



*Town of Belmont*  
**Belmont Middle and High School  
Building Committee**

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**BELMONT MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL PROJECT UPDATE**

**TOWN MEETING**

**June 8, 2022**

Thank you, Mr. Moderator. My name is Bill Lovallo, and I Chair the Belmont Middle and High School Building Committee. Members of the Town Meeting, I am here to give you an update on the Belmont Middle and High School Project. I am hoping this update will answer questions you may have and respond to the comments the Committee hears from interested residents in Belmont. And we should take time tonight to celebrate the great achievements that this project has made. Great achievements don't come easy and often come with challenges, and this project has had its share of challenges. **SL2**

To start off, this month we celebrate a great accomplishment, the completion of the first school year in the new High School portion of the building which opened as scheduled last fall to 1,350 students. I continue to hear great comments from students, teachers, and the public that use the building. The project is on schedule to have the Middle School portion of the building complete and occupied by next fall, for the start of the 2023/24 school year when the completed building will welcome 2,100 Belmont students in grades 7-12.

I feel when we talk about the High School being complete and that we are under construction with the Middle School, we may be misleading some folks. **SL3** The project is one school in one building, not two schools in two buildings. And it has a name that represents the inclusion of grade 7-12 students under one roof, called the Belmont Middle and High School. While Middle School students have their own entrance, and their own core classrooms, they share space with the entire school for various activities such as music, lunch, physical education, theater, and art. There is no wall between the Middle and High School portions of the building. I am hopeful that next year you can attend the open house tours that will demonstrate the success of this 7-12 project.

We will complete this project next year and that is reason to celebrate. I hear some people questioning if the project will ever be finished given it has gone on for so long. Yes, it is taking a long time however this duration was what we expected and how the Committee presented this project for the debt exclusion in 2018, and how we advertised and bought this job. **SL4** This slide is the same construction timeline slide I have been presenting to Town Meeting since 2019. As planned, the Building Committee completed the design after the vote in 2018 and started construction in 2019 so that the building could be completed in two phases by 2023. Nothing has changed on that schedule and that is certainly reason to celebrate.

One big change to our project and to all our lives was COVID and we continue to feel the impact from that. Fortunately, we solicited bids for most of the project's scope prior to 2020 and that scope is protected from subcontractor pricing changes. So when the Committee talks about COVID cost impacts, it is not from what was bid prior to 2020 but what occurred after 2020.

Post 2020, there are three primary categories of changes that were impacted by COVID. First, our project chose to use an accelerated bid process to allow construction to begin sooner, which significantly reduced the cost of the project, but also resulted in some design coordination adjustments. Second, our project has a renovation component, the Field House, and there were several unforeseen issues discovered when we opened up the Field House walls. Finally, our largest challenge throughout the entire project has been the very poor soils on the site and the challenges working with these clay soils, particularly following a very wet summer last year. These three categories of post 2020 expenses were significantly impacted by COVID.

The other COVID project impact was supply chain issues and delivery delays. Our project team worked hard managing those disruptions however the delays in getting product to the site, coupled with changes previously mentioned, threatened to delay the Phase 1 opening of the project. Early last year the Committee worked through scenarios of delaying the opening or accelerating the work with overtime effort. While the acceleration effort showed a cost well over a million dollars, it was a far less expensive option than a project delay by well over a million dollars. Therefore, the Committee accelerated the Project to complete Phase 1 on time. **SL5**

So when you ask why are we paying for the contractors to accelerate the work if they own it, I say good question. I can assure you that Belmont did not pay for this work twice. Our premium costs were the differences between straight time and overtime. Some of the premium time was absorbed by the subcontractors when it was work they were obligated to complete in the base bid, but far more was paid by Belmont to avoid a project delay.

We are asked what COVID is costing this project. The project team spent time evaluating that question last year and estimated the COVID impact cost to be \$4.5 million. The Committee asked the Select Board and received federal COVID relieve funds totaling \$1.3 million but the balance is an impact we must absorb in our total project budget.

We hear folks asking, then isn't our project going to cost more than expected? The Committee addresses that question every month when we hold our business meeting. And I recognize that this can be hard for many Belmont citizens to understand if you recently participated in a meeting, or even if you have been participating for months. What I can confirm is that the project will not exceed the \$295 million debt exclusion budget approved by Town Meeting in 2018. Let me explain how we prepared the budget, how we are tracking costs, and how we are ensuring that this project will remain on budget. **SL6**

This project, like all other building projects, carries an Owner Construction Contingency. Commonly that is in the range of 10 percent of anticipated construction cost. For this project that would be a value of \$24 million and the Committee thought that to be high. The Committee approved an Owner Construction Contingency of \$14.2 million before the debt exclusion, reducing the overall cost of the project by \$10 million before it was put in front of Belmont for approval. You may ask why would we do that, and I can say for two main reasons. One was the expectation that we could work within the \$14.2 million which appeared to be a large number at the time, the other was that the Committee wanted to reduce the burden to taxpayers and save Belmont \$10 million before we even finalized the budget. The thought was that if we had that additional money in contingency, it likely would be spent. On one hand the Committee reduced the proposed burden to the taxpayers which is reason to be pleased, on the other hand it created

more challenges for the Committee to stay within budget, particularly with the unanticipated cost impacts such as COVID. **SL7**

To dig a bit deeper into the Project budget, the \$295 million budget carried an Owner Construction Contingency of \$14.2 million. It carried other line-item contingencies, none of which were that significant. Through all the project cost events, the Committee saw that \$14.2 million getting smaller and at the end of last year, focused on predicting all future costs through the end of the project and evaluating the impact to the project budget. This proactive approach showed the project exceeding our \$295 million budget by several million dollars. So the Committee took action immediately.

All options for cost reduction were put on a list. These included items that were not fully purchased, or not complete in construction. Those not complete in construction were yielding low return values because they were already under contract, some if not all material was already purchased, and deleting scope required further changes to the project that often times meant having something new added in its place, and that didn't yield good savings. **SL8**

The big value savings could come from three items that were not purchased or hadn't gotten underway; sitework, PV on the roof, and eliminating all work west of Harris Field. We did make changes to sitework that resulted in some good savings, but not significant enough to close our cost gap. Let me assure Belmont that the temporary parking lot at the bottom of Goden Street is temporary and going away next year. This was always the case and did not change.

But let me stop here and thank the School Committee for voting last night to name the new varsity baseball field the Brendan Grant Memorial Field, certainly

reason to celebrate. This field did not change when we adjusted the sitework. We look forward to finishing that field as well as the other fields east of the new school next year.

Also let me reinforce that the Committee did not make scope reductions in the rooftop PV. It was on the list because it was not purchased, but it did not get cut. So that meant focusing on scope reductions west of Harris Field to build back our contingency.

The intended scope of work west of Harris Field consists of taking the two fields, one softball and one soccer, and changing that into three fields, one softball, one baseball, and one soccer, all overlapping. It also included a large parking lot for student parking overflow. All of that was based on the hockey rink staying where it is. That was the plan in 2018 that was presented to the Belmont voters and Town Meeting.

In 2022 I can tell you we still don't know for sure what the plan is west of Harris Field for our ice rink. Based on all good intentions several years ago, Belmont embarked on a public/private partnership to construct a new rink. Recognizing in 2019 that this area was in flux, the Committee pulled that scope from the bid documents and put it on hold reserving the \$2.3 million that was estimated for that cost in 2018. The Public/Private partnership didn't succeed so the School Committee then focused on identifying a configuration on site that would work for the rink while maximizing the playing field options. The Building Committee took that information last year and prepared a field design and priced it in 2022 dollars and the price was \$2 million over our budget. Concurrently the Town embarked on another ice rink feasibility study that has playing field impact.

The Building Committee had to make a hard decision, but I know it was the right one. The plan for this project was to construct these fields this year. This Committee is one year from finishing construction on this project and further prolonged delays in bidding and constructing these fields will result in further extended project costs we cannot afford. With insufficient funds to construct playing fields west of Harris Field in today's dollars, and with mounting costs fueled by COVID impacts, and without a clear disposition of the fields and future ice rink, and with a timeline running out, and not wanting to modify the PV scope, the Committee considered eliminating the scope west of Harris Field to resolve the budget issue.

The Committee reached out to the School Department to see if they could work with the two fields currently in place rather than the three fields as planned, resulting in a net loss of one junior varsity baseball field on campus. The School Department confirmed that there is sufficient field space in Belmont to make up the loss of one baseball field on campus. The Committee also recognized that student parking needs have decreased this year and could be managed without need for a large student parking lot west of Harris Field. This is a fantastic shift in student habits where we witnessed more students bicycling to school and less driving themselves in cars this year. That information led to a final decision by the Committee earlier this year to remove all scope west of Harris Field from the project. **SL9**

There are playing fields today west of Harris Field that are continually used, and the net loss of one field may be a short-term issue. If an ice rink project is successful, then sometime in the future the disposition of the fields can be addressed.

Let me be clear, with west of Harris Field removed, we have more than \$3 million unspent from our budget however, our predictions as we move through the final year of construction is that we will see that number drop to less than \$1 million. But with the work of the Committee making hard decisions, we will complete the project with some money remaining. We will not be over the Town Meeting budget.

Will we have spent more than \$295 million at the end of the project? The answer is yes by the Committee's predictions. However, that excess over the Town Meeting approval of \$295 million is being offset by the federal relief funds from COVID relief bills, and not by taxpayer burden.

Yet there is another factor that impacts the taxpayer burden and that is the MSBA State grant. MSBA is the Massachusetts School Building Authority who is our partner in this project. When we were provided the Project Funding Agreement language by MSBA in the summer of 2018, it was clearly noted that the maximum value of the grant to Belmont will be \$80.6 million. **SL10** I presented this slide to Town Meeting in 2018 describing the financial picture. The inference was that the taxpayer burden would be the difference of the net project costs and the State Grant, or the \$212.8 million shown on the bottom line. But that tax burden value is based on if we spend all the budget and get all the State Grant. I am certain of three things now, we won't spend all the budget, and we won't get all the State Grant, and that this final taxpayer number is not final until we are complete with the project.

As mentioned earlier we are predicting that some money, less than \$1 million will remain when we are complete with the project and reconciled with the State in 2024. Last year we received notice from MSBA that the maximum value of the grant to Belmont is being reduced by \$1.2 million, mainly due to the



bids received in 2020 for construction that resulted in values for the eligible and ineligible costs for reimbursement being confirmed compared to those estimated in 2018 from which the Grant was derived. This adjustment and those values are clearly identified in our Project Funding Agreement and, following a very thorough review, we can confirm that MSBA is correct in lowering the grant by about 1.5 percent. Will another reduction happen again, we hope not, but we will not know until final reconciliation in 2024 with the State. Our team is well versed in eligible and ineligible costs and continually looks to leverage costs in different categories to maximize the grant to Belmont with the hope that we stay at this new grant value.

One ineligible cost item is the PV system on the roof. It was clear from the outset that MSBA does not fund PV and we didn't object because part of the funding rules from the State is if Belmont receives anything in the form of other grants, credits, or funds for this project, the MSBA may reduce the maximum grant value proportionally. We knew that we would be installing PV and that we would be submitting for credits back for this renewable energy source. So anything we do with PV for this project is exempt from State Grant reductions and we are very pleased with that.

When I refer to PV, I am referring to the photovoltaic system that will be installed on this roof. The intent of the Committee, and with full support of the Belmont Community, was to maximize coverage of the new flat roof with a flat PV panel ballasted system. **SL11** This photo is the photo we keep showing for the PV system and it hasn't change, with all that blue on the roof being the PV panels. Because, second to constructing this building to serve grades 7-12 teaching and learning, energy efficiency and ZNE goals were a big focus of this Committee and the Belmont Community. Throughout multiple VE efforts, PV never waivered from staying part of the

project. Some of you may think it did, but I can say it never was going to be removed.

PV was not designed or bid earlier in the project strategically to ensure we were getting the best value for this part of the project because it could not be installed until the Phase 2 roof is complete. Our goal was to get the best technology and the best price just before it was to be installed. Later this year the Phase 2 roof will be complete and so earlier this year the Committee retained a design consultant to design the PV system to maximize the coverage of the new flat roof. The solution consists of over 2,300 individual panels with a combined rating of 1.1 MW and capable of producing 1.3 MWh/yr. This system is expected to harvest renewable energy that will serve 1/3 of the annual electrical needs of the building. And remember, there are no other fuel sources in this building, no gas to cook with, no oil to heat with.

You may hear comments where the electrical demands for the building are high, but they will be higher than the old High School because this is a larger school and because electricity is the only fuel source for the building. I remind you that this building was designed to be very energy efficient, based on factors such as optimum solar orientation, low glazing ratio, sun shading, high performance building envelope, efficient MEP systems, and geothermal wells. But think about this, once the PV system is up and running, and with our ability to offset the balance of our electrical energy needs with renewable energy, and by selling renewable energy credits, we will be saving over \$100,000 per year. **SL12**

But the real celebration is that Belmont can realize this project's energy goal of achieving a ZNE certification. This project is designed to achieve ZNE-

Class D, a request of the Belmont Community for this project that goes back to 2016.

And people continue to ask how we will fund this PV system if our budget is so tight with costs. Great question. But I can assure you that we have reserved in our budget \$2.6 million since 2018 and that money remains in our budget today to fund the installation of PV. Our experts say that this value is sufficient to cover the cost of this design. So later this month the Committee will meet to vote on sending this PV design package out to bidding and construction. The plan is to award the package to a subcontractor this fall with installation planned for next year.

Earlier this year the Building Committee reaffirmed our commitment to installing PV on the roof with a unanimous vote. Earlier this week, you, Town Meeting Members, gave the Committee a resounding vote of support, advising that you approve and expect to see the PV system on this building's new roof, with a goal of saving money, achieving ZNE, and improving conditions on our planet for future generations. That is a celebration of Committee and Community working together.

I continue to say that it will take a Community to get this project over the ZNE finish line. The Building Committee for implementing the design components; the School Department for establishing a program to achieve ZNE; the building occupants, administration, teachers, students, and community users, for being aware of energy usage and striving to change habits to more energy-conscious behavior; and the Belmont Community for continuing to foster awareness as a regional leader in energy change and advocating, like you did Monday night, for choices necessary to achieve project ZNE. **SL13**

The success of this Belmont Middle and High School Project could not be possible if it were not for the dedication and tremendous effort put in by the Belmont Middle and High School Building Committee. I say this often, they make my job as Chair very easy. Mr. Moderator, I thank you for assembling a talented and focused Committee. The Building Committee has worked through the High School and Middle School design issues, budget issues, schedule issues, COVID issues, PV issues, and site issues. This Project is not immune to issues, for sure. We owe the members of this Committee a great deal of thanks.

What is equally impressive and worthy of celebrating is that Community engagement has not stopped. We have been together at this for over six years now, and more and more people join us during our public meetings, wanting to learn more, and wanting to contribute. I am asked to provide more explanations, provide more information, and spend more time talking about certain issues. I suspect this is due to people becoming more interested in the project and wanting to do more. I am challenged with balancing public meeting time to conduct business, with finding time to educate and explain. And since this project is rooted in teaching and learning, I say this, reach out to the Committee with your questions, opinions, and comments, and we will respond. If you can't join our Building Committee meetings, there is a link on the Building Committee webpage for comments, and if you are looking for information, sending that email will get a response.

We celebrate and thank you, the Belmont Community. Early meetings in 2016 brought out interested groups, and the Belmont Community provided input because this Community wanted to make the Project great for Belmont. In

2018 the vote of support for this project was overwhelming indicating that this Community is committed to investing in our future, particularly the future involving our children. When you walk into this new building, you experience this overwhelming feeling of pride that this project has made Belmont better. The Project is a success because as a community, we are doing this together and the Building Committee thanks you for being involved.

Mr. Moderator, thank you for this time tonight to allow me to speak about the Belmont Middle and High School Project and Members of Town Meeting thank you for listening. We celebrate that together, we are making Belmont better.