

Approved by  
the Select Board on:

5/24/2021

SELECT BOARD JOINT MEETING WITH THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY, MAY 12, 2021

REMOTE MEETING

7:00 PM

RECEIVED  
TOWN CLERK  
BELMONT, MA

DATE: September 1, 2021  
TIME: 9:30 AM

CALL TO ORDER

A meeting of the Select Board was called to order at 7:00 pm by Chair Adam Dash. Vice Chair Roy Epstein and Select Board member Mark Paolillo were present, along with Town Administrator Patrice Garvin, Assistant Town Administrator Jon Marshall and the members of the School Committee.

ACTION BY CONSENT

Final Report on the Ice Skating Rink - Presentation by Perkins & Will (Stephen Sefton)

- Chair, Adam Dash, said that the plans for the rink had been discussed before and this is the second public presentation made by Perkins and Will about the rink. Public comment will follow the presentation.
- Stephen Sefton introduced himself. He said he leads the sports and recreation practice for the Boston office of Perkins and Will and he has been working on this project for three months. The site study involved a 5.5 acre parcel west of Harris Field.
- Sefton explained that there were two scenarios under consideration for the rink:
  - New ice skating rink
  - Evaluation of existing rink for renovation.
- He outlined the program assumptions:
  - Single ice sheet
  - Locker rooms for ice and field
  - Minimum of 150 spectators
  - Support public and community use, like skate rental, ice making facilities, small concession and a small DPW storage area
  - Soccer, baseball and softball fields
  - Throwing areas for discus and shot put
  - Parking for 110 vehicles
  - Town wanted us to do evaluation to see if tennis courts could be included.
- Sefton summarized the current issues at the rink:
  - Doesn't meet building codes
  - Not climate controlled
  - No mechanical ventilation
  - Lacks space to accommodate all needs.
- He said that the cost of renovation is higher than replacing with a new ice rink. The proposed rink is 45,874 SF. The existing rink is 29,500 SF.
- After evaluation, three options were arrived at:

1. Renovation – have to stay with same layout, and parking has distribution issues
  2. New Construction (east) – preferred scheme -- rotates building from existing building, this allows contiguous area for parking and fields. Ideal for natural lighting and solar orientation.
  3. New Construction (west) – advantage to being able to construct new rink without tearing down the existing, but there would be non contiguous parking and more overlap between fields.
- The preferred option – Option 2 – allows staging so fields could be constructed before old rink is demolished. Parking and traffic circulation is better. Option 2 is also the least costly.
  - The tennis court evaluation determined that 5 courts would not fit along with the other fields, rink and parking. Sefton said the tennis courts could be included without reducing other program elements if they were elevated. However, elevating the tennis courts would add \$4.5M to the overall costs.
  - Dash announced that the slides from Perkins and Will are now posted on the Select Board website.
  - Dash turned the meeting over to Amy Checkoway from the School Committee.
  - Checkoway said that Option 2 makes sense to her in terms of placement. She announced that we will not be talking about the financing tonight. She said she would like to hear from other School Committee members about the rink first, and then parking and the design for the rest of the area can be the second topic of discussion.

Questions from School Committee and Select Board members:

- Jamal Saeh said that Option 2 seems reasonable. He asked if there is a sense of urgency to come up with timing for construction? Sefton said the cost of the rink could be higher if the Town delays on the decision or there are changes to the economy, but they tried to give a range of costs. Sefton said the major issue is the safety aspect and concern that there is falling debris. Also failing mechanical systems pose a serious risk.
- Kate Bowen asked if they ever considered a plan that combined renovation and Option 2 that would place parking spaces to the front. Sefton said that doing that would split the parking and didn't allow ease of drop off. Kate asked how much of the parking is driving the proposals? And whether they evaluated the solar aspect particular to the needs of Belmont? Sefton said they evaluated the solar aspect by industry standards but did not do evaluation specific to Belmont's needs. He said that could be evaluated in the next design phase.
- Mike Crowley thought that Option 2 was best because it opens up the area. His understanding is that 90 parking spaces are for students. He thinks if parking was reduced that a few tennis courts could be included. Checkoway said that the number of parking spaces was set by the Planning Board.
- Stephen Pinkerton, Chair of the Planning Board, replied that the school set the student parking space numbers approved in the Design and Sign Plan review. The concern was that because student parking was not included in the site plan east of Harris Field, students will park on the street.
- Paolillo thinks Option 2 works best because we need to rebuild rink because it was built in 1965. The question is how to finance it. With a 15-month build time, he concluded that we are looking at 3 to 4 years away from completion. He suggested that the project could benefit from establishing a working group with the Select Board and School Committee about funding options. He wants to explore revenue ideas and try to get this to a point where only a small debt exclusion is needed. He



questioned whether parking could be put at the Underwood pool and another site could be found for the JV baseball field and shotput so that tennis courts could be included.

- Dash suggested exploring a public-private funding option again.
- Jon Marshall said in 2013 they looked at what the field would look like if we removed one element and added tennis courts. One of the challenges with moving the baseball field, is the impact it would have on the high school baseball and youth program in town. There are two baseball diamonds at the High School and one at the Town field. The Town field does not meet the school's standards.
- Paolillo asked how eliminating the JV baseball field could have a ripple effect across town? Phelan said there is only one baseball diamond in town and this is about accommodating all categories of sports. He affirmed that one field can cause a ripple effect.
- Saeh asked how many baseball courts were at the high school and how many will there be post construction? Phelan answered that prior to construction, there were two baseball fields and now there are none, but the school uses the Belmont Hill fields. The old fields were not up to NFHS standards. We would need to expand two little leagues fields that need expanding and then there is one more field that is not NFHS standard.
- Kate Bowen said she is concerned with the overlap from baseball and softball and she would like to consider a modest reduction in parking spaces. Sefton said they were asked to design the footprint, not the building. If you want to change it further on, you could do that when you get into design aspects.
- Mike Crowley recognizes that the planning has been several years in the making. But he asked whether the green space preserved north of Concord Ave., could be used for parking? He said we have to make decision that works for the next 30 years.
- Andrea Prestwich said it's important to replenish the tennis courts. One argument is that it's a life long sport, and we should have them somewhere in town. She said this decision process has taken so long that there is not much in way of corporate memory. She supports reducing parking in order to attempt to bring back courts to the campus.
- Meg Moriarty said she would appreciate more information about the timeline and what decisions need to be made in a timely fashion.
- Phelan said there is no immediacy to the decision making. He hoped bringing this to public would create synergy by staggering the construction projects. He was hoping to develop fields first and then the focus on the building of the rink after that. He doesn't see building happening right away due to funding, but he thinks we need to at least lock the rink design in so we can focus on other issues later.
- Dash asked if tennis courts were added, would any parking be possible? Sefton thinks that 20 parking spots could be available if tennis courts are included.
- Amy Checkoway would like to bring together a task force to talk about the financial aspects of the project.

#### School Committee members preferences for the plan:

- Saeh said he is comfortable with Option 2. He is open to replacing the field with a tennis court.
- Mike Crowley is comfortable with Option 2 and hope we have a process for revisiting parking, fields and tennis courts.

- Kate Bowen said she can support Scheme 2. She would like to see width reduced for more open space on the field. It may mean reducing parking but with a working group, we could establish a line that gains 20 feet. Prior to this the committee was looking to include 5 tennis courts, but maybe we could get one court to accommodate residents. We need include a healthy environment and cars do not help for making a desirable environment.
- Andrea Prestwich supports Option 2 and she agrees with Mike about parking.
- Meghan Moriarty supports Option 2.
- Amy said she will follow up on further discussion of this topic at the next School Committee meeting on May 25.

#### PUBLIC COMMENTS:

Dante Muzzioli commented that he would like to see the least impact on space that is possible. He is not in favor of Option 1, but would like to see the rink in the same location with same design, but built closer to the railroad tracks. Since the Option 2 baseball field interferes with the soccer field he asked if the Town could take the gas station by eminent domain?

David Stievater said his kids are tennis players. There doesn't need to be a JV baseball and softball field at the high school. He agrees with Dante that there could be another option. He said there was a conscious decision to take tennis courts off the campus and he thinks that decision needs revisiting.

Dash recounted that in 2017, the High School Building Committee held public meetings and it was agreed that not all sports could fit on campus and tennis was the one which would not be able to be located on campus.

Mike French is a hockey parent. He liked Option 2. He would like to see more urgency to build the rink. He can sympathize with the tennis advocates, but maybe the decision about parking and tennis can be made at a later time. He said there will be a cost to doing nothing.

Stephen Rosales asked if there could be a second deck on the parking lot that could house tennis courts. Sefton said it would be more expensive to elevate parking.

Patrick Murphy said the reason why the attempt for a public-private partnership failed was due to parking spaces. As a hockey parent, he knows that the potential for someone to get hurt increases every day.

Ms. Sun supports the ice rink and the tennis courts. Both tennis and baseball should be supported. She feels that no one studied the ripple effects of the lack of tennis courts. When the tennis courts were removed, it negatively affected the team. She thinks Belmont needs a minimum of 5 courts for the varsity team. Winn Brook only solves the problem for the boy's team.

Matt Garver said he strongly supports Option 2. He said significant opportunities are being lost because the current rink is weather dependent. All 22 hockey teams had to relocate to other towns. Figure skating and family skating is completely unavailable.

Ellen Schreiber said Option 2 is a good idea. The rink fails 3 to 5 times every year. Schools have to pay for rink time at other rinks. Regarding parking, she said there were lots of conversations with neighbors and those neighbors will be affected if there is no student parking available on campus. Unfortunately,



the site is small and not everything fits. The only sport that allows another option is tennis because the Winn Brook courts are very close by.

Maria Olagunju said at the time the decision was made about tennis in 2017, we weren't able to explore what the fields would look like until now. She feels we should not build a hockey rink at the expense of other sports. There are no restrooms or locker rooms at Winn Brook. She would like to see a subcommittee to examine how the fields could be developed to accommodate tennis.

Irene Son is a student on the tennis team. She said there have been problems with tennis practice and games. It's hard to do competitive tennis on four courts and it's hard to get to practice on time. Belmont has two competitive tennis teams. We need 5 fully functioning tennis courts on school grounds. She feels the four public Winn Brook courts are not ideal. Since this a plan for the next 20 years, she hopes that 5 school tennis courts can be created.

Heather Barr would love to see both tennis courts and the ice rink in the space. Close to 30 boys tried out for the tennis team and they only took 13 due to the limited court space. She asked if there was an estimated timeline for the Alexander underpass? Dash said it will get done, but he's not sure about the timeline. She said it's 1.6 miles to walk to the Winn Brook and there is no water, or bathroom. Since the multi-use field doesn't allow more than one sport to be played at one time, she feels we should be able to get a few courts into the plan. She is grateful that a working group was suggested to discuss the tennis courts. She would love to be a part of that to investigate all of the options.

Andy Osbourne said that Option 2 is a good option. It's not a matter of eliminating rink, it's about adding tennis. Why can't we put tennis on the elevated level of the parking lot for \$4M extra?

Lou Miller is a hockey and tennis parent. If we go with Option 2, we can start that building plan and then discuss how we can add tennis courts. He feels tennis courts would not slow down the rink project. It seems strange that there are JV fields on the campus yet we can't get a varsity sport on the campus. Five courts would be optimal and would allow Belmont to hold matches at the high school field.

Kathy Keohane said she thinks the overall cost of the project is high. She would like more context about why the cost is so high.

Sefton answered that the cost could be reduced once we get in there, and determine if we can use pre-engineered structures. He said that the amount estimated was a range, it was not the most expensive or least expensive.

Keohane asked what about the public-private partnership? She said the reason the first one failed was due to restrictions, maybe we could reconsider a new RFP? Dash said that has not been ruled out.

Sheryl Grace said she enjoys that people are thinking out of the box. She feels that the actual footprint could be changed. Maybe locker rooms could go on second floor? Then tennis courts and parking could be included. She has seen rinks that can be converted to tennis courts. She thinks five courts would be sufficient because boys and girls could share time.

Jenny Song likes the idea of a parent group doing a study about tennis courts. She said Belmont Hill has a skating rink that converts to a multi-purpose use in the summer. Winn Brook as the only solution for varsity tennis is unacceptable. The courts would be enjoyable for the rest of the community.

Mike French said that the hockey team has 350 kids on the teams. He encourages a sense of urgency around the building of the rink. We only have one rink. When this rink fails, it will be hard on the hockey players in Belmont. He suggested adding lights to the field in order to extend hours of use.

Jim Sullivan said it shouldn't be tennis vs. hockey, we should get one solution for everyone. There should be a subcommittee to discuss the viability of including the rink and tennis courts. He asked if the costs that were shown tonight include prepping the field? Sefton said it was the total cost.

Leslie Ann Copes-Fink wants to make sure we are not talking about one or the other, tennis or hockey. She is proposing that the School Committee creates a task force to try to get 5 courts on the campus.

Megan Moriarty said it looks like there are issues we could work on now. Maybe we could revisit the other issues at later date.

- Dash said the goal to choose a design for the rink before Town Meeting. We can talk about elevated courts later, but he is concerned about finding the extra funds for that plan.
- Checkoway said that the discussion tonight has been enlightening and she would like to follow up on some of the ideas. Dash thanked Stephen Sefton. He reminded people that the Perkins & Will slides and report are up on the town website.

*Motion was made to adjourn the School Committee. Approved by a quorum.*

#### APPROVAL OF MINUTES

April 26, 2021 – Regular Meeting (Tabled from 5/10/21)

*Motion made to approve the minutes of April 26, 2021 as amended. Motion approved by a vote of 3-0.*

Next Select Board meeting is May 17.

*Motion was made to adjourn. Motion approved by a vote of 3-0.*

Respectfully Submitted,



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PATRICE GARVIN, Town Administrator