Meeting opened at 1:30pm

SEPAC Board Members in attendance:

Shaina Brito, Co-President
Carol Yelle, Co-President
Rebecca Robichaud, Technology Chair
Helen McKinlay, Publicity Chair
Tali Ditman, Co-Events Chair

Guest Speakers in attendance:
Dr. Laurie Hunter, Superintendent Concord and Concord-Carlisle Schools
Mr. Philip Poinelli, Principal, Learning Environment Planner, SMMA
Ms. Kristen Olsen, Project Manager SMMA

Invited Guest:
Ms. Jennifer Brooke, Commission on Disability

Introductions were made, including audience members.
Dr. Hunter and Ms. Olsen presented an overview of the building process. It was noted that the meeting is well timed as there are no established designs at this time.

The design team has gathered a list of rooms that will be needed. The town has allocated $1.5 million for the feasibility study. Town vote will likely be in the fall with an anticipated building opening in 2023. There is a high priority to make the building feel inclusive and efficacy in programming.

Ms. Olsen stated that there are 3 components of the feasibility study: Investigation of existing site conditions; educational planning; envisioning and leadership; and test fits on the site.

The budget and sustainability will be interwoven.

Once there is town approval they will get to more details of the building. The first footprint will look much different than the final product. Community engagement is important now for town meeting to vote in the fall.

Mr. Poinelli stated that about 2 weeks ago he and other members of SMMA met with Concord staff which included district administrators, teachers, special educators, cafeteria staff, facilities staff and many other staff members across the board. In all over 20 meetings were held.

He met with over 30 special education teams to understand teaching styles, teaching today and how it will look in the future. He used images
from other schools to prompt teachers. He talked about universal design
for learning and how things are unique to programs in Concord.

Mr. Poinelli stated that they are using the MSBA guidelines as a way of
tracking their work but being specific to Concord Middle School needs.

The SMMA team has taken inventories of both middle school buildings
to compare spaces. Space for special education being allotted for the
new building will be more than doubled. Pull out spaces, or “pull over”
spaces will be closer to the kids. This will reduce travel time and
enable services to be delivered anywhere. Workshop classrooms will
be scattered throughout the team pods and adjacent to teams. ASD
language based programs can use the workshop classrooms. They are
determining how many will be needed.

Dr. Hunter reported that the building committee has gone out to see
about 6-8 middle schools. The team has a good sense of what is out
there. They watched for sub-separate programs and how they were
positioned in the building. They feel quite versed in this area. The team
stayed proximate to each other during the tours.

They would like to hear input from the audience that is here today.
They feel versed in the vision of what the building can be. The
experience of the team, specialist and parents will finalize and help find
the middle ground. Dr. Hunter then opened the meeting for comments
from the Board and the audience.

LH opened up the meeting to hear from all in attendance
Parent: Thank you for being here. We need to look at the sensory environment. In the previous forum, Laurie had shared the sentiment that the cafeteria is a place for relaxing and making social connections, and then also eating to highlight the role of the social interactions during these unstructured moments. However, some children can’t even enter the cafeteria because of sensory sensitivities like noise and smells. For these children, they lose more than their opportunity to eat with peers. They lose opportunities for meaningful social connections. We need to think about all aspects of the environment such as; smells, sounds, visuals, size of hallways. These things are not being taken into account. Love to see and think about what is needed to keep our kids in schools. Need to look at this now.

Parent: There is a place in Boston where it is about sensory processing disorder. There is someone that could look at acoustics. Buildings are built with a lot of glass these days. [Tali: I think she said the opposite -not that hardwood is better but carpet is better] Carpet is better than hard floors for acoustics. Take into consideration how high the ceilings are.

Parent: All of this applies to everyone. Why can’t we make the whole building friendly for everyone.

Mr. Poinelli: Gave some statistics on autism. Did anyone take the numbers? Tali: I don’t think the number are important. I think the point was that autism is very prevalent and every space needs to be designed with this profile in mind. Every space is going to have someone on the spectrum. Every space has to be designed for everyone. Such as,
There are new materials out there. It’s not like how it used to be. Mechanical systems can be silent today unlike years ago. Lighting does not flicker. Today the goal is to get every space to 35dba. A therapist told me that there are some great new materials for different table surfaces.

Dr. Hunter: MSBA sets the guidelines but then we choose what we are going to do. DESE has special education guidelines that they follow. Information can be found at: masschoolbuilding.org.

Parent: Asked for more information about MSBA.

Parent: Asked the team to talk about the outdoor space.

Mr. Poinelli: Learning through play is important. For example the new Templeton experience playground look for link to playground. He invisions multiple outdoor areas using nature. Important to include sustainability education.

Parent: We must have outdoor space for sensory and physical needs as well. Quiet areas within the outdoor space are much needed.

Ms. Jennifer Brooke, Commission on Disability: We all have war stories. Hard to advocate for our children everyday. We advocate across the scales such as; from my kid needs a special pencil to my child can’t go to an event because the wheelchair can’t fit through the door. It will be good for this group to have confidence that there is a sounding board with regard to inclusive design. It would be great to have people from various organizations to check in at key points. Places such as and
not limited to: Autism Speaks, Boston Children’s Deaf and Hard of Hearing clinic, Perkins School for the Blind, etc. Have a sub-group that can be an oversite at the major milestones.

A concern for the Disability Commission would be over the discussion about using the new Middle School as a community resource. The Middle School will be a place where grandparents come to see our students and attend other events. We need to make the whole building more inclusive. Without social sustainability the other does not work. It is hard to measure the outcome of social sustainability.

Parent: Mentioned another group to contact is the Boston Children’s Hospital Brain Injury group. Can include concussion issues.

LH and other SMMA team members: Would be good to collect a list of various organizations to contact. SEPAC agreed to put a message out to parents and ask for input.

Parent: commented that LH said that right now I feel the team is well versed in what the building can be. Becky this was your comment. Did anyone else take better notes on the response?

Mr. Poinelli: I have a special interest in special education. I am constantly researching and listening to ideas.

Parent: What will the follow up be? Will the team directly communicate with us?
Ms. Olsen: The immediate need is the site plan. Can someone elaborate on this...

Parent: Is there a group within the SMMA team that specializes in special education? Look at this at a more granular level. Response is that Mr. Poinelli would be the educational planner.

Parent: I like the way Willard is constructed. Mini classrooms in-between classrooms are nice. Outdoor space is not existent for those not wanting to run around. Would be nice to have someplace that can be covered. I never thought about the cafeteria before. A whole lot happens in the cafeteria. Middle school is about socializing more than eating. Currently there are other allotted spaces, such as the library.

Dr. Hunter described a school in which they saw a cafeteria with booths and smaller sitting areas. She noted that there are a lot more options today. She offered to bring pictures and ideas to our February 12th board meeting.

Ms. Brooke cautioned on one point. It’s easy to get myopic about tables and booths and forget the site such as parking, bus drop offs. Have to look at the overlap of uses. The outside is as crucial.

Dr. Hunter mentioned that the team has met with transportation. They are talking about bus drop off areas.

Parent: Asked if they had also met with CASE transportation ... anybody get the response...
Parent: Kids have to take the bus. There are lots of walkers and bikers. No parking for the kids. Don’t forget it’s a neighborhood.

Parent: Spoke about the walkers. Neighbors will be coming to look at the flow of traffic. I live in the neighborhood. It will be a closely watched process.

Dr. Hunter: There will be a lot of compromises in order to get the best building. Laurie made a comment such as: Universal design/inclusion to me is more important than anything...it was really important and I did not write it down...who got it? This was a key take away.

Parent: Commented on accessibility of healthcare offices and location of restrooms, drinking fountains, and how room numbering is done.

Mr. Poinelli: We are looking very closely at wayfinding.

Parent: We need to be proactive. We don’t want to be reactive. We can sit here and all agree that these problems seem obvious however, at the time, no one predicted that these would be obstacles to accessibility. We want to predict the problem areas. We don’t want to look back and have to react.

Parent: How are we going to know if we are successful? How can we measure that—our children come home more relaxed. We should have some measurable goals.
Mr. Poinelli: it's about joy in learning. How do you create environments that enhance that?

Parent: How do we learn more about screen time?

Dr. Hunter: Balance is the goal. Technology is a tool to be used for robust technology. It is meant to enhance education.

Parent: To the Team: We have a great group of parents here today. Some parents have history and have talked about why the building environment was not good for their child. We have parents here that have students in the building today and have talked about the struggles they are facing. We have parents here today of younger students who are learning new and innovative techniques. We hope this conversation continues. We really want to see an expert join the team. Our position paper was mentioned.

Dr. Hunter: We will be taking this information back to the team.

Meeting closed.