



**Town of West Newbury  
Select Board  
Monday, November 13, 2023 @ 6:00pm  
381 Main Street, Town Office Building  
[www.wnewbury.org](http://www.wnewbury.org)  
**AGENDA****

**Open Session:** Chairwoman Reed opened the Session at 6:00pm.

**Participation at the Meeting:**

Rick Parker, Wendy Reed, Chris Wile- Select Board  
Angus Jennings- Town Manager  
Jim Blatchford- Town Clerk  
Rob Phillips, Jim Sperelakis- Finance Committee representatives  
Maureen Lynch- WRTVHS Superintendent  
Kara Kosmes- WRVTHS Business Manager  
Robert Hardy- WRVTHS Facilities Director  
Kevin Bowe, Christopher Linck, others- residents

**Announcements**

- **This meeting is being broadcast on local cable TV and recorded for rebroadcast on the local cable channels and on the internet. Meeting also accessible by remote participation; instructions below.**
- **Project fair/forum re MBTA Communities initiative – Wednesday, Nov. 15<sup>th</sup> 5:30-8pm**
- **Annual Tree Lighting Thursday, November 30<sup>th</sup> at 6:30pm on the Training Field**
- **SAGE Center will be hosting the Page School Musical Performance and Luncheon Dec 7<sup>th</sup> at 11:30 in the Annex**
- **Call for volunteers! FY24 positions on Boards/Commissions/Committees. See [www.wnewbury.org/volunteer](http://www.wnewbury.org/volunteer)**
- **Reminder to subscribe for emailed Town agendas/news/announcements at [www.wnewbury.org/subscribe](http://www.wnewbury.org/subscribe)**

**Regular Business**

**A. Proposed Whittier Technical High School Building Project: Superintendent Maureen Lynch**

Whittier Tech. opened the presentation with an informational video about the building, which Lynch said was on their website. Lynch and her colleagues highlighted shortcomings of the present building to the Board as well as attendance numbers in day, night, and spring programs, as well as aspects of the Whittier curriculum. The cost to the School District, per Lynch, is \$364,000,000 for a renovation, or \$264,000,000 for a rebuild. West Newbury would be responsible for \$15,882,508 of the new building cost. The Superintendent offered a look at the building project timeline, beginning in 2014. Lynch showed off some renderings of the proposed interior and exterior of the new building. The District-wide vote on building funding would take place on January 23, 2024, but if the vote failed, the Superintendent outlined immediate and long term renovations needed to keep the school compliant/repairable.

Parker opened the Select Board Q&A by noting how the cost of a new school was spread out over 30 years, but renovation costs were spread out over a much shorter period (a decade) meaning the impact of the renovation would be very intense in the 10 year period. Wile asked about how interest rates would impact the amount the District's communities would pay. Wile asked about the way cost per community was calculated, highlighting the wide difference between Salisbury and Georgetown as an example. Kosmes explained it had to do with the split between residential and commercial taxpayers in each Town and City (if commercial properties were paying in, it would mean less coming directly out of the taxpayer's pockets). Wile suggested looking at leveling out the payment formula to make it more equitable, and to ensure passage of the building project. Discussion then turned to the cost per square foot of assorted technical high schools versus Whittier's, and the cost of the proposed designs the Whittier team picked from.

Reed asked about what options Whittier had explored regarding their failing sewage treatment plant: had the school considered tying into neighboring communities? Lynch said that tying in would not be feasible. Reed followed up by asking why the School District had chosen to do a District-wide vote versus a Town Meeting-based election. Lynch said that passage of a new school could be scuttled by just one Town Meeting voting the project down, versus a simple majority vote in a District-wide ballot.

Parker spoke to the need for HVAC tradesmen in response to adapting for climate change, and was curious if the new building would allow for greater flexibility in accommodating additional or growing programs at Whittier. Lynch said that this had been considered as part of the process. She and Reed discussed how the admissions process worked at the school, and what the West Newbury population of the school was.

Rob Phillips asked for clarity on some of the numbers he discovered in the Whittier materials. He followed up asking about when Whittier had requested its School District members set up a Stabilization Fund for a future funding (Lynch said 2016, but no official dollar figures were attached to the project at the time of this request).

Nathan Kelly, West Newbury resident and Whittier teacher, spoke up in support of rebuilding the building. He spoke to his experience being on the West Newbury Finance Committee during the process of funding the Pentucket rebuild, and offered his rationale for the Committee's support at the time for the new Pentucket Regional Middle High School which he felt was the exact same logic to support a new Whittier Tech. High School.

Jim Sperelakis asked Lynch about the disruptions to students with the building project underway, assuming, correctly, that students would stay in the old building until the new structure was ready.

Kevin Bowe said he was "disturbed" that Lynch went over the one page in the presentation with financials in 30 seconds, and expressed his dissatisfaction with the admissions process. Additionally, he took umbrage with the poor communication.

Parker said he felt similar regarding communication efforts by Whittier.

Kristen B., a West Newbury resident and Whittier educator, spoke to the strengths and benefits of the high school, which was followed by an unidentified man speaking in favor of the rebuilding project as well.

Christopher Linck brought up the cost-per-student ratio burdening communities, and what other “alternatives” the Select Board had looked into.

Wile asked about the Tax Analysis, and whether these numbers would evolve. Lynch said that it would not remain static, evolving with capital assessments and interest rates, but not with each Town’s enrollment numbers in the District.

Bowe asked if Whittier would be increasing overall enrollment in a new building, but Lynch said they were not trying to pull from other Town’s shrinking school districts. They then discussed the enrollment numbers at Whittier, wait lists, and issues of access to the school’s education.

Parker urged the School District provide the Towns and Cities more regular communication (annually or biannually). He also defended Whittier’s decision to conduct a popular vote in January versus through Town Meetings as the logical course of action to see passage of funding through.

After the audience and speakers from Whittier left, the Board and Manager discussed how best to make their position on the matter known. Jennings recommended laying out points in a memo on their own (and not signing onto a regional letter). Jennings said he agreed with Parker’s defense of the popular vote method, responding to the letter from the Town of Rowley which disliked this methodology. Parker also said that the letter mischaracterized the terms of finding the money, pointing out that the Towns and Cities would have two years to fundraise. Reed said that she felt that even with Towns planning their five year finances, the Whittier election/project caught many by surprise- and Wile echoed that sentiment. It would pose difficult questions for Towns trying to fund other major capital expenses at the same time. Discussion continued on cost-per-student and the regional workforce supply that Whittier provides, as well as the timeline of the building project and the silence from Whittier on the process (and opportunities missed to learn more about it).

Jim Sperelakis asked if the Finance Committee and Select Board should formulate their own opinion on the election/project and get it out to the public, though there was general concern about the quick potential turnaround time and aggregating the appropriate information. Reed encouraged Parker and Wile to bring their ideas to the next meeting for a letter regarding the project, and welcomed Finance Committee input as well. They decided to distribute the information by mail.

**B. Follow up meeting assignment; placing items for future agendas**  
**No motion was made at this time.**

**Wile motioned to adjourn. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (3 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain). The session adjourned at 8:10pm.**

**To access a video recording of the meeting, use the link below:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hPuUPTScvMo>