

Co-Chairs Waltham School Building Committee:
Stigmatines Preferred Site for new WHS

The School Building Committee and City officials are deep in discussions with the community about the two locations under consideration for a new Waltham High School: the current high school site and the Stigmatine Fathers and Brothers site. Below we describe the advantages and disadvantages for each location. In addition, as Co-Chairs of the School Building Committee, we end with our recommendation for the preferred site of the new WHS.

Location 1: New Construction at Waltham High School (WHS): The new WHS would be built on the current WHS parking lot, and upon completion of construction, the current building would be demolished and become the parking lot.

There are several advantages to this plan:

1. The land where the high school is located is under the care, custody and control of the School Committee. This means there is an easier path to move the project forward so long as there are 10 votes from the City Council to support the funding for the school (as a reminder, because we are in the MSBA process, we are eligible for 40-45% reimbursement for the project).
2. Given that the land is under the control of the School Committee, the majority of the School Building Committee and architects' time has been spent studying this plot of land. We are confident that we fully understand the challenges and can deliver the spirit of the education plan.

There are also some disadvantages:

1. There will be major disruptions to the school and community as the construction project will be 20-30 feet away from the current building. This type of project has been done in many neighboring communities who do not have an alternative site and all report that they are happy with the final product. However, all school leaders report there were many significant challenges along the way. In the Waltham context we can expect over the life of the three-year construction project there will be:
 - Limited to no on-site parking;
 - No student parking and most staff members would be shuttled to and from a satellite parking lot;
 - Limited community access for afterschool activities, fine and performing arts activities, sporting events, and the Reagle Theater;
 - Major disruption to student learning is expected. For example, there will be significant noise during instructional time, increased traffic and noise for abutters impacting the access road and a lack of access to open windows in spring and summer, among other disruptions. Even though we would strategically plan any blasting and work to mitigate any disruption, we need to be clear that there will be significant challenges to the student learning experience.

2. This plan requires the demolition of WHS during construction. Therefore, the WHS building would no longer be in the portfolio of the WPS and could not be used as a strategy to solve the K-8 enrollment increases.
3. We would not be able to deliver an entire campus in a phased construction project.
4. This closes the door to any future site or expansion for the school. Future generations would be relegated to the “the flipper plan,” which would move the school every 50-60 years to the other side of the land.

Location 2: New Construction at Stigmatine Site: This new WHS would be built at the Stigmatines site and allow for fields and other amenities for a whole campus facility in a phased construction project.

There are several disadvantages to this plan:

1. The city does not currently own the land (although to be clear the Stigmatines Order in Rome has signaled their interest in selling the land to either a developer or to the City) and would require two senior leaders in the Stigmatines Fathers and Brothers Order and City to come to an agreement. The political path forward is much more difficult. It requires a vote of the City Council to purchase the land, 8 votes of the City Council to use the parcel for educational purposes and then 10 votes of the Council to fund the project. The City Council has appropriated \$18 million for the City to purchase the Stigmatines

There are also some clear advantages to this plan:

1. Construction off-site would all but eliminate disruption at the current site, allow for normal access to school during the construction phase, and a faster construction timeline.
2. This plan also maintains the current WHS in the district’s portfolio to support K-8 enrollment increases that have already been projected to occur over time.
3. Stigmatine site would allow for a campus including all the amenities for a WHS on one site (likely could not happen all at once, but could happen over time).
4. The current high school building will continue to be used for school and community-related purposes without disruption during construction of new high school.
5. Allows for expansion potential in the event that more space is needed in the future (the MSBA allowable WHS build number is 1830, current enrollment is 1650).
6. Educators have expressed their support on social media and to the Co-Chairs for a new building that is not at the existing WHS site.

For the reasons outlined above we, as Co-Chairs of the School Building Committee, express our personal and professional beliefs that the Stigmatine Property offers the best opportunities for an innovative, creative and 21st century high school. Every student, as well as the City of Waltham, deserves access to the very best education we can provide. We are confident that through this process we can deliver a world-class education plan, which we believe can best be achieved at the Stigmatines site.

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