



CITY OF NEWTON, MASSACHUSETTS

PUBLIC BUILDINGS DEPARTMENT

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Although many members of the Public Facilities Committee have closely followed the Countryside School Building Project, and you've all likely seen our frequent project updates, I thought that a simple recap of the work we've done to date would be helpful in advance of our presentation on April 12th.

The Countryside School Project started in April of 2021 with an invitation from the MSBA to the Eligibility Phase of the grant program. In December of 2021 the MSBA invited the Project to partner in the development of a Feasibility Study and the [Countryside School Building Committee](#), CSBC was formed. Over the past 15 months and 50 meetings, we have completed a significant amount of work. We started with a big push to make the school community and neighborhood aware of the project through direct certified mailing, social media, email, and through a variety of Newton Public Schools communication streams.

We have met monthly with the CSBC, Design Review Committee, DRC, and community monthly since the project began. Our meetings have been well attended, and everyone has an equal seat at the virtual table which has fostered a healthy, productive, and efficient dialog that has allowed us to move swiftly through the feasibility phase.

We met early and often with the Countryside School staff for both project updates and productive [staff visioning sessions](#) where the educators helped shape the future for the Countryside School Project.

We updated and established our [educational program](#) to help us fully understand what the Countryside School Project must deliver, and in January we submitted the [Preliminary Design Program](#) to the MSBA.

We established our [design enrollment and space summary](#) based on current and projected Countryside student enrollment and the Massachusetts School Building Authority, MSBA, space guidelines. This helped us determine the size of the building and land area needed to support the Countryside School Project.

We then started our [site search process](#) by establishing the criteria for the evaluation of the various sites. The criteria were not surprisingly very similar to the criteria we've used over the past decade on a variety of school projects. We then evaluated close to 150 sites throughout Newton. Out of those sites, there were only a small handful within

the Countryside School district, which were all either parks or sites currently used for other municipal purposes, and which were also on the very outer edges of the district and cost prohibitive to redevelop. Therefore, the recommendation was that the current Countryside School site remain the site for the school project.

While all the work above was being completed, our project team has been hard at work analyzing and evaluating the [existing conditions](#) of the current Countryside School site. This included borings, test pits, wetlands and site surveys, and much more.

With the adjacent wetlands, brook, and existing floodplain, we looked hard at the water table, stormwater, and site to ensure that we were as informed as possible with regards to the siting of the new facility. We received a report from Horsley Witten, an incredible civil engineering firm that specializes in working in and around flood plains. They have proven and explained that the Countryside site is undeniably viable, and that the proposed siting and elevation of the new building will sit above the 500-year flood plain. They also explained that we will at a minimum maintain as much flood storage capacity as exists today, and possibly increase the flood storage capacity in the end. Through the use of porous asphalt, bioswales, rain gardens, and other stormwater mitigation efforts, we will have a very positive impact on the site and the neighborhood. To hear directly from the professionals at Horsley Witten, please click [here](#), and to read their summary report you can click [here](#).

With the current site identified as the preferred location for the Countryside School Project, and understanding that we had a very viable site, we began to evaluate various conceptual site options.

Using the same approach used for every large project, we established a [criteria matrix to help evaluate various site concepts](#).

The existing building sits well below the floodplain, and building code requirements do not allow it to remain there. This means that we either must elevate the entire existing building, renovate, and add to it, or we must build a new facility on another portion of the site. The concept of elevating the existing building has been evaluated, and it is not only technically impractical and cost prohibitive, but also yields a vastly inferior finished product.

Of the various new construction options, it became clear quickly that the best option was to build on the northeast portion of the site. Not only does this option elevate the building above the 500-year floodplain, but it allows for an optimal building configuration, site layout, and it affords the possibility of keeping the Countryside School students in the current building while the new school is constructed.

On April 4th, the [CSBC and DRC straw voted unanimously](#) to recommend option 6A as the preferred site concept for the Countryside School Project. This vote was a straw vote to ensure that we had an opportunity to present an update to the Public Facilities

Committee prior to the formal and official vote of the CSBC on [April 25th](#) to submit the Preferred Schematic Report to the MSBA.

In the coming months we will continue to work with the CSBC, DRC, and Community to study, refine, and advance our site plan with the goal of seeking site plan approval of the City Council in the fall.

We are still on track to start construction in the summer of 2025, and complete construction in the summer of 2027. The exact schedule may change as we continue to work with the MSBA and the various stakeholders.

Sincerely,



Josh Morse
Public Buildings Commissioner