Public Hearing of the City Council was held in the City Council Chamber, Room 219, City Hall, on Wednesday, May 1, 2019.

**CALL TO ORDER**

Council President Scott Joseph Graves called the Public Hearing on the New Elementary School Project to order at 6:00 o’clock p.m.

**ATTENDANCE**

Eight (8) Councillors were present including President Scott Joseph Graves and Councillors James Boone, Ronald Cormier, Edward Gravel, Karen Hardern, Christine Johnson, James Johnson, and Elizabeth Kazinskas. Councillors Nathan Boudreau, Craig Cormier, and James Walsh were absent.

Others Participating: Mayor Mark Hawke; Kristian Whitsett and Helen Fantini, Jones-Whitsett Architects; Eric Bernardin, P.E., Fuss & O’Neill; Tim Alix, Owner’s Project Manager (OPM), Collier’s International.

President Graves announced that the purpose of the public hearing is to hear comments from the public about the proposed elementary school project. He outlined guidelines for the hearing.

Kristian Whitsett, Jones-Whitsett Architects, provided an overview of the project by showing a power point presentation, summarized below and attached hereto.

**MSBA Process**

- The MSBA dictates the School Building Committee’s composition and the reimbursement formula – eligible and ineligible costs.
- Gardner reimbursed 80% of eligible costs (amounts to about 60% of total costs).

- The Need
  - Waterford Street School.
  - Elm Street School

- Feasibility Study: Educational Envisioning

- Guiding Principles

- Feasibility Study: Exploring Options
  - Advantages of new PreK-4 at Pearl Street – addresses all need for PreK-4 grades.
  - Fully wooded – trails on-site – historically logged.
  - To be built at the highest point on the property – stay away from buffer zones.
  - Lease expensive option per square foot.
State established population configurations.

Traffic Study Recommendations
- Traffic not significantly impacted – multiple families with children currently attending more than one school (vehicle trips).
- Installation of 2 lanes (exit).
- Proposed Bus Stop at Dunn Park
- Construction of full path and sidewalk along roadway to the school.

Preliminary Site Plan & Site Analyses
- Bus circulation
- Positioning of interior daylight and tree cover.
- Landfill on the site will be used for terracing the lots.

Cross Section through Site and Sketch of Arrival Landscape
- Focus on natural plantings and materials – wood, stone.

Topography and Stormwater
- Rain gardens on-site.
- All stormwater treated on-site.
- Resource protection.

What Can Outdoor Learning & Play Look Like?
- Similar learning and play areas.

Floor Plans
- Comprised of three buildings by grades and core facilities (cafeteria, stage, gym, offices, etc.)
- PreK and K
- Grades 1 – 3.
- Grade 4.
- Car drop-off loop.
- Separate PreK parking for parents to walk-in students.

What Can a New School Feel Like Inside and Outside?
- Recently completed projects – show daylight impacts learning – helps to increase math and reading scores.
- Spaces are formal and informal for learning.
- Natural materials are used – do not emit gases and toxic chemicals.
Estimates Construction and Project Costs.
  - Projected costs are only estimates at this point – Estimators based the current costs on schematic designs. Several more estimates will be made during the process. Next estimate anticipated June, 2019.
  - Details outlined in Power Point slides.

Current MSBA Projects Cost Comparison
  - Details outlined in Power Point slides.

Project Schedule
  - Next submission – July 2019 (for August MSBA Board meeting).

Why Act Now?
  - Accessibility
  - Class sizes.
  - Keep Gardner students in Gardner.
  - Maximize efficiencies by keeping students all together.

Amy Doucette, 194 Central Street
  - Questioned the ratio of teachers to students in the new school.
  - Questioned whether there are other grants available to assist with the project

Superintendent Pellegrino
  - Student-Teacher ratios expected to remain the same.

Tim Alix, Owner’s Project Manager (OPM), Collier’s International.
  - Green technology rebates – for higher efficiencies.

Mayor Hawke
  - NGRID could contribute for buildings over 100,000 s.f.

Anthony P. Kraskouskas, Jr., 222 Bickford Hill Road
  - Cited declining birth and student populations for many decades.
  - Gardner has only an elderly population to pay for the school.
  - Cited the wet conditions of the site.

Anthony Ruggiero, 429 Parker Street
  - Concerned with wet conditions on the site. Not enough retainage for Stump Pond and Dunn Pond. Erosion concerns.
  - Displacement of water as a resulting from excavation, land clearing, blasting, etc.
Eric Bernardin, P.E., Fuss & O’Neill
- School to be constructed on highest ground.
- Must meet EPA/DEP/ConCom regulations/guidelines.
- Can only put back into the environment what is there presently (roof water, rain gardens).
- Sediment treatment.
- Detention basins to be installed – basins required to be empty of water within 72 hours.
- School campus will be 700 feet from Pearl Street and 1,000 to 1,200 to front door.

Paul DeMeo, 9 Willis Road
- Concerned that the Gardner Conservation Commission has not been involved in the process to this point.
- The proposed school is within the 500 acres Dunn Pond Watershed, as is the Middle School and the Trailer Park off Pearl Street.
- Cited dredging of Dunn Pond in 1983 the Report addressed Dunn Pond and Stump Pond and filtering water. The dike is not doing its job. The Report recommended that Stump Pond be turned over to the State. No maintenance on the dike has been done.
- Concerned that Gardner just applied for a new EPA Permit and all water draining into Stump Pond is not part of Gardner’s application.
- Foster Brook (included in the State Report) – two legs feed Stump Pond on north side of Pearl Street. The proposed access road to the School will cross a perennial brook – protected under the Massachusetts Rivers Act.
- Concerned if a bridge will be constructed that will span Foster Brook.
- Concerned that the new school will have room for expansion due to student growth.
- Cited the loss of neighborhood schools.
- Questioned access – culverts or bridges?
- How will rainwater gardens function?
- Gardner noted for poor maintenance.
- Expressed concern with the Engineering Reports - he never received a response to his communications to the engineers.

Helen Fantini, Jones-Whitsett Architects
- Concerning ability to expand – MSBA requires that the ability to expand be shown to them – some ability to expand academic wings – small group rooms are paired, so can be broken up to create other classrooms within the existing building design.

Eric Bernardin, P.E., Fuss & O’Neill
- Two crossings – Main access road from Pearl Street and GMS access road - concrete culverts with environmental features.
Superintendent Pellegrino
- School Choice (out) have increased in the past, but decreased this year to 291.
- Goal is to keep Gardner kids in Gardner schools. Students leave elementary grades because of building conditions.

Mayor Hawke
- Conservation Agent walked the proposed site.
- The City has to follow the rules – Planning Board and Conservation Commission review the plans later.
- City under MS4 Permit.
- About a dozen students currently walk to Elm Street School.

Amy Doucette, 194 Central Street
- Recommended that more effort be made to improve the educational system and the district is working to improve transportation options.
- Cited concerns with sending students to out-of-district schools. She noted that the Perkins School tuition is $90,000 to $100,000 per year.
- Noted that the existing school buildings need to be brought up-to-code and noted a past lead issue at Waterford Street School.
- The new school would offer local connectivity with the teachers, that the priority would be on education and provide reasons for students to stay in the Gardner Public Schools.

Steven Rockwood, 310 Pearl Street
- The construction of the Middle School added water to the Pond.
- In favor of new infrastructure and a new school – not opposed to the proposed site, but to do it right.
- Cited a blind curve at 300 Pearl Street and concern about vehicle crashes at the school’s entrance.
- Location creates problems for abutters to enter and exit driveways,
- Questioned security measures for the school site and abutters, as well as maintaining privacy for the abutters.
- Cited visibility of MWCC’s windmills when trees were removed.
- Water now in his backyard that was not there before – neighboring properties water flowing downhill to his property.
- Noted claim of former “dump site.” This area is away from the proposed school site – stopped dumping about 1930 – consisted of bottles, dishware, rusted pails.
Kristian Whitsett, Jones-Whitsett Architects
- Access through from door – monitored by the Office.
- Security cameras will monitor all areas. Integrated with the Police Department.
- Play areas – all fenced.
- School District determine its lighting needs.
- No evidence of contamination on the site – only household products.
- Report found no evidence of spraying.
- Power line Easement – removed.

Council President Graves
- Will there be Phase II Environmental Report?

Kristian Whitsett, Jones-Whitsett Architects
- Could be done if environmental issues are raised.

Eric Bernardin, P.E., Fuss & O’Neill
- Final site plan not completed.
- 300’ to 400’ of mature trees will shield the abutters from the school.

Alan Preliasco, 300 Pearl Street
- The proposed road to the School abuts his property.
- Concerned with the proposed traffic pattern – difficulty exiting his driveway now.
- Asked that the entrance road be relocated away from his property.
- Cited 2 years of noise and pollution during construction.

Tim Alix, Owner’s Project Manager (OPM), Collier’s International.
- The proposed access road is the most logical place.
- All relevant issues will be kept in mind during project design, etc.

James Kiewel, 345 Elm Street
- Questioned whether the City could afford the new school and whether it would affect staffing and pay.
- Stated that Gardner is a dead City – no population growth.
- The City will be building a school in the middle of a swamp and concerned with mosquitoes and mold because it will be in a swamp or watershed.
- Questioned the length of time that the designer is responsible for the school’s construction. How long will they be on the hook for their mistakes?
- The modern practice is to reuse and repurpose.
- Questioned whether the City plans to tear down the old buildings.
Mayor Hawke

- Noted that Gardner is one of only 17 communities in Massachusetts that never have passed a property tax override or a debt exclusion. One is for operating and the other for capital spending.
- People are moving to Gardner every day because of affordability. More adults, fewer kids over the year.
- In the next Fiscal Year, Gardner will spend over $1M above Net School Spending.
- He presented a pro forma (tax plan) to the Finance Committee for funding the new elementary school, one that will not affect staffing.

Eric Bernardin, P.E., Fuss & O’Neill

- The project design will consider all uses. The school will be built 80’ to 90’ higher in elevation compared to Pearl Street.

Mayor Hawke

- Wetlands flowing constantly.
- Helen Mae Sauter School will be used in the fall for Administrative Offices and GALT.
- Waterford Street School is located in a swamp. The Boys & Girls Clubs have expressed interest in using the pre-school portion of the facility (on a slab). The remaining two-story structure could be demolished.
- Once Elm Street School is vacated, the Administrative Offices and GALT could take over the building.
- Prospect School Building could be abandoned by the City and then used by Collaboratives.

James Kiewel, 345 Elm Street

- Concerned about snow removal on the new school site.

Kristian Whitsett, Jones-Whitsett Architects

- Will address the snow removal process with the City.

Mayor Hawke

- The City utilizes green salt, which is better for the environment and melts at lower temperatures.

Superintendent Pellegrino

- Currently, 291 Gardner children are “choiced-out” to other school districts at a cost of $5,000 to $10,000 per student or $60,000 for SPED.
- Currently, $1.7M leaves the School District budget for choice students.
- $1M is taken from school maintenance and operations to support ELL and low-income students.
- The District is looking for space for a school psychologist.

**Mayor Hawke**
- Acknowledged that there would be errors during design and construction, noting that there will be hundreds of pages of construction documents and change orders.

**Richard LaBonte, 169 Summer Street**
- Concerned that there is the lack of a traffic study.
- Stated that Pearl Street is a State Highway, Route 101, and that the City must work with the State concerning speed limits, curb cuts (entrance), etc.

**Eric Bernardin, P.E., Fuss & O’Neill**
- Stated that the section of Pearl Street where the School would be constructed is City-controlled and not under Mass DOT.
- A traffic study was performed and the design is in a preliminary state. All traffic situations are included in the Study and it will be posted on the City’s website.

**Anthony P. Kraskouskas, Jr., 222 Bickford Hill Road**
- In 2012, 180 students left Gardner. Now, 300 left.

**Superintendent Pellegrino**
- This is the first year in the past 2½ years that the number of choice students decreased.
- First year since 2003 that the number of SPED students decreased.
- The focus is to keep the kids in Gardner schools.

**Scott Michael Graves, 92 Ash Street (not the City Council President!)**
- Concerned with water management on the proposed school site.
- Has not seen the feasibility studies for the rejected school sites.

**Mayor Hawke**
- Elm Street School (ESS) was considered for renovation.
- Addition to ESS would have required to cut 15’ to 20’ into the playground (hill).
- Stone Field would have been taken to construct 200 parking spaces.
- For 2 to 3 years, students would have to attend ESS during construction and then for the earlier grades to move in.
- Waterford Street School would be costly to renovate and maintain - almost as much as constructing a new school. Then there is the water!
- Matthews Street Site (near the Court House) – Wetlands conditions.
Tim Alix, Owner’s Project Manager (OPM), Collier’s International.
- The Architect also looked at the athletic fields behind the Middle School.

Mayor Hawke
- Traffic concerns – adding 600 more students to the site – a nightmare.
- Few walkers to the Pearl Street site.
- Synergy with the Pearl Street site – presence of Watkins Field and access road to GMS and GHS – a second agrees created.

Erin Kiewel, 345 Elm Street
- Questioned the life of the new school.
- Concerns with crosswalks, sidewalks, and stop signs.
- Would there be a Library in the School?

Kristian Whitsett, Jones-Whitsett Architects
- State requires life of the school to be 50 years. The Architects propose 75 years.
- There are plans to house a Library/Media Center in the new school.

Debra Eckler, 12 Moran Street
- New resident in Gardner.
- Glad to see that there are plans to reuse the old school buildings.

Charles Hodgkinson, 148 Oak Street
- When the new school is completed, water patterns will change.
- Sewer/water system must be designed to prevent future earth movement.
- Concerns for a single access road when the school first opens – ingress and egress.
- Suggested one road for ingress and a second road for egress.
- Potential for local population growth with advent of commuter rail locating further west.
- Local property values have been increasing.

Mayor Hawke
- Regarding the access road to the Elementary School and GMS and GHS – starting and ending times are staggered.

Kathleen (Woodcome) Vautour, Fitchburg
- Has family residing on Pearl Street.
- Concerned that water will run downhill and that the sump pumps run a lot now.
- The area is built on natural springs.
• Noted the current traffic situation at the intersection of Pearl, Elm, and Green Streets caused by the schools, as well as MWCC and Heywood Hospital traffic.

Laureen Peabody, 3 Jackson Park
• Questioned impact on programs at Dunn Park.
• Questioned traffic snafus on Pearl Street.
• Cited environmental concerns.
• Questioned ability to evacuate the entire area in the event of an emergency.
• Noted that the area is isolated.
• The new school project is the most expensive option.
• Questioned if something is found during construction.

Kristian Whitsett, Jones-Whitsett Architects
• More geotechnical studies would be conducted in the event of any findings.
• A Contingency is included the project budget for unanticipated conditions.

Ian Flaherty, 441 Parker Street
• The goal is to attract younger families to Gardner.
• Noted safety due to familiarity with the area of the schools – from Elementary to Middle School to High School.
• Questioned whether MSBA funding would be affected is the project is delayed.

Tim Alix, Owner’s Project Manager (OPM), Collier’s International.
• MSBA wants the facility to be where the City wants it to be.
• 120 days for local site approval.

Councillor James Johnson
• Noted that it is a long process.
• If the Council moves it along, then it will still be 3 years to completion.

The Hearing concluded at 8:30 p.m.

Accepted by the City Council: June 3, 2019
Schematic Design
City Council
Public Presentation
May 1, 2019

School Building Project
City of Gardner

**Agenda:**
- Introductions
- The Feasibility Study Process
- Proposed Site Plans
- Proposed Floor Plans
- Costs & Schedule

---

**SCHOOL BUILDING COMMITTEE**

- **Mark Hawke**, Mayor, Chair
- **Mark Pellegrino**, Superintendent, Vice-Chair
- **Wayne Anderson**, Dir. of Facilities
- **Ashley Chicoine**, Teacher
- **Ronald Cormier**, City Council
- **Jennifer Dymek**, Purchasing
- **David Fredette**, Principal
- **Catherine Goguen**, Academic Officer
- **Robert Hankinson**, Citizen
- **Heidi Jandris**, Citizen
- **Earl Martin**, Principal
- **Jennifer Pelavin**, School Comm.
- **Christina Thomas**, Teacher
- **Joyce West**, Pupil Services
- **April Yu**, Business Manager
MASSACHUSETTS SCHOOL BUILDING AUTHORITY PROCESS

**MSBA** is the state authority that administers and funds a program for grants for Massachusetts school projects.

**MSBA** mandates a multi-step rigorous study and approval process.

**MSBA** will reimburse all *Eligible* Costs.

- Examples of *Ineligible* Costs include:
  - Site Costs over 8% of construction costs
  - Building Costs over $333/sf
  - Removal of asbestos floor tiles
  - Costs associated with modular classrooms
  - Site acquisition costs
  - FFE/Technology Costs over $2,400/Student

---

THE NEED – WATERFORD STREET SCHOOL

- Aged, outdated electrical & plumbing systems
- Does not meet current educational needs
  - Classrooms are too small – Pre-K and Kindergarten are 25% under state guidelines
  - Building designed and sized for middle school students
  - Students with disabilities have makeshift accommodations
  - Not fully handicapped accessible
  - Doesn't work for 21st century learning & teaching
THE NEED – ELM STREET SCHOOL

- Aged, outdated electrical & plumbing systems
- Does not meet current educational needs
  - Classrooms are too small – many are 45% under state guidelines
  - Building designed and sized for high school students
  - Students with disabilities have makeshift accommodations
  - Not fully handicapped accessible
  - Doesn’t work for 21st century learning & teaching

FEASIBILITY STUDY: EDUCATIONAL VISIONING

- June 12 – Elm teachers & staff
- June 14 – Waterford teachers & staff
- June 18 – SBC & Community Leaders
- July 17 – Leadership Team
- August 28 – All teachers and staff

- Discussed 21st C Learning Goals
- Reviewed Design Pattern Examples
- Performed Strengths, Challenges, Opportunities, and Goals (SCOG) Exercise
- Developed Priorities for Gardner
GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. School as Community Resource
2. 21st Century Teaching & Learning
3. Learning Communities
4. Healthy & Sustainable School
5. Outdoor / Nature Connections

FEASIBILITY STUDY: EXPLORING OPTIONS

Three Possible Sites:
1. Waterford Street
2. Elm Street
3. Middle / High School Site (Pearl Street)

Two Possible Grade Configurations
1. Pre-K – 1st Grade  365 (+80) students
2. Pre-K – 4th Grade  925 (+80) students

Six Options:
1. Waterford Street up to code
2. Add/Reno PK-1 @ Waterford
3. New PK-1 @ Waterford
4. Add/Reno PK-4 @ Elm
5. New PK-1 @ Middle/High
6. New PK-4 @ Middle/High
Advantages of a New PK-4 at Pearl Street

- Supports district long-term plan - one 21st century building for all PK-4 students
- Unites all elementary administrators & specialists in one building
- More design flexibility by building new
- Connects to Middle/High campus
- Provides natural setting for learning, which is proven to foster better results
- Relieves traffic and congestion from existing neighborhoods
- Provides more spaces for community use

THE “PREFERRED SCHEMATIC” CHOICE

WHY A PRE-K TO GRADE 4 FACILITY?

- Equitable access to 21st century education
- Eliminates moving students from school to school – fewer transitions
- Technology to support 21st century college and career readiness
- Resources to better support students with disabilities
- Opportunity for staff to collaborate and share ideas and resources
- Opportunities for older students to mentor younger students
- Improved instructional spaces for Art and Music
- Least expensive when considering dollars/student
- Addresses all of Gardner’s elementary students needs at once
TRAFFIC STUDY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Enforce posted speed limit on Pearl Street
- Establish a 20 mph School Zone on Pearl Street
- Relocate three utility poles for improved line of sight
- Tree trimming and brush control along north side of Pearl Street
- Include a right-turn only bay for those exiting the school site onto Pearl Street
- Include a left-turn only lane on the eastbound Pearl Street approach
- Move existing crosswalk to Dunn State Park to the east side of the proposed intersection
- Extend sidewalk to city bus stop at Smith Street and Pearl Street

"The proposed elementary school will not degrade traffic conditions along Pearl Street."
WHAT CAN OUTDOOR LEARNING & PLAY LOOK LIKE?

FIRST FLOOR PLAN
## WHAT CAN A NEW SCHOOL FEEL LIKE OUTSIDE?

## ESTIMATED CONSTRUCTION & PROJECT COSTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New PK-4 School at Pearl Street</th>
<th>145,750 sq ft</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New School – Estimated Trade Costs</td>
<td>$ 41,500,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sitework – Estimated Trade Costs</td>
<td>$ 8,100,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contingencies and Escalation</td>
<td>$ 8,300,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Conditions &amp; Overhead</td>
<td>$ 7,400,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Estimated Construction Cost</strong></td>
<td><strong>$ 65,300,000</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approximate Construction Cost</td>
<td>$ 65 - 69 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Project Costs (Fees, Contingencies, Etc.)</td>
<td>$ 18 - 20 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approximate Project Costs</td>
<td>$ 83 - 89 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Approximate MSBA Reimbursement</strong></td>
<td><strong>$ 48 - 52 million</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approximate City Costs</td>
<td>$ 36 - 40 million</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### CURRENT MSBA PROJECTS
#### COST COMPARISON

- **Waltham High School**: $742/sf
- **Wareham Minot Forest**: $450/sf
- **Springfield Brightwood School**: $446/sf
- **Gardner Waterford St.**: $448/sf

**Legend**
- □ In Construction
- □ In Design
- □ Development/Construction Documents
- + In Schematic Design


### PROJECT SCHEDULE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Statement of Interest</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invited into MSBA process</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hire OPM &amp; Designer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feasibility / SD</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>August 2019</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSBA Approves Budget</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Aug - Nov 2019</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Council Vote</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design &amp; Bid</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Design</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Construction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move in</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Summer 2022</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closeout</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Fall 2022</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
WHY ACT NOW?

- Gardner has not built a new school since the Middle School in 1996
- Gardner has not built a true Elementary School since the 1800's
- Gardner base reimbursement rate is 80% of eligible costs – the highest rate allowed by the MSBA
- Including all reimbursable and non-reimbursable costs, MSBA will reimburse the city for approximately 60% of the project costs
- An opportunity to provide new facilities for the entire elementary school population
- Keep Gardner students in Gardner – reducing choice out & out of district placements
- PK-4 approach is most efficient in terms of square feet per student, as well as cost per square foot.
Date: May 1, 2019

From: Alan N. Rousseau
       211 Betty Spring Rd.
       Gardner, MA

To: Gardner City Councilors

Subject: Presentation and Hearing on the New Elementary School Project

Due to a meeting conflict, I am unable to attend this May 1st public hearing for the New Elementary School Project. The following is my input on the proposed project.

I have reviewed the information posted on the New School Building website and viewed the video recording of the April 16th City Council Informal Meeting on this subject. I do appreciate all of the hard work that the School Building Committee has done thus far on this project. As an advocate for Conservation and Smart Growth, I do not support the currently proposed option for the location off Pearl Street. I think the city should utilize the options (or further variations of the options) at the Elm Street or Waterford Street locations.

1. The Option 6 Pearl Street location will require the destruction of a 17-acre forested area in the watershed for Dunn’s Pond. The site has a steep elevation range of 90 feet that will require extensive excavation with cuts and fills not specified at this time. Blasting may be required. Wetlands are located to the east & west of the site and a thin strip of wetlands pass through the southern part of the site. If anything, this property should be protected with a conservation restriction.

2. The Option 6 Pearl Street location seems to promote a central educational complex for Gardner. However, I think schools should be integrated into our general residential areas, close to our city center, where many students can walk or ride bicycles to school. Many years ago, I attended school at both Waterford and Elm Street locations and was able to walk and bicycle to school from my prior home on Monadnock Street. Also, this location will result in all school related traffic converging on to one area during morning and afternoon hours five days a week.

3. The Option 4 Elm Street location is a much better alternative. This site has the capacity and central location while creating no adverse environmental impacts. This site previously supported a large high school population of well over 1,000 students. This option would obtain higher MSBA reimbursement, by utilizing existing buildings, and will also meet Gardner’s educational goals as well as addressing the entire PK-4 population.
4. The Waterford Street location, with a new building, may also offer a better alternative. From the available published information, I do not understand why this site could not be developed to support PK-4 grades.

In conclusion, I do support a significant investment for a new elementary school that meets 21st Century educational requirements. However, we must do this in a smart way that avoids environmental damage and re-uses school properties in the great locations that currently exist in our general residential areas. We must apply 21st Century thinking by utilizing sustainable Smart Growth principles for our New Elementary School Project. Let’s complete this project in such a way that we can ultimately teach our young people how this city created a great facility while protecting our environment.

Thank you for your consideration of my input.

Sincerely,

Alan N. Rousseau