

Town Meeting

12-3-14

TOWN MEETING

12/3/14

Precursors

- SAB - none
- Staff Meeting: Teacher of the Year, Interims & Advisories, Allocation '15-'16 calendar, Program of Studies revisions, Holiday Party, Student assignments over vacation breaks.

Announcements

- Eleanor announced the annual yearbook cover contest, with entries due next Friday (12/12). This year's theme is "the dictionary of H-B," and entries should include the cover, spine and back.

Consent Items

- Middle School group presented a proposal for a mural, but the chair ruled this should be a motion, so . . .

Motions

- Motion to put a Middle School Mural in the corridor leading to the music rooms by stairwell C. The theme will be guidance from the stars and will be done in coordination with the Hirshhorn Gallery, with contributions from all middle school art students. Someone asked if any existing art would be painted over and the answer was no. Motion passed unanimously.

Discussions

- CIP and tonight's public comment school board meeting
 - o Frank opened the discussion with a brief recap of the past 11 months and a reminder of the superintendent's official recommendation (SWE3) to move us with all programs intact, a 10% increase in enrollment, and a new preschool, to a new building on the Wilson site. Tonight will be the last opportunity for public comment prior to the School Board's decision on December 18. The School Board is currently a 4-member board, with the newly elected member, Barbara Kanninen, to join them in January. (Meaning that a 2-2 decision would result in a postponement until then.)
 - {at this point the chair announced that a physical speakers' line would form instead of the usual speakers' list}
 - o Adam (6th) said the move would open us up to new opportunities such as walking field trips across the Key Bridge and urged us not to approach this negatively.
 - o Niles (6th) spoke about how great it would be to go to school right next to a 7/11 and other fun places.
 - o Neal (6th) talked about how important the writing on the walls was and said it wouldn't be the same in digitalized form. But he said that the change could still be good.
 - o John (?) said that it was important that students give their opinions more than parents.
 - o Bill V.E. said he supported HB being part of the solution but was still concerned about the 10% increase. He remembered that in his early years here (1995-2000) there were only 69 kids per middle school class and that we have therefore already grown by 10%. PAC representative Kristen Colston reminded that ALL the current proposals include a 10% increase in HB's population, as did earlier ones that included us staying here. Growing after moving will allow for sufficient space and the hope for the School Board to implement the increases gradually.
 - o Luke (11th) questioned the exact size of the new building. Kristen answered: 2.5 acres.
 - o Amanda (12th) suggested that we decide upon a unified stance to present at tonight's meeting and questioned whether the increase in size should still be argued, given its appearance of inevitability.
 - o Dave Soles spoke as an alumni as well as a teacher and said no one should count on fun things like a 7/11 being nearby, saying that having to walk somewhere was part of the social experience of HB. He thinks it is imperative to continue fighting against the population increase and points out that the entire size of the new

building will be the size of our current lower lot. He says that the board is still primarily concerned about construction sights, so we should fight for option SWE2 (775 seats rather than 900). He pointed out that vocal opposition over the years to proposed increases to HB has been successful.

- o Amir (6th) said he was glad there were more middle schoolers present than high schoolers because it was more important for them. He is afraid of an increase in size because he believes that the more people there are, the less they can be treated as individuals.
 - o Liz Waters agreed that size matters very much and that the Arlington community is wrong to see us as elitist because of our insistence on small size. Size influences so much more than is evident in official policy: students often have teachers more than once during their time at HB and this is part of what makes the community stronger. An additional section for each of the middle school teachers would likely prevent them from teaching high school sections and would eliminate that continuity.
 - o Josue's (6th) brother is in 10th grade and his sister graduated last year, and he wants to experience the same things they got to.
 - o Adam (6th) said we can't stand in the way of change, but we can affect what that change will mean and said that many essential things won't change.
 - o Lizzie (12th) reminded that the entire Arlington school population is increasing and that no one is happy about it. She questioned whether HB population increases would be across the board, and Kristen answered that both the HILT and Stratford programs would most likely increase and that it's possible that Stratford might someday grow large enough to displace the proposed preschool.
 - o Bill P. said how optimistic/excited the huge turnout made him, particularly from the 6th grade, but he wanted to remind the HB community that the need for quality artistic space was equally important as the need for Frisbee space. He, too, spoke about the population increase as a burden for all of Arlington to bear and that we might have to accept our own discomfort in sharing that burden. He believes it is important, however, not to present a splintered front at the meeting. The possibility for a 1300 seat building at Wilson (rather than 900) is still viable, and we don't want to shoot ourselves in the foot.
 - o Amelia (10th) asked whether renovations to this building will begin while we're still here. Kristen answered yes but that the extent of the renovations was dependent on the projected population of the new "Stratford" school (still undetermined), and that the hope is that much of it can be done during summers.
 - o Aman (7th) questioned what exactly will happen to this building. Answer: it will be a neighborhood middle school (seat number still undecided).
 - o Evan (11th) said he could see positive aspects to a new building such as improved performing art space, but he said that traffic in Rosslyn is already bad and that buses will only make it worse. Kristen answered that studies had shown that there was actually more traffic around neighborhood schools than choice schools and that the county was confident that disruption could be kept minimal.
 - o Someone again questioned the painted walls, and Kristen repeated that preliminary plans included digitally copying them.
- {Frank made a point of info reminding that a building level planning committee would handle these types of issues, and that the current discussion had to concern building size, location, green space and co-housed programs.}
- o Ben (11th) said we should make sure the new building has a well-designed auditorium and a bigger and better library that would allow for large meetings such as today's town meeting. He then questioned the timing of renovations and building. Answer: renovations here and building at new site would begin in 2017, with an expected completion date of 9/19.
 - o Ellie (12th) spoke passionately (!) about the current traffic on Rt. 50 in the morning and envisioned frequent late arrivals for those forced to travel on it to reach the new HB.
 - o Rebekka (7th) asked if it might not be a better idea to move other schools.
 - o Julian (alum) said the appeal of HB had always been its size, not its location. He doesn't think we should fight the board on the proposed 10% increase, though, but rather try to get it implemented gradually.
 - o Brad (12th) said that the current HB population is not racially representative of the greater Arlington community, and that we should be eager to try to increase its appeal and accessibility to others.
 - o Carl H. said that his wife graduated from a 4000 person high school and that we should remember that a 10% increase, while not favorable, would not be impossible. An increase to 1300 would definitely be impossible for HB.
 - o Amanda (12th) questioned whether further increases would be imposed after move. Answer: almost impossible, given space limitations.

o Dave Soles spoke again about the need to remain small. He wants the school board to recognize that we will already be sacrificing enough. He sees the recent small participation in the Turkey Bowl and the Halloween haunted house as indicative of a less-than-unified community, perhaps due to the already too large classes. He foresees growth leading to increased fracturing of unity and a deteriorating sense of community. We need to remember that the school board members are our elected officials and are answerable to us. Can we use our negotiating skills to get them to work for us? How about starting the building renovations here in the gym so that the current students can benefit from them?

o Josue said it's important that we stay small so that teachers can remember kids the way Jeff (F) remembers his sister.

o Eleanor insisted that everyone who attends tonight should speak his or her own truth but asked that we try to speak positively and not accusingly. People who don't know us or our program don't care about the painting on our walls. We need to see the move as opening possibilities: a different shape might make the additional population easier to bear. She says that in our current building she never gets to see her close friends who are only two floors away but hopes that a differently shaped building would change that.

o Emma (12th) said that the size increase would allow more students to experience the greatness of HB and might make it more representative of the community. She said to continue to complain about size would increase the overall negative perception of HB by others.

o Nathaniel (9th) said that keeping HB small was important, but that some growth would be okay if the infrastructure allowed for it through large meeting spaces, etc. The history in this building (walls, etc.) are important, but new history will be made in the new building.

o Casey asked that we remember we are (most likely) being moved onto a 2.5 acre lot and therefore, the smallest possible population (i.e. 775) is far better than a larger one. She likes little kids but doesn't see how allowing for the limited amount of outdoor space being used for pre-k play space, special drop-offs, etc., can possibly benefit us. A smaller student population allows teachers and administrators to know the kids so much better, and a token decrease of approximately 1-2 kids from each of the other middle schools in order to increase our size wouldn't really help the county-wide over-crowding issue. We should be recognized for the sacrifice involved in moving, and that should be enough.

o Margaret (12th) at this point proposed a motion to present a unified position of some form at tonight's meeting. This became:

A MOTION for Town Meeting as a whole to endorse the SWE plans, with a friendly amendment added by Eleanor that Town Meeting as a body supports the SWE plan, knowing that there are differences in opinion over which of the SWE plans is best. **The motion passed** and the ongoing discussion continued:

o Lizzie (12th) questioned the surrounding physical space in Rosslyn. Kristen answered that the board envisions shifts in adjacent properties. Lizzie added that we need to remember that ALL schools in Arlington are currently larger than they want to be.

o Tom M. said that he was skeptical that green space in Rosslyn would actually materialize and he doesn't really foresee great cooperation from the county. He said that size is the key issue and that School Board members do not and never will truly understand its importance. We are not competing for space as much as we are competing for program. Allocations may increase, but HE will not, and neither will Bill or Diana or Carl or Risa, and yet their programs will increase. When is too much too much? Recent responses to auditions have been so large that everything becomes harder. Kids will be competing for time and attention and non-competitive situations could quickly become competitive due to high numbers. His question: Will the PAC support us in our attempt to NOT grow?

o Kristen answered that outside HB we are not liked and that their overall goal had been to avoid the WE option (a much larger increase).

o Tom responded that all he is really hearing is "Let's be less offensive." We need to take a stand for our belief that our small size is EDUCATIONALLY RESPONSIBLE.

o Kristen reminded that we will continue to need allies once final decisions are made.

o Tom proposed a **Motion** saying that Town Meeting supported SWE1 as the only ethical decision.

o Margaret (12th) commented that SWE2 was the more likely decision.

o Dave Soles proposed a **substitute motion** to vote on proposals SWE1, 2 and 3 and Eleanor added that the data be made public at tonight's meeting. Tom accepted the substitution/amendment.

o Amanda (12th) read and explained (WONDERFULLY!) the three options, and Sally Moss clarified that the difference between 1 and 2 was the amount of construction that would take place while we were still in this building.

Motion made and approved to vote on Tom's motion by physically moving to different parts of the library.

{all moved to specified location and the SWE2 motion was chosen by a huge majority: SWE1 = 24% or

37/149, SWE2 = 71% or 106/149, and SWE3 = 0.13% or 2/149 with 4 abstentions}

- o Meghan French questioned what would happen next. How will we as a community deal with these decisions and how much of a voice will we have?
- o Casey answered that she truly believes we will have a voice. After the holiday break, the Building Level Planning Committee will be formed. It will be the first in the county to have student representatives and HB will have a strong showing on the committee. The PAC will get parent input and department chairs will get staff suggestions.
- o Meghan reiterated that a 10% growth would be felt differently here than it would be elsewhere and we have to make sure the board understands that. Our allocation process is different and teacher responsibilities are different.
- o A student asked if it even mattered whether we truly oppose the size increase since all options included it.
- o Casey answered that it does matter, and we still have the right to request it. She said she believed that Abby Raphael's feelings on the matter had changed after hearing many HB supporters speak about the importance of size.
- o Zoe (12th) said we should continue to fight for as small a size increase as possible and as little disruption (construction) as possible.

Dave made a point of order that Liz would be available during H Block in the teachers' cafeteria to help students prepare to speak tonight. Kristen reminded that students usually get to speak first in the meeting and that ALL speakers are cut off after 2 minutes.

· Amir put forth a **motion** to allow 6th and 7th graders off campus privileges but a counter motion to table the idea was quickly made and passed.

Chair: Erin Lammie

Co-Chair: Bennett Weinschenk

Secretary: Amanda Hayes