

March 11, 2024

**BUILDINGS AND GROUNDS SUBCOMMITTEE**

**Virtual Buildings and Grounds Subcommittee Report  
Monday, March 11, 2024 at 5:00 p.m.  
Broadcast from the Media Studio  
454 Broadway, Cambridge, MA**

Called for the purpose of sharing the status of the Facilities Condition Assessment, hearing plans for solar panels and an urban farm at CRLS, providing an update on how COVID-19 is treated in schools, and sharing plans to use schools as polling sites for the upcoming September 3 primary. The meeting is expected to end by 6:30 p.m.

Subcommittee Members Present: Member Rojas, (Chair), Member Hudson, Member Rachel

Others Present: Victoria Harris, Election Commissioner; Ethridge King, Election Commissioner; Vedad Konjic, Facilities Director; David Murphy, Chief Operating Officer; Steve Nutter, Green Cambridge; Patricia Nolan, Cambridge City Council; Sarah Adkins, Green Cambridge

**Chair Rojas** started the meeting at 5:03 p.m. and read the call of the meeting. He outlined the meeting's agenda and goals for the discussion which included:

- Sharing the status of the long-range Facilities Condition Assessment and Master Planning project and strategy
- Hearing plans for solar panels and an urban farm at CRLS
- Providing an update on how COVID-19 is treated in schools
- Discussing the request to use schools as polling sites September 3<sup>rd</sup> primary.
- Questions from the public

**Chair Rojas** highlighted the agreements of the meeting (below):

- Speak and listen from the heart (respect)
- Step up/step back (watch air time)
- Expect and accept non-closure (work in progress)
- Bike rack (list of things that are important but should be addressed another time)
- Public comment would be limited to 3 minutes to allow for a broader discussion.

**Chair Rojas** led round-robin introductions and participants shared what they would like to do before winter ends.

**Chair Rojas** turned the meeting over to Mr. Murphy to discuss using schools as polling locations on the September 3 primary. As the first day of school falls on September 3, the timing is not ideal. Typically, the district schedules a professional development day during election days. The district is moving ahead with having the first day of school on September 3 and will plan for extra security. Ms. Harris, Election Commissioner, expressed her appreciation for the School Committee's partnership with the Election Commission. She noted that school buildings provide for excellent polling sites as they are ADA-compliant and allow for open and well-ventilated spaces (gyms). The positive experience of students seeing civic engagement in action was also noted. Mr. King echoed Ms. Harris' sentiments.

The discussion turned to updated COVID protocols in schools. Mr. Murphy noted that the CDC guidance has relaxed the isolation protocol. He shared that he had connected with the Cambridge Health Alliance (CHA). As the MA Department of Public Health has not made revisions since the updates by the CDC, the CHA has not revised its policies. Mr. Murphy highlighted that the 2024 COVID protocols are different from the early days of the pandemic, but that the district continues to encourage vaccinations, and testing and for students and staff to stay home if feeling ill. CPSD caregivers, Julie Croston, Serena Facchinetti, and

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Ashley Miller encouraged CPSD to remain vigilant in ensuring that COVID precautions are maintained. They noted the importance of air ventilation and allowing for adequate space during lunch while students are unmasked. They also shared their desire to have COVID cases and air quality data tracked in schools. Mr. Murphy thanked the caregivers and encouraged continued dialogue. He highlighted the confidentiality concerns for students returning to school after a COVID diagnosis. He encouraged families to continue to communicate with school leaders and he agreed that school leaders should be reminded that caregivers may ask for accommodations. Mr. Murphy agreed to follow up in writing.

The discussion turned to solar panels at CRLS. Mr. Murphy shared that the initial vision for solar panels on the CRLS faced many challenges and now the roof is 12 years old making it more difficult to install panels. He noted that the solar panels initiative should align with the long-term facilities plan and highlighted that some CPSD buildings have better infrastructures to accommodate the panels. Mr. Konjic emphasized that CPSD has been installing solar panels in new schools. Councilor Nolan asked about the percentage of the CRLS roof that was covered in solar panels and the amount of power the panels generate. Mr. Konjic was unaware of the exact percentages but shared that both were very minimal.

The discussion turned to urban farm proposal at CRLS. Mr. Murphy shared that the underutilized space under consideration was near the CRLS auditorium and the Cambridge library. He shared that CPSD has been in discussions with Green Cambridge regarding the project and he is most concerned about having a continuity plan in place. Both Mr. Nutter and Ms. Adkins from Green Space highlighted that they have a solid idea of how the urban farm would work operationally. They have a plan that the farm would serve as an academic space and envision CRLS clubs would also be involved. They are focused on creating a long-term culture. They have created a presentation outlining the operational structure which they will share at a later date. They gave a brief history of Green Cambridge and its future aspirations. Student Member Anjaria asked the group about the structure of the farm's financial responsibility -- CPSD, the city, or an outside organization? Mr. Murphy shared the importance of prioritizing initiatives as part of the budget process. He could not comment on the CRLS budget and ensuring the CPSD would financially support the farm in perpetuity. He shared his hopes that a financial partnership could be formed. Councilor Nolan thought that the operating and construction costs would most likely come from the CPSD budget. **Member Rachel** inquired about the costs more specifically. Ms. Adkins shared that the initial construction would be approximately \$200K and yearly costs approximately \$98K. **Chair Rojas** wondered if the proposed space was the best space/environment for an urban farm. The group also discussed how the urban farm would fit in with the broader instructional framework of CRLS. Mr. Nutter and Ms. Adkins noted that they have already forged strong connections with science educators.

**Chair Rojas** noted that the closing time of the meeting was quickly approaching and that a robust discussion related to the Facilities Condition Assessment would be not possible. Mr. Murphy gave a very brief update. He shared that the DLR Group, the contracted design vendor, has reviewed the schools and will share scenarios to inform a path forward. Mr. Murphy emphasized that it will not be a concrete plan and that the public needs to be engaged in the conversation.

**Chair Rojas** concluded the meeting at 6:38 p.m.