

This is the third update from the School Building Committee (SBC), and it contains information on our ongoing search for land, the details for a new conceptual plan for the Center school site, and a report on the Committee's outreach activities.

## **Land Search**

The SBC has already done preliminary evaluations of three possible sites, all of which are large enough for a new school. They are owned by the O'Grady, Kane, and Quirk families. An Active Adult Neighborhood (AAN) has already been approved for the O'Grady parcel. Before the town meeting last Spring the SBC explored the possibility of sharing the O'Grady site with the AAN. While we found that the full site would have been an ideal site for a school, and the partial site would have been a viable site for a school, town meeting chose to preserve the AAN and agricultural use that were planned for the site. The Kane parcel is very large, and could likely provide a good site for a new school. Because of wetlands and limited street access the site would be more expensive to develop than an ideal site (such as O'Grady). We are in the process of determining what the likely cost would be to deal with these challenges so that we will be able to compare the cost of a new school at Kane with the Center campus approach. The Quirk parcel is also large; however, the site is compromised by the presence of a drumlin and wetlands, and was not recommended as a site for a school.

Several residents have asked if the SBC is considering conservation land. The Committee met with the Chairman of the Open Space Committee and others with expertise in this area. We learned that taking land out of conservation is a serious legal and ethical matter. The state legislature must approve such a change. An even greater concern is the breach of faith with the landowner who expected that his/her property would remain under a conservation restriction in perpetuity. The SBC has no plans to pursue acquisition of conservation land.

The SBC has been looking for land since January 2003, and the search continues today. After consulting with the Open Space Committee, the SBC identified about a dozen parcels that seemed possible site for a new school. We sent letters to each of the owners to see if they had any interest in selling their land to the town. Only one owner responded. H offered a parcel which is smaller than the current Center site, but is flat and dry, and could likely fit a PreK-2 (to use in combination with a Center 3-5 school). We encourage anyone who might be selling a large (buildable) parcel of land to contact the SBC as soon as possible.

## **Outreach**

At the start of the summer, the SBC began meeting with various boards and committees to learn what people were thinking about the SBC's progress to date. We have received comments from the Capital Planning Committee, the Finance Committee, the Planning Board, the Board of Selectmen, School Committee reps, and the Concerned Citizens of

Stow. We also held a public forum to hear the questions and concerns of parents and voters in general.

Several themes – some of them conflicting- have emerged from these outreach sessions:

- Concern that because of the physical limitations of the schools students are not getting the education they should be, not getting a full share of time on the playground, not getting programs they would have otherwise, etc.
- Concern about the potential cost of a school building project and its impact on Stow's tax rate (especially for seniors and low income families)
- Interest in reducing the impact of additional taxes on those least able to afford it
- Concern that the project was not done yet- frustration that Stow's students are being educated in an environment that is significantly substandard compared to other towns in our district.
- A feeling that we should try to renovate one or both of the existing schools rather than "throwing them away" and buying land to build a new school.
- A concern that the disruption of a renovation project (where would the students go during construction?) would be major and should be taken seriously.
- Full support for a new school or renovated school as long as it accommodates the districts educational objectives
- Disagreement about the number of additional classrooms we will need over the next decade and beyond. Some feel the SBC's enrollment projections are much too high compared to Stow's growth over the last 10-20 years
- Concern that the enrollment numbers might be too low given that we are talking about a building that would open around 2010 and our #maximum enrollment projections s are based on 2013

Attitudes toward the Pompositticut school are generally negative, primarily because of the disruptive environment and lack of traditional classrooms. Many people seem to think that a fire station is a good use for the building

### **Center Campus Conceptual Plan**

The SBC has been evaluating the Center site as the potential location for an expanded, renovated school that would be large enough to accommodate grades preK through 5. We commissioned a conceptual plan from our architect (Design Partnership of Cambridge) based upon the following parameters:

1. Addition and renovation to the existing Center School to include 37 classrooms and all related support spaces to accommodate the district's educational objectives. (or the determine the maximum enrollment possible if the site will not permit the full 37 classrooms)
2. Determine whether the site would provide sufficient room for expansion to accommodate expected enrollment growth beyond the ten-year projections.
3. Cost estimates for all site development, construction, and furnishings.
4. A preliminary traffic study has been completed. We presume that a more thorough analysis will be required at some point, but decided not to pursue this until we know what the site will hold.

5. Making the maximum use of the existing structure, including the evaluation of the possible addition of a second story.
6. Use existing plumbing, electrical, and HVAC where possible.
7. Consider expanding play spaces into wooded area behind current play spaces if necessary (wetlands are currently being flagged so that we can see where these might go.)
8. Recommendations on the pros/cons of this add/reno vs. razing Center and building new on the same lot.
9. Incorporate land now occupied by fire station and the land behind the fire station
10. If the site seems large enough we will also
  - determine the type and location of a waste management system as required by the Department of Environmental Protection
  - verify the presence of an adequate water supply
  - Verify that the location can handle the expected traffic

DPC produced two plans – one larger one based on a preliminary educational needs assessment from the School District, and another severely scaled down at the request of the School Building Committee. In reviewing the second, smaller option the committee noted the following concerns

- There was inadequate parking and no room to develop a traffic pattern that did not require the students to cross traffic to get to the play spaces
- Plays space was reduced from the existing Center school- while the school population was more than doubled
- The building would be very large and potentially overwhelming on the site- there was discussion about whether this was appropriate for Stow.
- There is no way to keep the grade K-2 separate from grades 3-5, which was the original intention to try to keep the feel of two smaller schools.
- The re-use of Center resulted in an inefficient floor plan with a very long narrow school which means there would be long walks to the gym/cafeteria with various grades mixed together
- The smaller version does not provide adequate space for the enrollment projections and district requirement. There was concern that it would be a maximum capacity as soon as it was built.
- The site would be significantly undersized for the school building and there would be no room for expansion beyond the 10 year projections.
- The school would have to be vacated during construction. There was concern that this be very disruptive and would require the construction of an entire temporary school on the site or at another location.

In addition to reviewing this study, the SBC walked all the possible parcels that are accessible from Center and had all the wetlands flagged by the Stow Conservation Commission. We found that while there are some uplands that could be used for playing fields the total useable land area is only between 1/4 and 1/2 acre.

After reviewing all these factors the School Building Committee decided unanimously that there is insufficient space at the Center site for a preK-5 school. Currently we are in the process of reviewing the other options available to the committee. These include:

- An add/reno for grades 3-5 at the Center site with a new PreK- 2 on a new site
- A new preK-5 on a new site

Our intention is to get schematic plans and full pricing (including land and site development costs for the sites we have available to us) for these options so that we can bring an informed recommendation to the voters in May.

The SBC is committed to developing a plan that meets the long-range needs of the elementary schools in the most cost-effective manner. We are well aware of the high taxes we already pay, and would like to minimize the financial impact of upgrading the schools. To do this, we are planning to apply for state building assistance before we begin any renovation or construction project even though this means that a project cannot begin before 2007/2008. Our plan is to review all the options that are available to Stow and determine which will provide the best and most cost effective long-term solution to provide an appropriate environment for the excellent education our school system is providing. We hope to bring a plan to next Town Meeting for approval to proceed with the next steps for the best possible option. If we are able to get approval for a direction and proceed after Town meeting, we would likely come back in 2006 to get approval to proceed with the final building plans with the intention to complete the plans for the 2007 submission deadline for SBA funding.

The SBC will be happy to answer any questions regarding our activities and plans. We usually meet at 7 p.m. on the first and third Monday each month at Town Building. You may also contact me at 978-897-5803 or [s.dungan@att.net](mailto:s.dungan@att.net).

Steve Dungan  
Chairman, Stow School Building Committee