my personal vote of non-support for proceeding with the School Consolidation plan at this time.\*\***

To be transparent, and in the spirit of cooperation, I agree with many elements of the school consolidation plan:

- I agree that we need to invest in our town's education system.
- I agree that we need to renovate our elementary schools, all of which are in states of disrepair.
- I agree that our students need improved facilities and better physical learning spaces.



- As a taxpayer, I am willing to shoulder my portion of the increased taxes that it will take to make improvements -- I am not a vote of non-support because I am upset with the fiscal undertaking.
- And I hope that some of the momentum and energy towards improving our schools can be maintained and harnessed for a better plan.

However, I am very opposed to consolidating all of the schools into ONE GIANT elementary school. I have viewed the BOE meetings and presentations, I have attended forums to ask questions and share my perspective, and I will continue to be open to discussion at any time. I believe that I have a unique perspective as someone who grew up and was educated by Portland Public Schools, who then left town for several decades, and who has now returned with three elementary aged students who are in Portland Schools (entering Kindergarten, 2nd grade, and 3rd grade). My kids will be greatly impacted by this decision. Some of my main concerns and positions are bulleted below:

- 1) I support closing ONE elementary school and consolidating into two schools. My preference would be a Pre-K through 2nd grade school, a 3-5 school, PMS housing 6-8, then PHS.
- 2) The School Consolidation Plan means that Portland will end up with a giant elementary school (one of the largest around!) which is antithetical to what a Portland education has always looked like. We specifically moved to Portland (and out of Glastonbury) for our children to attend schools that were smaller, more intimate, less anonymous. In our small Portland schools, our kids are KNOWN to staff -- they are known by the teachers, by the janitors, by the nurse, by the secretaries, by administrators, by support staff, etc. The kids feel safe, they feel seen, they feel accountable -- these are things that improve their morale, their positivity about education, and their academic performance. In a school of 600 or more kids, that familiarity and intimacy is lost and it can never be replicated (I do not believe that the "neighborhoods" of grades adequately addresses this issue at all). This culture of SMALL schools is the very foundation of what makes Portland schools so fantastic and it would be devastating to lose that. While I am not arguing that the physical structures don't matter (they do -- and they need major improvement!), the culture, dynamic, and "feel" of the schools matters more.
- 3) Similarly, I hate to see the loss of administrators, nurses, specials teachers, etc. with the School Consolidation Plan, where the idea is to pay less by cutting those positions and consolidating fewer personnel to do the same job as many. I would rather pay more and have nurses who aren't maxed out on numbers and overwhelmed and who actually know our kids! Same with administrators! It's a loss for the students to try to max out the student ratios in order to save some dollars.
- 4) I am concerned that a very extensive study was conducted over multiple years by a committee (headed by Lou Pear), with focus groups, assessments, examinations of the buildings, and community input, and a comprehensive report was issued. Those recommendations -- to consolidate to TWO elementary schools -- have essentially been completely ignored. When I have asked why, the response centers around the subsequent survey that was conducted. My concern about the survey is that MANY folks didn't have anywhere near the info that the committee did (and misunderstood many questions on the survey). Also, we are touting the "majority" position as our guide when in actuality, the majority was only the majority by a very slim actual number of votes. And if the options were to be two rather than three (for example: 2 elementary schools vs. 3) -- I believe that the result would be VERY different, because those voting for 2 or 3 elementary schools greatly outnumber those who want complete consolidation.
- 5) I tried to remain very open-minded about the architectural plans for the mega-school but was disappointed by many aspects of that as well. A prime example is ONE gym (and not just a gym, it will be a "gym-itorium" because it will be a gym with a stage). ONE gym for 600+ students does not give our kids access to the physical gymnasium space often enough (when presently our elementary kids get gym twice a week). Also,

the town is already maxed out on gym space, where we have three elementary gyms! My 3rd grade son couldn't get more basketball practice because there is no gym time, as is. Our after school programs, rec programs, basketball teams, indoor soccer teams, etc. will be so detrimentally impacted by losing two gyms and only having ONE. If this happens, I'd bet we will be knocking on neighboring towns' doors, asking for space to conduct our programs and practices! This is just one example of how the mega-school plans do not adequately address what is really needed when losing two physical school structures. My longer list includes concerns about kids having to start eating lunch at 10am because of limited cafeteria time, as well as infrastructure concerns regarding parking (completely insufficient parking for a school and staff of 600+ students, let alone events that will occur at the school that involve families) and traffic issues on High Street and Hall Hill. I struggle to understand why we want to create these problems!

6) I am also concerned about how there is no plan for what will occur to the Gildersleeve and Brownstone properties. I have viewed the land use committee meetings and remain confused and concerned. As a resident whose home is less than 200 yards from Gildersleeve, I want to know with certainty what will occur to that property before I would ever vote to decommission it. If the solution is 200 more apartments -- something that would forever change my neighborhood, greatly impact my property's value, and change the safety of our portion of Main Street -- that will impact my vote. Likewise, Brownstone is an iconic building in this town and its fate is important to me. So I am personally concerned about these things, but I also think that town residents as a whole need this information. And we are not going to get needed votes on the education improvements unless we have thoughtfully planned through the collateral impacts and are able to offer those solutions. I don't want us to lose momentum for educational improvements, but I think we will lose votes for any plan without these appropriate collateral plans in place.

These are just a few of my concerns, and while I know that I will have the opportunity to place my official vote when things get to a referendum, I feel it is important for our elected representatives to understand the positions of folks in town. I welcome the opportunity to further discuss things at any point (860-836-0965) -- I welcome respectful dialogue and am committed to keeping an open mind.

That said, at this time, I urge you to reconsider pushing through the School Consolidation plan in its present form and in such a rushed fashion.

Thank you,  
Ingrid Swanson Moss

## Portland Public School Consolidation

We recently saw the presentation for a one school proposal, consolidating Portland elementary schools. It was a very good presentation and there were some compelling positives; however, we still have, as many others do, some serious reservations for the one school project.

The School Facilities Committee, composed of many professional and educated persons, spent two years agonizing over the pros and cons of consolidating schools. In addition, there was feedback from 17 various focus groups. It seems that there are still some of the same issues, that were wrestled by the School Facilities Committee. The main issues found to be divisive were:

### Size of school

In the visitation of large schools, by Principal Ryan Walstrom, none were 650 students (with a real possibility of a future 750 students). While there are many pre-K to 5 schools in CT, most of them are 350 to 500 in size. There are presently only 7 elementary non-Magnet schools in CT with a population of 650 or over; and of those, some are regional or city schools.

### Closing of two schools, without a confirmed plan

The repurposing and/or selling of both Gildersleeve and Brownstone Intermediate Schools, while being presently addressed, will be a major factor in a referendum vote. No one will want to see a school(s) deteriorate, especially one where the front portion has historical value and is located on Main Street.

### Possibility of a referendum failure due to cost of the project.

In the recent town survey, on school consolidation, if viewed carefully, will show that the "one school proposal" was not a slam dunk. While the majority favored one elementary school, approximately 42% of the respondents favored two elementary schools. An additional percentage wanted no change. This survey also never included the majority recommendation by the School Facilities Committee. That recommendation, of a revised two school proposal, would have ceded both the auditorium and the basement, at BIS, to the town. The basement could be utilized for storage and the auditorium for town meetings (presently, the auditorium is used less than 10 times a year). This proposal was verbally approved by Directors of Administrative Services for the State of CT (representatives that sanction applications for new school additions and renovations). The projected cost of this proposal was \$31 million, which is \$13 million less than the current one school proposal for \$44 million. Had this plan been presented to the public, perhaps the vote would have been for the two school proposal. To date, we have not heard why this plan was never included for a public vote. Our concerns are not ours alone, there is still a significant population that would like the two school proposal or who did not vote, but will vote in November.

There are pros and cons for both the one and two school proposals. However, that said, what we absolutely **DO NOT** want to see take place is a referendum vote for the three school and "Do Nothing" proposals. Both of these proposals show a lack of foresight, over the long term, of **saving tax dollars**. They also risk delay in incredibly needed repairs that would most likely be fixed in dribs and drabs (Valley View's roof has been leaking for over 10 years). Maintaining three schools would definitely cost more; and **more importantly, it would deprive Portland students of educationally sound improvements.**

Lou & Mary Pecker

PORTLAND BOARD OF EDUCATION  
Special Joint Meeting with the  
BOARD OF SELECTMEN  
May 14, 2024 AT 6:30 PM

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The Portland Board of Education meeting will be held in the Portland High School Media Center, 93 High Street, Portland.  
Remote access is available via ZOOM. <https://www.portlandctschools.org/>

**AGENDA**

1. First Selectman Call Special Joint Meeting to Order
2. Boards discussion on School Facilities Plan
3. Audience of Citizens
4. Adjourn