

Town of Southborough, Massachusetts

Neary Building Committee

May 5, 2025

8:30 PM

Virtual Zoom Meeting

Pursuant to Chapter 20 of the Acts of 2021, An Act Relative to Extending Certain COVID-19 Measures Adopted During the State of Emergency, signed into law on June 16, 2021, this meeting will be conducted via remote participation. No in-person attendance by members of the public will be permitted.

Neary Building Committee:

Members Present: Roger Challen, Mark Davis, Kathryn Cook, Andrew Pfaff (arrived at 9:48 pm), Denise Eddy (arrived at 8:39 pm), and Jason Malinowski

Members Absent: Chris Evers

Ex-Officio

Members Present: Keith Lavoie, Assistant Superintendent of Operations, and Mark Purple, Town Administrator

Members Absent: Gregory Martineau, Superintendent of Schools, Stefanie Reinhorn, Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning, Rebecca Pellegrino, Assistant Superintendent of Finance, Kathleen Valenti, Neary School Principal, Steven Mucci, Principal of Woodward School, and Brian Ballantine Town Treasurer/ Finance Director

I. Call Meeting to Order

Jason Malinowski called the Neary Building Committee meeting to order at 8:37 pm.

II. Host a virtual public forum for the community to answer questions about any aspect of the proposed Neary Building Project

Jason Malinowski reminded the audience that the Special Town Meeting is scheduled for May 10, 2025. A two-thirds majority vote is required for the meeting's proposals to pass. The ballot vote will take place on May 13, 2025, as part of the local election and requires a simple majority (50%) for approval. Before opening the floor for questions and answers, each member of the Neary Building Committee introduced themselves to the audience.

Johanna Sheyner started by expressing her gratitude to the Committee for their efforts on the Neary School Project. She inquired about the results of the grade configuration survey, whether an option to add one or two grades to the Finn School had been considered, and what the plan would be in the event of a "no" vote on May 10th or May

13th. Johanna also inquired whether the \$108 million allocated for the proposed project includes renovations to Finn School to accommodate various user groups. She asked about the plan to raise funds for a playground and the reasoning behind the potential disruption of the fields. Johanna inquired about the research into new school buildings in other towns and whether the Committee would continue to provide updates if the vote passes. Johanna further asked about the process for getting back in line with the MSBA if the vote fails. Finally, Johanna requested information about the schematics of the new building, specifically in relation to the classrooms for Castle and TLP.

Jason Malinowski reported broad support for moving beyond a two-grade elementary setup based on a grade configuration survey, which will be posted on the Neary Building Project website. Regarding Finn School, the Statement of Interest (SOI) submitted to the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) focused on grades two through five. The Committee could not propose a plan that included an addition to Finn School for any combination of those grades since they are not currently housed there. The Committee focused on the Neary and Woodward School sites for state funding. Expansion at Finn requires legislative action due to adjacent parkland and possible demolition of a section from the 1960s. Over three years, the Committee held over a hundred public meetings and submitted three deliverables, resulting in a \$35 million grant offer. A “no vote” requires a feedback explanation to the MSBA. The budget difference of \$5 million includes a \$1 million Mass Save Program contribution and a \$4 million federal grant needing congressional action, with a \$12 million contingency for uncertainties. Economic strategies, including the CM at Risk procurement method, have been implemented to ensure the total amount stays within the approved budget of \$108 million for the Neary project. An estimated \$3 million “light renovation” is also proposed for the Finn site, which will not be turned into affordable housing. Kathryn Cook mentioned that the Select Board has clarified that the Finn site will not be turned into affordable housing, and there are no intentions to impose another major capital project on the school related to Finn. Regarding the plans for the playground and the fields, the contractor will restore the fields to their current state. Additionally, there are intentions to create a playground, which may be funded through private donations, a \$12 million contingency, MSBA reimbursement, and CPA funds. Jason Malinowski responded that Committee appointments are made annually, but if the same group remains, they are required to have an Owner’s Project Manager (from Skanska), and the MSBA audits every expense. He also emphasized their commitment to transparency, similar to the monthly reports provided by the Public Safety Building Committee. Jason explained that it would take a minimum of three years to return to compliance, which would involve submitting another statement of interest. He noted the uncertainty surrounding the MSBA’s evaluation of the Finn school, especially considering their previous partnership with the town and the building's age. Stefanie Reinhorn, the Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning, will follow up with Johanna separately to discuss the details.

Mike Nute, 49 Wildwood Drive, requested clarification on the impact of tariffs on project costs and whether the state would prevent the Committee’s progress if they exceeded the budget. Mike also inquired about how the risk of cost overruns is shared between the town and the contractor.

Jason Malinowski explained that if the project is approved in both phases, the Committee would need to hire a Construction Manager at Risk (CM at Risk). This manager would collaborate with Arrowstreet, the designer, to create accurate construction documents. If the costs exceed the budget, two key issues would arise: first, locally, the Committee would not be able to proceed since they would lack sufficient funds; second, the Committee would be obligated to sign a contract with the state that sets a maximum project cost that cannot be exceeded. Jason noted that the most recent construction estimate used to develop the figures the Committee currently has was prepared following the Trump administration. Mark Davis mentioned that the contingencies in place will cover any cost overruns. He anticipates that the upcoming year will be challenging as they work to ensure the designs align with their expectations by the project's completion. Regarding the building project, with the type of contract they will be signing, any savings will be returned to the town. The Finance Subcommittee is meeting to present their final arguments on the project, which will include discussions on costs and tariffs. There are safeguards in place: if the bids exceed the budget, the project will fail. Additionally, if material costs fall within acceptable bid changes, it will be the contractor's responsibility to adhere to the accepted bid amount. Jason added that they could request an extension of the 120-day window; however, there is no guarantee due to other communities waiting in the pipeline. As a Committee, they are concerned about potentially losing the \$35 million grant if the votes do not go positively.

Thomas Lincoln, 10 Bryden Road, inquired about peer-reviewed studies supporting claims of increased educational quality, especially regarding the need for students to learn in a trailer. Thomas also asked why the current Neary has not been upgraded for ADA compliance, how to ensure the Neary does not face the same issue, and if the new Neary building will be large enough for future growth. Keith Lavoie, Assistant Superintendent of Operations, stated that the educational benefits are research-backed. Reducing transitions between elementary schools will allow for a greater focus on the student experience. Roger Challen would like to encourage community members to visit the website, which has a section detailing the educational benefits. Jason Malinowski explained that the trailers will be for specials, and they anticipate needing two trailers at each school for two years. The trailers are intended to keep students away from the construction site for safety reasons. Jason mentioned that multiple demographic studies have indicated that consolidating into two elementary schools is not a feasible option. He believes that the new building includes a 10% contingency in terms of space, factoring in fluctuating grade sizes. One reason for selecting the Neary site and the requirement for state funding was the potential for an addition at the rear of the property. The town considered factors such as birth rates, fertility rates, and housing turnover when determining the appropriate size for the school. The current Neary building has been well-maintained, with necessary repairs and upkeep to ensure its continued suitability for students and staff. Andrew Pfaff added that the plan accommodates 610 students and rounds the number up to seven classrooms, providing a buffer of approximately seven to eight students per grade.

Tom Gittins inquired whether there are any legal barriers or covenants associated with the Finn School building or property that would prevent its sale to help offset costs.

Kathryn Cook replied that while the Finn School can be sold, the current plan is to utilize the space for various town needs.

Kristin Lavault sought clarification regarding the potential sale of the Finn property, expressing her concerns about the absence of a committed budget for its renovation. She fears that financial constraints could lead to a sale. Lastly, she raised concerns about the impact of a potential recession on families in town. In response, Kathryn Cook stated that, in theory, any building could be sold, but there has been no discussion about selling Finn. She also clarified that the Committee does not have the authority to make such a commitment, as this decision falls under the Select Board's jurisdiction. Jason Malinowski added that the Committee has not proposed selling Finn. He reminded the community that selling real property requires a two-thirds vote at Town Meeting. He also pointed out the restrictions on the surrounding parcel and mentioned that departments like Recreation could utilize the building at minimal costs. Regarding the concerns around a potential recession, Kathryn shared that the governor's municipal empowerment act has a provision to encourage towns to do more for senior tax relief.

Ethan asked about the consequences of a failed vote and the need to realign with the MSBA and concerns about the landfill. Kathryn Cook explained that the MSBA's base reimbursement rate is determined by the town's wealth, which is currently around 41%. She noted that the MSBA caps construction costs per square foot for reimbursement. However, actual construction costs often exceed this cap due to prevailing wage laws. The Committee can earn incentive points for building a green school and maintaining a comprehensive maintenance plan, increasing the reimbursement rate. Mark Davis reported no significant issues from test borings, aside from unsuitable fill, and noted that Neary School is about 290 feet from the nearest monitoring well, with water flow directed away from the school. He assured compliance with storm water regulations, protection of wetlands during construction, and careful management of below-grade work.

III. Other business that may properly come before the Committee (None at this time)

IV. Adjournment

Jason Malinowski requested a motion to adjourn.

Jason Malinowski moved, Roger Challen seconded, and it was unanimously voted by roll call, "To adjourn."

MOTION TO ADJOURN

Roll Call

For: Mark Davis, Kathryn Cook, Andrew Pfaff, Roger Challen, Denise Eddy, and Jason Malinowski

Opposed: None

Abstained: None

Jason Malinowski adjourned the meeting at 10:16 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Mariana Silva, Central Office Administrative Assistant

Office of the Superintendent

List of documents used at this meeting:

1. Neary Building Committee Agenda of May 5, 2025

Town of Southborough, Massachusetts

RECEIVED

By Town Clerk/jfh at 10:01 am, May 01, 2025

Neary Building Committee

May 5, 2025

8:30 PM

Virtual Zoom Meeting

May be watched or may participate in the meeting remotely with the meeting link at: <https://ma-southborough.civicplus.com/674/Virtual-Meetings>

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Agenda (all items may have one or more votes taken to the extent action is required):

- I. Call Meeting to Order
- II. Host a virtual public forum for the community to answer questions about any aspect of the proposed Neary Building Project
- III. Other business that may properly come before the Committee
- IV. Adjournment

Jason W. Malinowski, Chair