

CITY OF NEWTON

IN BOARD OF ALDERMEN

PUBLIC FACILITIES COMMITTEE REPORT

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 17, 2007

Present: Ald. Schnipper (Chair), Weisbuch, Albright, Salvucci, Gentile, Mansfield and Lappin

Absent: Ald. Yates

Also Present: Ald. Baker, Coletti, Hess-Mahan, Johnson, Lipof, Merrill, Parker and Samuelson

City personnel present: Nick Parnell (Commissioner of Public Buildings), Dori Zaleznik (Chair of the School Committee), Anne Larner (School Committee Member) Eva Thompson (Principal of Peirce Elementary School), Stephen Griffin (Principal of Zervas Elementary School) and Shawna Sullivan (Committee Clerk)

#5-07            DESIGN REVIEW COMMITTEE in accordance with §5-58 of the City of Newton Ordinances petitioning for site plan approval for the installation of eight (8) modular classrooms with associated connectors at the following elementary schools: Bowen (1), Cabot (2), Horace Mann (1), Peirce (2) and Zervas (2). [12-28-06@4:01 PM

**ACTION:**    **APPROVED AS AMENDED 7-0**

**NOTE:**        Commissioner Parnell presented the item to the Committee and explained that the School Department has requested eight modular classrooms to provide space at the five elementary schools to alleviate overcrowding in the schools. The Design Review Committee has reviewed the plans for each of the schools and voted to approve the plans. The Planning Department has also reviewed the plans and submitted a memo to the Board dated January 12, 2007, which contains recommended a memo from the Engineering Division stating that there is no on-site drainage improvements needed, the runoff from the additional parking spaces that will be constructed is minor and directed to the existing drainage system. The modulares will be in place for the 2007/2008 school year. The modulares are 900 square feet, include plumbing, heating and electric utilities, and are connected to the schools using links.

The Commissioner gave a PowerPoint presentation that included the site plans, floor plans and photographs for each of the elementary schools. The presentation displays preferred location of the modulares and alternate locations. There will be one modular classroom placed at Bowen Elementary School. The modular will be located towards on the side of the school towards the rear by the gymnasium (see attached). The preferred location places the modular on top of a patio constructed with CPA funds and donated material. However, the alternate location is within the parking lot creating a loss of parking spaces, would require a lengthy connector and the Assistant Fire Chief found that the location would not allow fire truck access to the rear of the school. After meeting with the principal, the PTO Chairs and other school related committees, it was decided that the best location for the modular is the preferred location.

Ald. Schnipper questioned whether the modular classrooms would include restrooms. The Commissioner responded that no but it is hoped that there will be a sink in each of the modular classrooms. Ald. Schnipper asked the Commissioner where the restrooms that would service the modulars at Bowen are located within the school. The Commissioner referred to the floor plans to show the current bathrooms on the first floor of Bowen Elementary School. Ald. Hess-Mahan stated that at the Design Review Committee meeting the Commissioner agreed to check on how many stalls were required for the number of students. The Commissioner explained that it is an ongoing process and the architects are working on it. The question is if there are not enough stalls, do you put new restrooms in the modulars at high expense or do you place them in the school where there is already sewer and drain connections. The Public Buildings Department will certainly comply with plumbing code. Ald. Salvucci asked why if sinks were going into the modulars, why not restrooms, as sinks require drains too. The Commissioner responded that the sink water is grey water and a toilet requires a 4" pipe; therefore, it is a much easier, much less expensive connection for a sink. Restrooms would require trenching, pipes and in some cases a pump, which is very costly. Should it be determined that new restrooms are needed they will most likely be placed in the school.

Ald. Lappin inquired whether the modular classroom would infringe on the outdoor classroom. The Commissioner responded that the modular does not affect the outdoor classroom, but it will require that some of the proposed planting included in the CPA project be moved.

The Commissioner proceeded with the presentation and spoke on the two proposed modular classrooms for Cabot Elementary School. The location for the two modulars is on the Bridges Avenue side of the school in the existing parking lot. The connector will link with the building at the existing lobby. The modulars will be setback approximately 29' from the sidewalk and will not project further than any of the other wings of the building. There will be a loss of six to eight parking spaces in the parking lot; however, there is available on street parking along Parkview Avenue.

The Commissioner has worked with the faculty and members of the Cabot Elementary School community to site the modulars. Everyone is in agreement with the location. Committee members questioned whether there would be enough on street parking to accommodate the faculty. The Commissioner felt that there should not be any parking conflicts.

The original proposed site of the modular classroom at Horace Mann Elementary School would have been beside the two existing modulars at the rear of the building. There are engineering problems with this location due to the heat packs for the existing modulars and the fresh air pipes. There is a new alternate location in the front of the school at the side closest to the Newton Boys and Girls Club. The new location would require a tree to be removed from the site. It would leave a separation between the new modular and the existing modulars.

Ald. Schnipper asked if it would be the principal of each building who would decide what grade would go into the modular or whether there would be a shift of use. The Commissioner responded that the principals would make that determination. Ald. Hess-Mahan asked about the connector at Horace-Mann and whether there would be a ramp at the connector. Commissioner Parnell stated that there would be a 6 to 8' link with a ramp. Ald. Salvucci again voiced his

concern about the necessity of additional restrooms. The Commissioner explained that if additional facilities were required they would be added. Ald. Weisbuch questioned why it was necessary to remove the tree to add the modular. The Commissioner stated that the tree needs to come down and he has been told that it is a non-native invasive tree. Ald. Gentile asked why the original location is being changed. A member of the audience responded that there is a community classroom, butterfly garden and natural space located at the original planned site. Commissioner Parnell will inform the Design Review Committee of the change of location and will get a consensus of the Committee and have them sign off on the change at the next meeting.

Ald. Lappin asked if the modular classrooms would be leased or purchased. The Commissioner responded that it would be sent out to bid as a lease/purchase. It is something that needs to be worked out with the Law Department. In most cases, the City purchases the modulars.

The Peirce Elementary School will receive two modular classrooms, which will be located side by side at the southeast side of the school. The modulars will be placed in the existing parking lot and would require removal of the curb line and a new sidewalk. Ald. Albright asked whether there was any problem with the loss of parking spaces and fire truck accessibility. Ald. Schnipper responded the Planning Department's memo states that as long as the proposed extension of the curb does not narrow the road enough to impact traffic circulation and fire accessibility the Planning Department does not see any adverse impacts on immediate abutters. She believes that it just raises the issue of being careful that it is not narrowed to the point which it would hamper fire access. Commissioner Parnell pointed out that it is the widest part of the parking lot and there are no spaces in the middle of the lot.

The two proposed modulars for Zervas Elementary School will be located in the parking area and will require removal of about eight parking spaces. The Building Department is proposing that the access way back out to Beacon Street be used for parking to replace the lost parking spaces from the modular classrooms. The connector would link to an existing corridor in the school. The modulars will be located 20' from the existing classroom windows.

The Chairman opened the public hearing and John McLean, 155 Berkeley Street, (Peirce Elementary School) asked if it is possible to separate the modulars and place them at different locations on the site, as they are currently located at the front door. He suggested placing one of the modulars at the end of the driveway by the dumpsters, which would mean less mass at the front entrance. He also asked if the modulars were constructed from wood and if it is possible to blend them with the existing school. The Commissioner responded that the modulars are primarily wood and will be painted with fire retardant paint that blends with the school. Also planting can be provided to better screen the modulars. The Commissioner has spoken with one of the parents at the school, who has offered to donate some trees. The Commissioner will work with the principal and the abutters to screen the modulars.

Eva Thompson, Peirce School Principal, explained that the modular could not be placed at the end of the driveway because there is a room located there that is used as a classroom or aftercare room and there needs to be windows. Dori Zaleznik spoke on the placement of the modulars. When the School Committee priced out modulars, they learned that there is a premium

on putting them together because you have to build less of a link. It is a great deal less expensive if you place them together.

Joe Loisell, 165 Berkeley Street (Peirce School) spoke on the modulares. He would hope that given the units are at the back of the school by homes that camouflaging would be addressed. He would ask that a professional landscaper be hired to look at possible screening. He also asked if there was money being allocated for landscaping. Commissioner Parnell responded that there is no money being allocated but he will put in the specs and have in-house architects look at plantings. Ald. Schnipper asked if other mechanisms have been looked at to come up with funds for landscaping. Ald. Albright asked if there had been any thought about what happens if additions are added to the schools. Commissioner Parnell stated that the study on elementary school space needs has to be completed and then a decision regarding how to address the space issues needs to be made which will take some time. The modulares will be in place for a substantial period of time. Everyone involved has tried to place the modulares where they fit and are best for the school in terms of least disruption, safety, circulation and blockage of light.

Ald. Gentile felt that if the city is going to do this, it should be done right. It seems for a relatively small amount of money a landscape architect can be hired. He would think that something could be done to lessen the impact on neighbors. Commissioner Parnell will direct the on-call architect to buy some time for a landscape architect to do a minimal study to look at landscaping. Karen Fischer, 43 Prince Street (Peirce School PTO), is more than happy to work with neighbors of Peirce School regarding the landscaping and blending. A few of the PTO members have expertise in landscaping are willing to volunteer there time and expertise. The PTO has already discussed some landscaping ideas for the modulares.

Bruce Henderson, 52 Vaughn Avenue (Zervas Elementary School), asked if the link could be widened to 12', as the link is at the delivery entrance to the school. Other than the width, he is very pleased with the modulares. Faith Justice, 44 Churchill Street (Horace-Mann Elementary School) is very happy about the site change of the modular. There is a lot to be said for thoughts and creativity of the community. Landscape architects are expensive and funding for materials is more important. Isabelle Thacker, 19 Salisbury Road (Cabot Elementary School), spoke on the importance of setting up the insides correctly.

Steve Griffin, Principal of Zervas Elementary School, asked if wireless drops being planned for the modular classrooms. The Commissioner responded that the set up specifications would be that of a regular classroom.

Susan Flicop, 163 Suffolk Road (Bowen Elementary School), agreed that the best site for the modular was chosen but would like to see everything placed back as it was when the modular is removed.

The public hearing was closed and Ald. Salvucci moved approval of the site plans with the Horace-Mann amendment. Ald. Albright asked if there was enough room on Bridges Avenue for some faculty parking. Anne Lerner thought that there would be enough room for a few spaces across from the blue zone on Bridges Avenue.

Ald. Weisbuch is concerned about the removal of the tree at Horace-Mann and would like the arborist's opinion. He suggested moving the modular a little closer to Albemarle Park. The Commissioner stated that the tree is a Norway maple and is on the top ten list of exotic invasive trees. It is the intent to replace the tree with some native trees in the area. Ald. Mansfield also agreed that the Norway maple is not a good tree. Ald. Mansfield asked if there had been any determination on paying back the funds to the CPA funds for the patio at Bowen Elementary School and whether there would be detailed site plans by the next meeting of the full Board meeting on parking. The Commissioner responded that he would attempt to have more details plans by the full Board. He will discuss the CPA funds with the Planning Department and determine the best course of action. Ald. Mansfield also asked for a memo from the Engineering Department addressing the impact of the additional parking spaces on the drainage at Zervas School.

The Committee voted on Ald. Salvucci's motion of approval with the amended placement of the modular at Horace-Mann and it carried unanimously.

**REFERRED TO PROGRAMS & SERVICES, PUBFAC & FINANCE COMMITTEES**

#5-07(2) HIS HONOR THE MAYOR requesting authorization to appropriate and expend \$1,000,000 from Free Cash to lease/purchase eight (8) modular classrooms for the School Department. [12-22-06 @ 1:11PM]

**PROGRAMS & SERVICES APPROVED 7-0**

**ACTION: APPROVED 7-0**

**NOTE:** The Programs and Services Committee joined the Committee for discussion of this item. Commissioner Parnell presented the item to the Committees. The item is a request for \$1 million to purchase/lease eight modular classrooms for the School Department to be placed at five elementary schools. The Mayor is working with the School Committee to determine a funding source for the remaining \$280,000 needed. Dori Zaleznik stated that at the time of the School Committee vote the Mayor said he would find \$1 million if the School Department could do \$200,000. If after the bid, the cost is higher than \$1,200,000 than there will need to have another discussion.

Ald. Albright stated that there needed to be a plan because the modulares cannot sit forever. Ald. Lappin is concerned about the bathrooms at the schools and wondered if the requested funds needed to be increased. The Commissioner stated that bathrooms drive up the costs significantly due to the need to trench and provide pipes. Ald. Coletti would like to see the modulares be speced as permanent, as he has only seen one modular classroom actually moved. Ald. Gentile asked if the toilets are added how much would they cost and how much space in lost in the modular. The Commissioner responded that it is a delicate balance. The cost is due to the sewer work needed and there would be small loss of space.

Ald. Parker was impressed with the distinction between short and long-term. He would imaging that after looking at the space needs study, the needs will be prioritized, which might mean some of the modulares will be in place for a number of years. He would like the project done without any skimping. Ald. Hess-Mahan iterated the need to get the modulares in place. The schools are overcrowded and the City needs to address the space need as quickly as it can.

Ald. Weisbuch asked the Commissioner if it was more important to have the modulars or bathrooms. The Commissioner felt that it is more important to have the modulars. Ald. Coletti feared that the modulars would be used for the younger grades, who really need to have quick access to a bathroom. Eve Thompson, Principal of Pierce School, stated that the principals of the schools could make the decisions on the use of the modular space. The Commissioner will report back to the Committees on the need for bathrooms at the individual schools.

Ald. Salvucci asked what the latest start date for the project is. The Commissioner would like to begin as soon as possible and get the specifications out immediately. The modulars need to be in place in the fall. Committee members realized the immediate need for space at the schools. Ald. Baker moved approval in Programs and Services, which carried unanimously and Ald. Lappin moved approval in Public Facilities, which carried unanimously.

Appointment by His Honor the Mayor

#4-07            AMELIA RAVIN, 121 Adena Road, West Newton, appointed as a member of the SOLID WASTE COMMISSION for a term expiring December 31, 2009 (60-days 3-3-07) [12-26-06 @2:07PM].

**ACTION:**     **APPROVED 7-0**

**NOTE:**        Ms Ravin joined the Committee for discussion of her appointment to the Solid Waste Commission. Ms. Ravin has been to many Solid Waste Commission meetings and Commission members look forward to her appointment to the Commission. Ms. Ravin is an Environmental Consultant and is very familiar with solid waste management. She has also worked on the Energy Action Plan for the City and is looking forward to working with the City again. Ald. Gentile moved approval, which carried unanimously. Ald. Schnipper thanked Ms. Ravin for her willingness to serve and stated that she is a wonderful addition to the Solid Waste Commission.

Respectfully submitted,

Sydra Schnipper, Chairman