



Ruthanne Fuller  
Mayor

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Barney S. Heath  
Director

**INTER-OFFICE MEMORANDUM**

**DATE:** October 19, 2023

**TO:** City of Newton City Council

**FROM:** Barney Heath, Director, Department of Planning and Development  
Jennifer Caira, Deputy Director Department of Planning and Development  
Katie Whewell, Chief Planner for Current Planning  
Joe Iadonisi, Planning Associate

**SUBJECT:** Chapter 5 §5-58 of the City of Newton Ordinances, request for site plan approval for site and building construction at 191 Dedham Street for the Countryside Elementary School

**CC:** Alejandro Valcarce, Public Buildings Department  
Design Review Committee  
Public Buildings Department

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Planning Department conducted a Section 5-58 review of the proposed new construction of the Countryside Elementary School at 191 Dedham St. The school was initially constructed in 1953 and consisted of about 36,000 square feet with roughly 5,000 additional square feet in the basement. Since then, there have been five additions totaling approximately 15,000 square feet, which added twelve classrooms and offices, and incorporated improvements to the building’s energy efficiency. As the existing building no longer meets the needs of today’s students, and is located within the FEMA 100-year floodplain and Rivers Protection Act area, the Department of Public Buildings plans to demolish the existing school and construct a new school. Certain areas within the school are designed to support only half of the current enrollment of students and due



*Above: rendering of the proposed new 3-story, 75,500 SF construction of the Countryside Elementary School provided by DiNisco Design.*

to its location on the site is subject to chronic flooding. The 60-year-old building does not meet the needs of people with disabilities and the proposed building would correct that.

The proposed new construction would allow for an increase in enrollment capacity to 465 students. A new school would also ensure adequate classroom, office, and support space, improve site drainage, and meet City goals and guidelines by adding all-electric power, heating, ventilation, and air conditioning and potentially achieving LEED Gold certification. Regarding the proposed demolition of the existing school, the Newton Historic Commission voted unanimously on August 24, 2023 not to impose demolition delay or require further review.

This memorandum serves to summarize the Planning Department's § 5-58 review of the Countryside Elementary Proposal and contains two sections: the first an overview of the school's existing conditions and challenges and the second regarding the proposal for a newly constructed Countryside Elementary School.

### Section 1. History and Existing Conditions

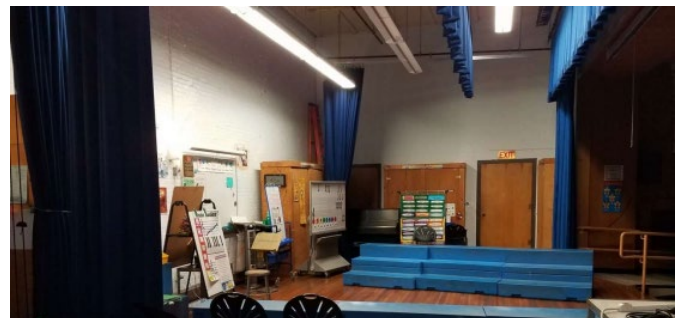
The Countryside Elementary School was constructed in 1953 corresponding with rapid population growth post-World War II. The original structure occupies 35,910 square feet on a 322,065 square foot parcel. Subsequent additions in 1958, 1986, 1991, 1999, and 2000 added classrooms and offices to the annex and modular area. The expansion also allowed for energy efficient improvements in the main building through the replacement of windows and brick façade. Despite these additions and renovations, there are several remaining issues with the current building and site that render the school inadequate for the City's needs, including: insufficient capacity for classrooms, offices, and supporting facilities, flooding and site drainage, energy efficiency and antiquated heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) equipment, leaking sewage and sewer gas, fire safety, accessibility, plumbing, and electrical.



*Above: a picture of the current Countryside Elementary School from the Assessor's database.*

#### *Program and Capacity Issues*

The overall needs of the programming for the school exceed the space that is available. For the 2022-23 school year, 372 students were enrolled at Countryside. Currently, there are 18 classrooms for individual grades plus an art room, library, gym, cafeteria/auditorium, specialized classrooms and offices, and an afterschool program room. Offices, small group instruction areas, special education rooms, storage areas and staff rooms are insufficient or lacking. Office space for support staff and storage and placement of equipment like copiers are in hallways or in inhospitable places such as an old generator room. The library and cafeteria/auditorium are less than half the appropriate size based on enrollment. Only one bathroom with one toilet services the annex and modular classroom area, which can hold up to 250 students and 26 staff.



*Above: the music instruction area is currently in the cafeteria/auditorium. Picture from 2021 via Public Buildings.*

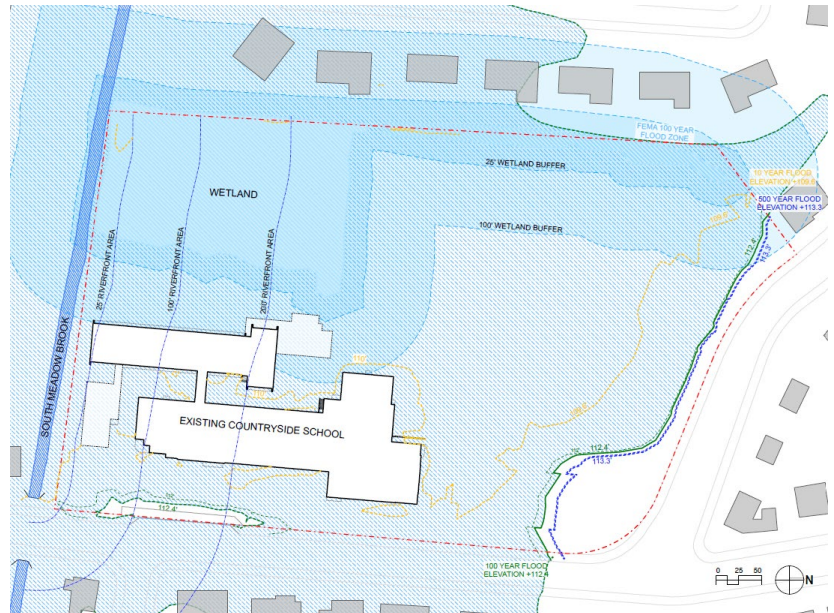
There are various accessibility issues with the site and building. The restrooms, playground, and doors are not

accessible. The ramp from the school to the “annexes” is not ADA or MAAB compliant. The boys’ restroom has accessible stalls but clearances for wheelchair access and maneuverability are insufficient. The girls’ restroom has no accessible stalls nor any wheelchair clearance. Overall, none of the restrooms in the building are accessible, which is deeply concerning.

*Stormwater and Flooding Issues*

The existing building location at the southeast corner of the lot sites on the Rivers Protection Act area, at an area where the water table is nearly at surface level, and the terrain does not provide significant drainage away from the site.

The resulting chronic flooding has damaged the school’s main electrical panel, creating a safety hazard. Makeshift measures have been implemented to keep the school intact during severe storms which result in flooding. For example, oil tanks are haphazardly strapped to one another to prevent them from floating away during flooding. Sump pumps are overworked and must be frequently replaced. Flooding especially effects the basement, where standing water can threaten HVAC systems and storage areas.



*Above: the above map from DiNisco Design shows the existing building location in relation to wetlands and protected areas.*



*Above: the above picture shows damage 9 feet up on the wall from flooding. Picture from 2021 via Public Buildings.*



*Above: the above picture shows a normal level of sitting water in the basement storage areas. Picture from 2021*

*Site and Facility Existing Conditions*

The Department of Public Buildings note many issues with aspects of the original building, annex, and modular additions to expand classroom space. The exterior walls of the modular classrooms have vertical wood siding that is in poor condition and, although repainted in the past five years, is chronically wet and rotting in some areas. There also is a crawlspace beneath the modular classrooms, hosting local wildlife such as skunks, compromising the building insulation.

Much of the school is poorly weatherized, with original windows that are single-paned in the annex and modular

areas. The heating and ventilation distribution system is original, with limited controls, and air conditioning only exists is limited to some of the modular classrooms. Exposed ductwork is noisy and may impact the learning environment.

Much of the plumbing is original to the 1953 building and sewage lines do not conform to code.



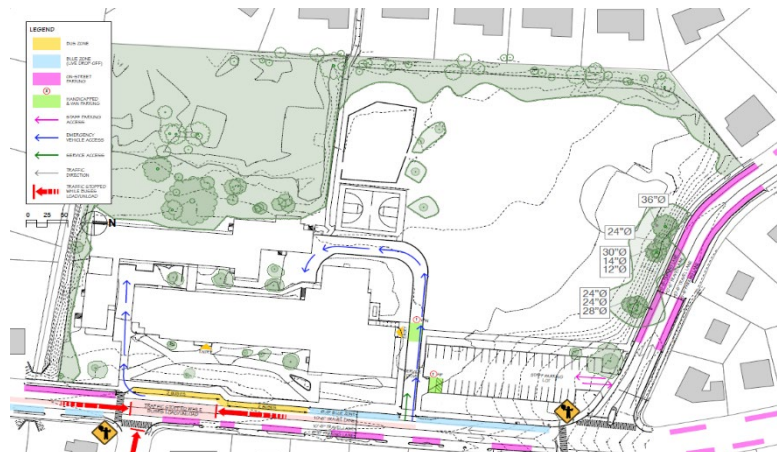
Above: the above picture shows loud and disruptive HVAC ductwork in the classwork. Picture from 2021 via Public Buildings.



Above: the above picture shows the access to the sewage pump, which is located in the nurse's office. Picture from 2021 via Public Buildings.

### Traffic, Circulation, and Parking

Currently, the lack of sufficient off-street bus loading and vehicle drop-off/pick-up spaces creates traffic congestion, impedes pedestrian safety, and creates inconvenience for students, guardians, and staff. With only two off-street bus loading spaces and a small drop-off/pick-up zone, traffic is either stopped or limited to one lane as the school opens in the morning and closes in the afternoon.



Above: the above map from Dore + Whittier shows the existing traffic and circulation.

### Section 2. Project Details



Left: Site Plan provided by DiNisco Design

## I. Site Plan Approval Process

Prior to construction at any municipal building, Section 5-58 of the Newton City Ordinance requires reviews of associated plans by the following:

- The Director of Planning and Development for consistency and compatibility with the Newton Comprehensive Plan and other applicable planning and analytical studies;
- The Design Review Committee for layout, construction, and relationship to surroundings;
- The Public Facilities Committee to provide a forum for public comments and discussion about proposed buildings and their locations, followed by City Council action.

Once the site plans are formally approved by these bodies, they become part of the final set of project plans and construction drawings and cannot be substantially altered without being resubmitted to the Design Review Committee and to the City Council. After the requirements of §5-58(a)(1) through (a)(6) have been satisfied, the City Council can appropriate funds for preparation of detailed construction drawings.

Work on the facility is slated to be completed in 20-22 months, after a bidding process projected to last 3 months. All work, including the interior utility work will be addressed in one phase. The project was presented by DiNisco Design and the Public Buildings Department to the Development Review Team (DRT) on July 26, 2023 with a follow-up meeting with the DRT on October 4, 2023. The project team has additionally met with the Fire Department, Fire Prevention, the Police Department, and the School Department to review building and site requirements and security features on September 20<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2023. Meetings to discuss traffic implications were held on March 30<sup>th</sup> and June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2023 including Newton's Traffic Advisory Group, Newton Public Schools, the Department of Public Works, Engineering, and Safe Routes to School. Additionally, the Newton Historic Commission met on August 24, 2023 and voted unanimously against preferably preserving the property, imposing demolition delay, and requiring any further review.

## II. Site Design and Building Design

The proposed new building will consist of 76,000 square feet, and allows for an increased enrollment capacity of 465 students. The proposed building will be sited on the northeast portion of the property with the parking area on the northwest. The siting of the new building represents a significant improvement to remove the building from the portion of the site within the 100-year floodplain and Rivers Protection Act area. The balance of the site, exclusive of the wetland area, will be utilized for a softball field, playground, outdoor learning spaces, pollinator gardens, and drop-off/pick-up areas. The existing building is 56,215 square feet including basement area and two stories while the proposed building will consist of 76,000 square feet and will measure three stories tall. This represents an increase of 25,240 square feet and an additional story. The proposed plan complies with the Newton Tree Ordinance and increases the protections to wetlands and the buffer area by concentrating impervious surfaces away and at a higher elevation.

### *Programming and Capacity*

The proposed building will be approximately 25,240 square feet larger than the existing school. With this added space the number of individual grade classrooms will increase to 22 while increasing the number and size of specialized classrooms, offices, and dedicated space for staff, support, and storage. There are to be twelve rooms and spaces for projects and small group work, ten classrooms for specialized or specialist education, to include special education, social and emotional learning, SPARK, and occupational and physical therapy. Additionally, there will be significant increases to the size of the gym, cafeteria/auditorium, a dedicated art room with kiln, and a dedicated music classroom. The proposed space appears prepared to accept additional

students or to reduce class size pending any future demographic or budgetary changes.

III. Technical Review of Site Plans Under Section 5-58

1. Location and Existing Site Conditions

191 Dedham Street is zoned as Public Use. The surrounding neighborhood is entirely residential and zoned Single Residence 2 and 3. The parcel is 322,065 square feet comprised of 120,000 square feet of impervious surfaces, about 65,000 square feet of wetlands, and 137,065 square feet of open space including play areas and a baseball field.

2. Proposed Improvements

The proposed Countryside School project includes demolition of the existing school, removal of existing parking, play areas, and some trees and vegetation and construction of a new school, parking, play areas, and planting of trees and vegetation. With the school being located away from the wetlands, new stormwater and utility services will be installed prior to construction. This relocation increases the buffer from wetlands and places the building on the highest portion of the lot, significantly increasing protection against stormwater.

The proposed 75,582 square foot facility will increase support and office space, small group and project space, and the space for the cafeteria/auditorium, gym, library, and art room. The building design will resemble the previous building in its primary use of red brick for the façade, however, it will feature significantly larger windows to increase sunlight to classrooms. The three-story design will have its primary entrance on Dedham St. with a pedestrian plaza and walkways behind the building. The site will feature a new softball field, multi-purpose field, pollinator garden, and playground.



Above: Site Plan provided by DiNisco Design showing first floor layout.

The parking area will be relocated to the northwest corner of the lot and feature 46 parking spaces for staff, 5 van parking spaces, and 2 handicap parking spaces. Improvements to traffic control and ease of drop-off and pick-up will be created by doubling the number of dedicated bus spaces to four spaces on Dedham St. north, adding a dedicated service and loading area, and roughly doubling the pick-up area on Dedham St. east.



Above: Traffic circulation diagram provided by DiNisco Design.

The proposed school is entirely above grade and at the highest point on the lot where water will drain away from. Additionally, the proposed building is sited further away from the Rivers Protection Act area and adjacent wetlands. However, portions of the building will remain in the FEMA 10-year and 100-year flood plain. While the playing field, playground, and parking lot will continue to provide flood storage if necessary, the building, with finished spaces two feet above the 100-year flood elevation, will have a significantly reduced risk of flooding compared to the previous building.



*Above: Stormwater management design provided by DiNisco Design.*

The proposed stormwater includes various low impact development practices including a porous pavement parking lot, bioretention areas, and drywells. The proposed design will increase the recharge to groundwater as well as improve the water quality of the stormwater prior to discharging into South Meadow Brook.

By adhering to the building code and achieving LEED Gold and electrification, the building will have significantly improved plumbing, electrical, HVAC, fire safety, accessibility, traffic, and sustainability. Construction plans will be submitted at the building permit phase and will be reviewed by Inspectional Services.

#### IV. Other Reviews

- **Newton Historical Commission.** Following the August 24<sup>th</sup>, 2023 meeting, the Newton Historical Commission voted unanimously that no further review or demolition delay is necessary.
- **Senior Environmental Planner.** The new location of the Countryside Elementary School places the school building outside of the Rivers Protection Act area and increases its distance from wetlands. The design elevates the building 2 feet above the 100-year flood elevation and increases flood storage capacity on the site. The design maximizes infiltration facilities, assisting with stormwater management and contributing to phosphorus control. This creates the conditions for the school as proposed to fully comply with all pertinent state wetland and stormwater regulations. The Conservation Commission will conduct a detailed assessment of the plans when they are finalized and submitted as part of a wetland permit application.
- **Associate City Engineer.** The proposed work will result in a net decrease in the amount of impervious surface on the site by consolidating into one three-floor building. Additionally, these impervious surfaces are now located further away from wetlands and waterways and on higher elevation, improving stormwater drainage. The new building will have an entirely new stormwater drainage system. The Engineering Division will review the proposed plans to ensure that drainage infrastructure is constructed according to City standards. The Engineering Division will also review soil testing and evaluations and publish an Engineering Memo as necessary prior to the issuance of a building permit.
- **City Transportation Engineer.** The proposed site adds more off-street bus parking and pick-up/drop-off areas and appears to alleviate some of the existing traffic created on Dedham St. by the current lack of adequate bus and student loading areas. A traffic engineering study of the site and neighborhood will be undertaken to study any broader traffic effects on the area, as well as potential improvements to the traffic equipment, crosswalk systems, and general circulation patterns in the immediate vicinity.

- **Fire Department.** The Fire Department and Fire Prevention met with the design team on September 20<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>. The proposal includes fire suppression systems will be installed throughout the new facility. The Newton Fire Department has reviewed the site and building concepts and has provided feedback to the design team. The Public Buildings Department will continue to coordinate with the Fire Prevention Bureau to meet all applicable safety codes.

V. Consistency with Newton Comprehensive Plan and Other Plans/Studies

While most of the Comprehensive Plan deals with non-public land and buildings, the Comprehensive Plan specifically addresses schools and municipal buildings in general with regards to environmental protection, energy conservation, and transportation.

With regards to energy and the environment, the plan calls to “to reduce energy consumption [to 7% below] and GHG emissions within the municipal sector alone to 20% below the base year 1998.” The proposed site plan will make the school LEED certified, fully electric, solar-ready, and will require less energy with improved weatherization and more efficient HVAC, setting the school up to contribute to those energy and emissions goals. Additionally, with improved HVAC and a newer facility that includes a sewer system that is up to the building code, indoor air quality for students will be improved. This is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan as it states “controlling indoor air quality is getting a great deal of attention by the Newton Schools Department to address numerous problems identified throughout the school buildings by each school’s Environmental Management Team (EMT).” The City also lists as a goal “to recognize, preserve and maintain the City’s important natural assets and resources including water resources –[such as]...brooks...wetlands.” The proposed relocation of the building increased the buffer between impervious surfaces and human activity and the wetlands and South Meadow Brook.

One of the goals of the transportation section is to “reduce school area congestion,” which this proposed site development appears to do through increasing off-street bus loading areas and off-street pick-up and drop-off along Dedham St.

VI. Site Plan Review Criteria

In accordance with Section 5-58, the City has filed plans for Site Plan Approval. These are to be reviewed in accordance with the procedure outlined in Chapter 30: Article 6, Chapter 5, Section 5-58 of the Revised Ordinances. The following is a review of the submitted plans against the relevant criteria established in this section.

A. Convenience and safety of vehicular and pedestrian movement within the site and in relation to the adjacent streets, properties or improvements

The proposal improves vehicular and pedestrian safety by removing bus loading and drop-off/pick-off sites from intruding on Dedham St. Currently there is only space for two buses and the pick-off/drop-off area is about 288 feet long and entirely on Dedham St. The proposal includes four off-street bus loading spots and increases the dedicated pick-up/drop-off area to approximately 310 feet off-street. This should mitigate the risk of through traffic interfering with pick-up/drop-off vehicles and vice versa to create traffic and accidents.





Left: Existing school traffic design provided by DiNisco Design. Bus loading areas shown in yellow and pick-up/drop-off in blue.



Left: Proposed school traffic design provided by DiNisco Design. Bus loading areas shown in yellow and pick-up/drop-off in blue.

**B. Adequacy of the methods for regulating surface water drainage**

The proposed relocation of the building creates improved stormwater drainage. The higher elevations of the north side of the site allows more opportunity for infiltration practices to be installed, meaning that the proposed location will offer significantly improved natural drainage. The existing stormwater drainage systems are inadequate, with no treatment, and flooding is frequent. The proposed stormwater system includes methods for infiltration as well as improved water quality. New systems should offer improved drainage, although further analysis from the City Engineer is required.

- C. Screening of parking areas and structures from adjoining premises. Location of parking between the street and existing or proposed structures shall be discouraged.

The proposed site design includes trees surrounding the parking areas and schools, providing adequate screening from abutters. The proposal exceeds the screening requires that would be required for outdoor parking facilities on private developments in the Newton Zoning Ordinance Chapter 30 Section 5.1.9.



Left: Existing school design provided by DiNisco Design demonstrates additional trees that will provide screening.

- D. Avoidance of topographic changes; tree and soil removal shall be minimized.

The construction of the proposed school on an entirely new site will require some surface leveling and removal of some young trees around the existing parking lot and around the existing building and its courtyards. However, the design team has paid careful attention to the City Tree Ordinance and deliberately placed the new building to preserve a group of oak trees on the north side of the lot as well as the existing trees located between the existing playground and ballfield.



Above: Planting plan provided by DiNisco Design shows proposed tree removal and planting.

As the proposed planting plan above demonstrates, the site will maintain the current number of trees and amount of vegetation. Additionally, the soil removed and disturbed will largely be from the existing parking lot and softball field rather than vegetated areas that provide crucial habitat and

stormwater drainage. Therefore, the impact of soil removal should be minimal, particularly given the lot is relatively level and no basement or subsurface building space is to be constructed.

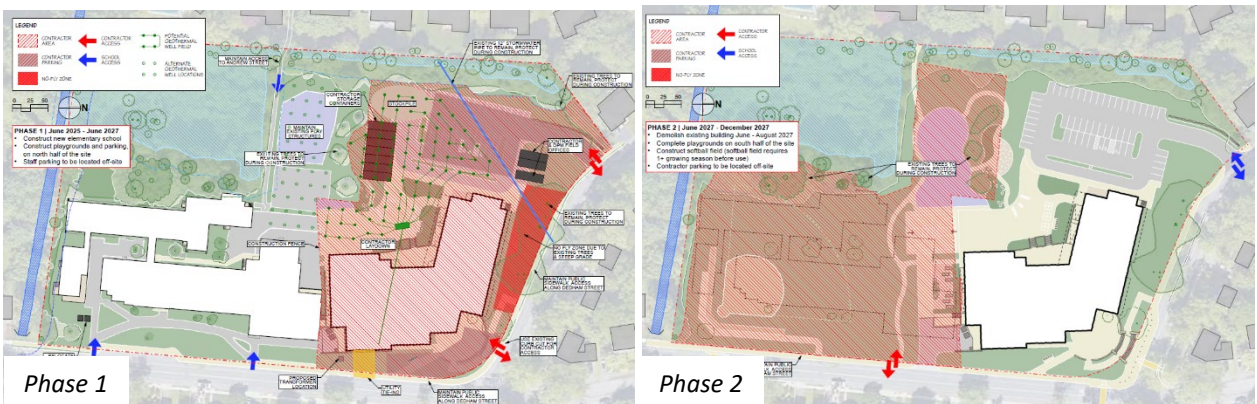
E. Consideration of site design including relationship to nearby structures.

The proposed new Countryside Elementary School at 191 Dedham St. utilizes a site design similar to other recently constructed schools in the City, in particular Newton North High School and Cabot Elementary School. The proposed design and similar designs primarily utilize red brick, keeping in line with traditional school design while utilizing large windows to keep classrooms bright and improve the learning environment. While the proposal plans for complete demolition of the existing school and an entirely new school results in a change and a more modern look that varies from the previous structure, the new building should be an aesthetic improvement given the current inconsistency in school design between the original brick façade building and the wood-sided and blue-painted annex and modular classrooms. The consistent design, blending traditional brick with more modern large windows. Additionally, the proposed landscaping, addition of a pollinator garden, and placement of trees around the school is in keeping with the landscaping of surrounding neighborhood properties and gives the school a verdant appearance that fits the context.

The school is surrounded by single-family homes and Single Residence 2 and 3 neighborhoods. Given the low elevation of the lot, setbacks of the school, and the protected wetlands, the addition of a third story to the school and relocation compared to the existing two-story school will have no significant impact on the abutting properties. Instead, the site design's addition of added off-street bus loading and pick-up/drop-off areas is likely to have a positive impact on traffic for the surrounding neighborhood.

VII. **CONSTRUCTION MANAGEMENT**

The contractor should submit a Construction Management Plan ("CMP") to the Director of Planning and Development, the City Engineer, the City Traffic Engineer, and the Commissioner of Inspectional Services for review and approval before any construction activities related to this project are commenced on the site.



Above: Construction phasing plan provided by DiNisco Design shows plan to minimize disruption to students.

This plan should identify hours of construction, expected length of construction, location of proposed on-site contractor parking, and material storage and staging areas. This plan should also incorporate preferences and input from neighbors, and the telephone number for the contractor's primary contact

person. Copies of the final approved CMP should be submitted to the Executive Office and each of the Ward 5,6, and 8 Councilors who represent the areas the school serves.

#### VIII. **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Director of Planning and Development has determined that the preliminary site and architectural plans for the proposed Countryside Elementary School are consistent with the *Newton Comprehensive Plan* and any other relevant plans and studies, including the site plan review criteria listed in Section 30-23. The proposed building offers remedies or improvements to the issues with the current building that could not otherwise be offered through renovation. The new school should greatly benefit the surrounding neighborhood far beyond the impact of construction or any other potential inconveniences of the new building.

With that in mind, the Planning Department wishes to offer the following items for consideration:

- Additional information about the need for improvements to existing pedestrian access and safety, to include any need for increased signaling for crosswalks and traffic calming.
- While the roof will be solar-ready, a cost estimate for providing solar at the onset, prior to the construction of the building's utilities connections and electrical system may be useful to determine long-term energy savings.

**If the Council, Executive Office and School Committee choose to approve these plans, prior to applying for Building Permits the Public Buildings Department should submit:**

- 1) Any revised plans showing any alterations to proposed driveways, pick-up/drop-off areas, or landscaping to the Planning, Engineering, and Fire Departments;
- 2) Final material samples to the Planning Department, where warranted;
- 3) A construction management plan to the Planning, ISD and Engineering Departments and Ward 5, 6, and 8 Councilors.

#### IX. **Attachments**

**Attachment A: NHC Letter, August 24, 2023**



Ruthanne Fuller  
Mayor

# City of Newton, Massachusetts

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Barney S. Heath  
Director

## Newton Historical Commission Demolition Review Decision

**Date:** September 15, 2023 **Application #** HRA-23-131

**Address of structure:** 191 DEDHAM ST

**Type of building:** Other - Public Elementary School  
If partial demolition, feature to be demolished is

The building or structure is:

- in a National Register historic district or in a historic district eligible for listing
- individually listed on the National Register or individually eligible for listing.
- importantly associated with historic person(s), events, or architectural or social history
- historically or architecturally important for period, style, architect, builder, or context.
- in a local historic district not visible from a public way

is  **NOT HISTORICALLY SIGNIFICANT** as defined by the Newton Demolition Delay Ordinance.  
*Demolition is not delayed and no further review is required.*

is  **HISTORICALLY SIGNIFICANT** as defined by the Newton Demolition Delay Ordinance (See below).

The Newton Historical Commission staff:

**APPROVES** the proposed project based upon materials submitted see below for conditions (if any).  
*Demolition is not delayed, further staff review may be required.*

**DOES NOT APPROVE** and the project requires Newton Historical Commission review on this date August 24, 2023 (See below).

**Conditions:**

The Newton Historical Commission finds the building or structure:

is  **NOT PREFERABLY PRESERVED**  
*Demolition is not delayed and no further review is required.*

**Owner of Record:**  
Josh Morse

is  **PREFERABLY PRESERVED – (SEE BELOW).**

**Delay of Demolition:**  
 is in effect until \_\_\_\_\_  
 has been waived - see conditions

Please Note: if demolition does not occur within two years of the date of expiration of the demolition delay, the demolition will require a resubmittal to the Historical Commission for review and may result in another demolition delay.

Determination made by:

Mollie Hutchings, Chief Preservation Planner





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# City of Newton, Massachusetts

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## RECORD OF ACTION

**DATE: September 15, 2023**

**SUBJECT: 191 DEDHAM ST**

At a scheduled meeting and public hearing on August 24, 2023, the Newton Historical Commission, by vote of 0 to 7:

RESOLVED to: Find the building preferably preserved. The motion failed.

Voting in the Affirmative:

Voting in the Negative:

Abstained:

Recused:

Mark Armstrong  
Nancy Grissom  
John Rice  
Harvey Schorr  
Anne Marie Stein  
Scott Friedman, Alternate  
Doug Cornelius, Chair

Title Reference:

Owner of Property: Josh Morse  
Deed recorded at: Middlesex County Registry of Deeds  
Book/Page  
Date

Mollie Hutchings, Chief Preservation Planner

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