



The Chair called the meeting to order at 4:00PM

"This meeting is being held remotely and in person as an alternate means of public access pursuant to Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2023 and all other applicable laws temporarily amending certain provisions of the Open Meeting Law. You are hereby advised that this meeting and all communications during this meeting may be recorded by the Town of Dracut in accordance with the Open Meeting Law. If any participant wishes to record this meeting, please notify the chair at the start of the meeting in accordance with M.G.L. c. 30A, § 20(f) so that the chair may inform all other participants of said recording."

Present:

Chairman Steven Stone, Phil Thibault, Dennis Piendak, Andy Graham, Linda Trouville, Rob Sheppard, Renee Young, Stefanie Fields, Kate Hodges, Barbara O'Connor, Nick Botelho, Rebecca Duda, David Martin, Josh Taylor, Katharine Foster

Guest:

Michael Cronin, Town of Lexington Facilities Director

Mount Vernon Group: Frank Tedesco, Al Cuevas, Susan Taylor

Crowley Engineering/HVAC: Marty Vicky

LiRo-Hill: Paul Kalous, John Abbott

Absent: Marybeth Veilleux

Minutes

Mr. Stone made a motion to approve the minutes of July 9, 2025 as presented. Rebecca Young carried the motion Rob Sheppard seconded the motion with an edit. The motion carried with all members for, except that Kate Hodges, Barbara O'Connor and David Martin abstained because they did not attend the meeting.

HVAC Options – Geothermal and Costs

Mr. Stone stated he is taking up this topic first so that the SBC can hear from someone experienced in constructing and maintaining a geothermal HVAC system in a school and respect his time. Mr. Stone introduced Mr. Michael Cronin, Facilities Director of the Town of Lexington, who has experience with geothermal systems in three of the school buildings he manages. Mr. Cronin stated that two of his buildings have open loop systems and the other, the Hastings School, has a closed loop system. Mr. Cronin does not recommend an open loop system because an open loop system requires much more maintenance than a closed loop system. Mr. Cronin said that the closed loop system at the Hastings school system has 80 wells, each hundreds of feet deep. The system has performed very well, reducing

energy use by 30%, and with the solar power source, the building generates electricity that is sold back to the utility. When the system was first brought online, it had some problems that were resolved by a consultant named Wellspring. The system needs quarterly maintenance that they pay \$2500 per quarter (\$10,000 per year) for this. Mr. Cronin said that the system is managed in its Building Management System (BMS) that their staff has no problems operating it. The new Lexington High School coming on line is a hybrid system, part VRF and part geothermal, because there is not enough room for the number of wells that would be needed. The unit price they are paying for each well is \$55,000.

Invoice for Approval Mount Vernon Group June 2025

Phil Thibault made a motion to approve the monthly invoice from Mount Vernon Group for the month of June 2025 in the amount of \$50,000 as presented. Dr. Trouville seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Invoice for Approval LiRo-Hill June 2025

Mr. Thibault made a motion to approve the monthly invoice from LiRo-Hill for June 2025 in the amount of \$18,080 as presented. Dr. Trouville seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Composition of the School Building Committee

Mr. Stone stated that the SBC has the membership it has for the planning purposes of the project, however the roster will reduce when the project is in construction and be under the direction of the Dracut Permanent Building Committee at that time. The principal of the Greenmont School has left the district and will not be included on the SBC any longer. Instead, Mr. Josh Taylor who as Select Board chairman and legal liaison to Town Consul has volunteered his participation on the SBC. Dennis Piendak stated that in his prior role for 41 years as Town Manager, until now, could not vote for a Selectman on any ballot, and motioned for Mr. Taylor to the SBC. Dr. Duda seconded this motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Lot 64 Updates

Mr. Stone stated that a 90 minute conference call took place that included Mount Vernon Group, their engineering consultants, Ingris a legal title search consultant, Town Consul, the Town Manager, Andy Graham and LiRo- Hill took place. The discussion created some specific questions to answer to create an approach to legally utilize Lot 64 and nearby paper streets.

Kate Hodges reported that as a result of this discussion and the work performed by MVG's team Town Consul offers the following points to the SBC:

Neither the Town or the Subdivision currently own lot 64 or the paper streets.

The property Lot 64 a.k.a. Lot B could be conveyed to the Town, the Town can use for the road access, give the rest to the subdivision or dedicate as open space. If the property is used for the desired purpose as a means of access or egress from the school, the Town should own the land and take steps to modify the special permit granted to the subdivision. Conservation Commission N.O.I. would be needed and followed by compliance to an order of conditions. Town Meeting vote would be necessary to accept the acquisition of the property. Ms. Hodges said that in this process a complaint would go to land court.

Ms. Hodges said the steps would require at the minimum a Town meeting vote, a Select Board vote, Planning Board meeting, plus a new NOI with conservation commission and subsequent meetings.

Mr. Kalous stated that the ownership of this property must be by the Town for the MSBA to agree to construct on it as part of the school project. The acquisition of the property could be voted in an article at the same Town meeting as the project, both articles contingent on the other. The permitting may not be complete at the time of Schematic Design or Town meeting, but the process must be scheduled with agendas and dates certain. If this is part of the MSBA project and does not get permitted, it would violate the funding agreement. The MSBA will monitor this very closely.

Mr. Taylor stated that there is not enough money in this phase of the project to pay for the work needed to permit this work. Ms. Hodges said that the Town legal budget is not sufficient to pay for this. She said it is too small of a sum to borrow or bond.

Mr. Piendak asked if taking of these properties is an option. Or, perhaps the current easement for the septic field as an adverse possession taking. Ms. Hodges said that the simple taking by eminent domain or adverse possession will still not exempt the special permit modification and con comm to legally build there.

Mr. Taylor suggested that a sqft to sqft land swap for replacement of the open space would be an approach for these approvals. Ms. Hodges said that the land swapped must be upland and not wetland. Frank Tedesco suggested that the special permit to the subdivision might specify the size of the open space necessary, and maybe the land left over, plus other land contiguous with the subdivision, that would be an attractive option. Dennis Piendak asked where that "other land" would come from, and Mr. Tedesco suggested as a small taking from the other neighbor to the subdivision.

Mr. Taylor said that the land conveyance and permitting timeline will not coincide with the MSBA timeline, and perhaps the use of lot 64 and the paper streets be handled as a project separate to the MSBA project. Mr. Kalous said that the MSBA limits their reimbursement for the site work portion of the project to 10% of the building cost. This project, without the development of lot 64, will exceed this and not be reimbursed anyway, so that approach of being a separate Town project will not lose money for the Town from the MSBA.

Mr. Tedesco said that the project was approved by the MSBA without the benefit of lot 64 and its second means of access/egress to the site. MVG can prepare the plans accordingly to be two separate projects.

Mr. Taylor asked if there is another possible egress/access from Bellevue Avenue that would be an easier legal/permitting lift than lot 64. Mr. Tedesco said he did not believe there is. He said at first, they looked to Congress Street as it is shown on paper to abut the school property. The vernal pool in this location would require an actual bridge (not simply a culvert) to span this, which would have a significant cost impact.

Mr. Taylor said we need a written summary from the legal counsel that outlines the approach to enable the project to construct the driveway joining our site to Bellevue Avenue over lot 64 and Intervale Street. Implementing this will have legal costs and designer costs. Mr. Kalous said that legal costs are not reimbursed by the MSBA. They can be budgeted within the project and sometimes are, but they will not be reimbursed.

Dr. Duda suggested that the project proceed with no second means of egress and make that provision a separate project. Mr. Taylor asked what Public Safety would say. Mr. Tedesco said that in the preliminary meeting with the fire and police, that they stated they wanted the second access location. Mr. Thibeault added that roadway length as shown without the second means, does not violate town bylaw.

Mr. Sheppard asked if someone gave property to the Town for a second means, would that work with the schedule. Ms. Hodges said that Town Meeting is still necessary to accept the conveyance.

Mr. Sheppard asked if another roadway would fit to Methuen Street to alleviate traffic by increasing the culvert and wetland replication. Mr. Tedesco said that the capacity of the roads as designed will support the bus lanes and auto lanes. MVG will review.

Mr. Stone said that the school they toured in Easton only has one means of egress, and it was reported to work well.

Dr. Duda stated that at this time, the project does not have lot 64 or other properties and that the committee should continue working with what they currently own, is currently approved and will be funded. The Town should obtain that other access via a separate project.

Mr. Taylor made a motion to authorize the team to proceed with the project as approved by the MSBA with the turnarounds instead of the second egress. Second???

Schematic Design Updates:

Mr. Tedesco briefly presented some modifications to the floor plans. These modifications are still being reviewed and adjusted. They include a modification to the cafeteria area and the provision of a sidewalk linking the entry plazas on the east and west sides. Work on the plans is ongoing.

HVAC Options – Geothermal and Costs

Marty Vicky presented again the summary of the life cycle cost analysis of the systems. He said that he heard that the new spending bill in Washington did not eliminate the IRA credit for geothermal systems that can be a 30 to 40% credit (cash payment) of the cost of the system. Paul Kalous stated that the company Energy Tax Consultants, that the Town of Swampscott utilized, sent an email announcement stating this good news. Swampscott received \$2.1 million as a result of this, that the proof of “buy America” was the impediment to getting more. HVAC equipment components are from many different countries, where the material may be mined, fabricated, assembled, and can be all different places. Mr. Kalous said that the money is not provided to the Town until the work is complete. Also, unlike the past, the MSBA no longer claws back this credit from their grant.

Ms. Hodges said that Dracut is a Green Community, and the Town must pay back a grant to the cost of \$250,000 per year because various green initiatives are not being implemented. If this project includes a geothermal HVAC system, that will change that, and the Town will save the \$250,000 for the next six years.

Mr. Sheppard stated that the cost differential of \$1 million is not a tremendous up-front savings over the benefits in cost savings indicated by Mike Cronin, and he will support the geothermal alternative.

Mr. Thibault made a motion to select the geothermal HVAC system alternative. Dr. Duda seconded this motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Public Comment

No public comment.

Upcoming Schedule and Milestones

Mr. Kalous stated there will be a meeting next Wednesday, July 23 at 4 pm at Harmony Hall. Plan updates will be discussed in more detail.

Dr. Duda stated that the committee really needs to get the community effort and information out. Mr. Stone said that now that an approach is determined for Lot 64, he will confer with Vivian Varbedian at LiRo-Hill and report back.

Mr. Sheppard made a motion to adjourn, Dr. Trouville seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

Adjournment

Superintendent Stone made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 5:35 PM. Seconded and approved.