

5/10/23 Community Advisory Meeting Notes

Present:

David Cantor, Montclair Public Schools

Priscilla Church, Montclair Board of Education, Past Vice-President

David Cummings, Town Council, 4th Ward

Brian Fleischer, Montclair Board of Education; Facilities & Finance Committee

Cathy Kondreck, MEA President

Daniel Marcketta, MEA Incoming President

Obie Miranda-Woodley, Nishuane PTA

Jason Santarcangelo, SEPAC

Eric Scherzer, Montclair Board of Education; Facilities & Finance Committee Chair

Ivy Sheibar, Montclair Climate Action

Tessie Thomas, PTAC President

Brian Meade, Legacy Construction Management

Conor O'Brien, Legacy Construction Management

Will Ross, Parette Somjen Architects

These are notes of the conversation that followed Legacy's PowerPoint presentation:

David Cantor asked **Brian Meade** to provide background about Legacy to familiarize the group with their work.

BM explained that he founded and was 50 percent owner of Legacy, along with Keith Thompson [not present]. He and Thompson started working together in 1996 for another construction management firm before starting Legacy in 2011. He said Legacy serves as "owner's reps" serving school districts and other public entities. He explained that the majority of the firm's work is in "occupied school buildings," and he described the type of work necessary in Montclair schools as "in our wheelhouse."

He identified **Conor O'Brien** as a project executive at Legacy who oversees on-site project managers and takes the lead for Legacy in communicating with the administration.

DC noted that the project schedule was "huge" and couldn't be fully addressed at the meeting. He put a dedicated email address [MPSbudgetquestions@montclair.k12.nj.us] in the Zoom chat for people to submit comments to and said he would respond as he received them.

DC said he would bring suggestions raised by the group to the superintendent, who would then meet with Legacy about possible revisions. He also said he would create a page on the District website that would include FAQs and other materials, and that there would be regular email updates.

Obie Miranda-Woodley asked if Legacy was aware that schools in Montclair’s South End have historically been neglected; she said that was probably why they need the most work. She wondered if repairs at these schools could be prioritized – as a “way to right this wrong.”

David Cummings clarified that Glenfield and Hillside are not in the South End – only Nishuane is — but said those three schools seem to be the last ones getting repairs in the plan.

BM said Legacy had not been made aware of the historical circumstances involving these schools. He said he would go back and review the schedule with this circumstance in mind and get feedback about possible adjustments from the administration.

Priscilla Church said that when she worked on the plan the situation with schools in the South End was “a big issue.” She asked what the plan’s reference to “storefront replacements” at Glenfield referred to. **Will Ross** said it referred to glazing on the glass in the building that consistently leaks.

PC continued, saying the plan didn’t reflect the way the district promoted it. She suggested the District had previously emphasized the age and neglect of the Glenfield building. She recalled that the District had asked the old Board of School Estimate for \$15.5M to improve school air quality during the COVID pandemic, and said air quality remained the community’s top priority as the plan was formulated. The District had promoted the upgrade of HVAC systems as the bond’s top priority, she said, but in the current plan some of these repairs wouldn’t be addressed for three or four years — which she suggested would be “problematic” for those in the community who supported the bond. She said these repairs should be the first priority.

PC also asked if there was any consideration of meeting with school PTAs ahead of playground upgrades. She noted that there was pushback during the Watchung playground repairs due to what people felt was insufficient opportunity for community input. She recommended holding building-based presentations and providing opportunities for feedback around each playground upgrade.

PC also said she was “extremely disappointed” that renovations of the auto shop (and other trade shops?) at Montclair High School weren’t scheduled for several years. She felt the delay undercut the superintendent’s commitment to provide career pathways for students.

BM emphasized that the plan was Legacy’s first attempt to create a sequence for the construction projects and the firm could make adjustments in response to the feedback at this meeting.

Jason Santarcangelo said the plan wasn’t what community leaders had sold to their constituencies based on the District’s representations. He criticized the plan for not providing “resources for teachers to teach” more quickly, cited a lack of conversation about adaptive playgrounds, and noted that it had been three months since the group last met. He said it felt

like planning had happened “in a vacuum.” He argued that more designers should be hired if that’s what was needed to expedite upgrades while also prioritizing student safety.

JS also noted that the football field, where construction had already started, affected 100 students but that there are more than 6,000 students in the district.

Cummings said that breaking into walls to install new HVAC systems would expose asbestos. He asked whether it might be smart to move up HVAC installation in order to get any asbestos abatement completed early.

Cummings also suggested that Legacy should connect with the Department of Community Services and relevant township officials, including the police and fire departments, in order to keep the township aware of how it could, or needs to, help with the plan.

Cummings also asked if Legacy would provide a record of its work in other districts. He reiterated what he called a “perception issue” — the sense that the schools that serve the largest numbers of economically disadvantaged students — Nishuane, Glenfield, and Hillside — have been neglected. He said the plan could prioritize repairs there based on the [poor] shape of those buildings, and that new HVAC systems should be the priority.

Cummings also said he didn’t believe playgrounds needed to be repaired immediately and asked why replacing the seats in the MHS auditorium couldn’t be done right away. He also asked if the project schedule could be made bigger — i.e., physically easier to read.

Cathy Kondreck noted that in the plan repairs to the administration building would be worked on last and pointed out that the building is adjacent to the building housing pre-K. She said that while the administration building isn’t an educational space, the pre-K building is an educational space, and the building needs many repairs (she mentioned leaks, roofing, stairwells) that should be addressed sooner than indicated in the current plan. She also described auditoriums as educational spaces.

CK asked what “swing spaces” at Nishuane were.

BM explained that if a classroom had to be emptied in order for work to be performed, Legacy needed to know from the administration if there were rooms available for students to be moved into while the work took place. When the work was completed, students would return to their renovated classroom and another group of students in a classroom still needing repairs would be rotated into the free space.

BM explained that repairing the stairs at the pre-K building was one of the first projects in the plan, as were roof repairs at both the pre-K building and CO. He indicated that the schedule reflected the fact that the administration had shared concerns about these issues.

Eric Scherzer clarified that the board's Facilities & Finance Committee raised concerns about the scheduling of repairs at Nishuane, Hillside, and Glenfield when it saw the plan draft a few weeks earlier.

ES noted that he and others had promised to meet with SEPAC (the Special Education Parent Advisory Council) for its input but that the meeting hadn't happened yet because, he was told, the superintendent wanted to get SEPAC's feedback about the plan before meeting. Scherzer said he was glad that Jason [a SEPAC leader] had the chance to voice the group's concerns in this meeting — concerns that were similar to those of the F&F Committee, he said — and that hopefully revisions would be made in response.

ES said if more design engineers were needed, the District needed to figure out how to provide them. He said people understand there are supply chain delays, but no one understands why we don't start on shorter projects as early as possible — this was an issue raised by the F&F committee.

ES also asked that this group meet more often and said the planning process needed to be more transparent.

Ivy Sheibar asked for clarification — given that “half” of the plan's budget is allocated for HVAC upgrades — as to who in the process is best versed in Inflation Reduction Act incentives and other incentives available for schools making energy efficiency upgrades. She said there was potentially a lot of funding available, especially in the next few years.

WR said PSA [Parette Somjen Architects, the district's architectural firm] will take lead on the design of individual systems and will investigate grants available to reduce costs. He said PSA doesn't apply for grants directly but will advise the relevant groups in the process about which grants to pursue.

PC said she senses “a little sea-change” from the way the F&F Committee worked closely with PSA in designing the work in the bond referendum. She commended the effort that went into creating the construction plan but wondered — based on comments during the meeting — if PSA, Legacy, the District and the District's committee of expert builders were working as closely together as they needed to be.

DC said he sensed from several remarks that this group's members felt the construction plan didn't fully capture the “tenor” of the time period when the referendum was being designed. He acknowledged that this must be frustrating but said it also spoke to why the community group needed to meet. He said he believed there was an appetite in the administration to be responsive to the group's feedback.

Tessie Thomas said part of the group's frustration was that there had been a three-month wait since the last meeting. She said the district should set regularly scheduled updates/meetings that can be put on members' calendars.

DC said he foresaw scheduling regular monthly meetings but with biweekly project updates.