

Virtual Buildings and Grounds Sub-Committee Report
Wednesday, November 30, 2022 at 6:00 p.m.
Broadcast from the Media Arts Studio
454 Broadway, Cambridge, MA

Called for the purpose of discussing socializing the latest changes to COVID protocols, updates on the Long-Range Building Study, sharing policies being considered for review during the school year, and prioritizing and incorporating them into the subcommittee's schedule.

Sub-Committee Members Present: Member Rojas, Chair; Member Fantini

Others present: Dr. Carolyn L. Turk, Deputy Superintendent; Vedad Konjic, Facilities Director

Chair Rojas started the meeting at 6:00 p.m. **Chair Rojas** outlined the meeting and shared the goals of the meeting:

- Learn about current updates to the health & safety protocols being considered
- Review the status of the RFP for the Long-Range Building Study
- Discuss policy regarding parents entering school buildings
- Set Agenda for the rest of the school year with regard to policy review goals
- Provide an opportunity for community members to ask questions and ideas on these topics to the administration, the health & safety working group, and others

Chair Rojas asked for public comment to be limited to 3 minutes each and began introductions by asking attendees to share their thoughts regarding Team USA's recent win in the World Cup Soccer tournament.

Chair Rojas framed the conversation by informing the group that he had recently attended the MA Association of School Committees Conference where it was shared that managing the increased energy costs was a priority concern for districts across the state. He is seeking input from Mr. Konjic regarding reducing costs and taking advantage of CPS buildings' energy features.

Mr. Konjic shared the following:

- His team continues to explore options for purchasing energy with other groups to negotiate the price. He shared that collaborating with CFO Claire Spinner will be key to these conversations. There could be savings, but CPS should expect an increase in energy costs regardless.
- Since COVID, CPS has been using more energy. Systems start earlier (oftentimes 5:00 am) and shut off later. In addition, buildings are in use over the weekends. As expected, buildings will need to be kept at warmer temperatures during the winter months.
- Facilities is partnering with Stephen Turner Inc. who has been recommissioned to review the systems of the King Open School, notably the energy models implemented as a result of COVID. Mr. Konjic hopes to replicate this study with other CPS schools with a priority given to larger buildings such as CRLS. Remaining at the forefront will be exploring energy efficiencies while keeping safety a top priority.
- His team is exploring the option of updating controls in older buildings with the goal of centralization. This would be an expensive and time-consuming endeavor requiring more time beyond the summer months. The initial phase would identify improvements. He is hopeful that ESSR funds could assist with these expenses.

Chair Rojas returned the conversation to exploring three key issues that were highlighted at the MA Association of School Committees Conference, He is hopeful that these initiatives could be considered in the short term and yield high-impact results. They are: 1.) hiring a person dedicated to energy management; 2.) training staff in building energy management; and 3.) confirming consensus on temperature management. Mr. Konjic responded that energy management is handled within the Facilities team and he is hopeful Stephen Turner Inc.'s work with

King Open will yield results that can be implemented with CPS' highest energy users. He shared that newer buildings are temperature controlled within plus or minus two degrees. Unfortunately, older buildings do not have this capability.

Member Fantini asked if the new geothermal designs were working as intended with a net zero energy usage. Mr. Konjic responded that the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. School was performing as designed, but the King Open School has been experiencing issues since its opening. Various stakeholders, including architects and builders, are in disagreement regarding the source of these issues. W.T. Rich (construction company) has identified underground leaking pipes and is trying to address some of these issues. Once everything is working properly, his team will have a better sense of the energy issues that need to be addressed.

Chair Rojas transitioned the discussion to status updates regarding the Accelerated Repair Program as part of the MA School Building Authority (MSBA) and updates on the Long-Range Building Study. Mr. Konjic shared that CPS had been invited by the MSBA to participate in the Amigos School roof replacement project. Given his experience, he is confident that the project will be included in the program. For the next steps, the City Council or City Manager needs to approve the funds for the feasibility study. Cambridge needs to commit to funding the project and will then be reimbursed approximately 43% of the total costs. The MSBA will determine the assigned project manager resulting in a feasibility study that will include cost estimates. With the City Council's approval, bids will be submitted and a contract awarded. He is expecting the Amigos School roof will be completed in the summer of 2024.

Mr. Konjic is developing a master plan for 10 buildings that have not been renovated in approximately 15 years. Consultants are looking at each building to create more space and/or reconfigure existing floor plans. He shared that the Amigos School has inquired about the need for breakout spaces. The consultants and CPS Facilities are trying to think creatively about what can be accomplished. He mentioned the Amigos School's boilers have been replaced with much smaller ones and perhaps some of the basement could be updated to include a learning space. Mr. Konjic sent a 10-minute survey to the staff of these schools asking for their input. The survey is open for another week. As a next step, Mr. Konjic will be meeting with the DPW to discuss additional energy-saving opportunities as part of the Inflation Reduction Act. In addition, his team is looking into possibilities of expanding space to existing schools by adding a wing or another floor. These ideas must be coordinated with the DPW.

Member Fantini asked if existing buildings must be expanded because new schools cannot be built due to Cambridge's land constraints. Mr. Konjic shared that they are looking at each school based on enrollment numbers. In addition, there has been an increase in requests for breakout rooms across the district which is challenging to accommodate given existing floor plans. He gave the Morse School as an example of a building that occupies significant land space (one floor) but is lacking in square footage. **Chair Rojas** asked about the timeline for the report's completion. Mr. Konjic confirmed that the report will be completed by the end of May 2022 to present the report's findings to the School Committee and appropriate CPS administrators in June 2022.

Chair Rojas pivoted the discussion and asked Dr. Turk to comment regarding the policy of parents/caregivers entering schools. Dr. Turk shared that she had connected with principals to determine what they are hearing from parents regarding these issues and there seem to be pockets of these questions but not widespread inquiry. She believes that there needs to be more clarification regarding the School Committee's 2018 visitors policy and the 2020 building access guidelines developed in response to COVID (aka COVID Manual). The Manual is stricter and asks visitors to make appointments prior to visiting a school. Dr. Turk would like more information regarding the root of families' concerns. **Member Fantini** shared that prior to COVID, parents were allowed to walk children to classrooms allowing for an opportunity to connect with their teachers. **Chair Rojas** echoed Member Fantini's comment that he was hearing similar comments from parents of younger children. Dr. Turk will share these issues with Dr. Edwards and her academic team. CPS parent, Jamie Lichtenstein, agreed that parents were seeking a stronger connection with teachers, and walking students to their classroom provided an opportunity to forge these relationships. She has since heard from teachers that this practice was disruptive to their classrooms. With COVID restrictions lifting, drop-off policies vary across the district and parents are sharing this information. Both Ms. Lichtenstein and **Member Fantini** expressed that parents/caregivers are eager to forge stronger connections with teachers and engage with students' work via classroom visits. Ms. Lichtenstein believes that it is important to create regular and frequent opportunities for this engagement. **Chair Rojas** reiterated that guidelines should be

clarified and communicated. **Dr. Turk** will share these issues with Dr. Edwards and her academic team and believes that input from principals is necessary.

Chair Rojas turned the discussion to the student transportation policy and began the discussion by sharing a slide from the MASC site highlighting CPS' student transport policy. He suggested a revision of a typo and clarification regarding the statement highlighting that the School Committee (SC) provides transportation to the students as he questioned the SC's role in this area. He consulted with DESE's policies regarding transportation which does mention the SC's role. The discussion evolved to MBTA cards being provided to all high school students and select middle school students. Dr. Turk questioned the sole role of CPS in funding MBTA cards to students and believes it is a negotiated partnership with the MBTA. If so, more flexible language should be included in the policy. Dr. Turk plans to get more information from Claire Spinner, CFO, regarding how MBTA cards are being funded. She will report back to the committee. **Chair Rojas** asked that the committee review the student transportation policy so that revisions can be made at one time.

Chair Rojas solicited final comments. Ms. Lichtenstein stressed that HVAC system upgrades should be considered as part of the master plan focused on energy efficiencies. Mr. Konjic confirmed that the review of air ventilation and circulation systems was included as part of the master plan

At the close of the meeting, **Chair Rojas** encouraged members to "think outside the box" regarding energy efficiencies. The meeting was adjourned at 7:01 pm.