



Design Review Committee  
PUBLIC BUILDINGS DEPARTMENT  
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**Ruthanne Fuller**  
**Mayor**

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Honorable City Council  
City of Newton  
1000 Commonwealth Avenue  
Newton Centre, MA 02459

25 Oct 2023

RE: Countryside Elementary School Project, 191 Dedham Street

SUBJECT: Site Plan Review and Approval

Honorable City Council:

On Wednesday, October 25, 2023, the Design Review Committee, DRC, and the Countryside School Building Committee, CSBC met and reviewed the proposed site plans, building floor plans, and architectural schematics dated October 25, 2023, as submitted by DiNisco Design Architects on behalf of the Public Buildings Department and Newton School Department for the above referenced project.

The City of Newton, in collaboration with the Massachusetts School Building Authority, MSBA is proposing to demolish and replace the existing Countryside School with a new 76,000 SF school located on the corner of Dedham and Walnut Streets. The new school provides 21 classrooms with educational support spaces, cafetorium, and gymnasium to accommodate a design enrolment of 465 students as previously voted by the School Committee and agreed upon with the MSBA.

The building envelop design will comply with the newly adopted opt-in stretch code. Materials will include masonry, metal panel and insulated glass, and will be selected to reduce the embodied carbon of the project. The building will be all-electric with a Ground Source Heat Pump (GSHP) mechanical system, making it the city's first geothermal project. The design will also allow for future photovoltaic panels to be installed on the roof and as solar canopies over the staff parking area.

The new structure is located such that first floor is above the 100-year flood elevation and provides universal access, enhanced storm water management, and improves on-site flood storage within the flood plain. A new bus loop separated from the traffic lanes will be located on Dedham Street at the north end of the site, and improvements will be made to the intersection and street alignment. Pedestrian access will be along Dedham and Walnut Streets with new pedestrian crosswalks. Pedestrian access will also be maintained from Andrew Street. Staff parking and Van Drop-Off/Pick-Up is to be located on-site at the western side, and Blue Zone Drop-Off/Pickup is located on Dedham Street on the east side of the site. All three areas have access to the main school entry lobby. The site design features include a fully accessible playground, hard surface play areas and new field space. Landscape features include bio-retention areas, pollinator gardens, tree infiltration areas, and pervious pavement. Landscaping and trees will be planted throughout the site.

The Design Review Committee determined that the proposed site plan, building floor plans, and architectural schematics are appropriate. The Committee believes that the proposed circulation and placement of building and associated site functions are a good solution to a site that presents a challenging topographical landscape. The Committee voted unanimously to recommend that the project be presented for site plan approval, in accordance with Section 5-58 of the Revised Ordinances. This letter is to petition the City Council on behalf of the School Department for Site Plan Approval. The DRC identified the following areas of design which are to continue to be developed and evaluated. It is understood that the Public Buildings Department and DiNisco Design will continue to work with the DRC, CSBC, and city staff in the completion of the schematic design phase and all future design phases.

- The design team should continue to take an integrated design approach to the building's design through its mechanical systems, building envelope, floor to floor heights, ceiling heights including the height and extent of glass and glazing, methods of sun control, day lighting, electrical lighting, and sound control. All components should be designed to promote efficient building performance and reduce overall energy consumption, consistent with both its purpose and context. This process should include life cycle cost analysis in the vetting of building systems.
- The design team should provide updated LCCA for GSHP + VRF option for verification. The team continue to strive to meet, or exceed, our sustainability goals. This should include further study and evaluation of geothermal, on-site PV, and other methods of driving down our energy use intensity, as Newton strives to reduce its' carbon footprint and pushes towards net zero buildings. The building will be heated and cooled using no fossil fuels on site. The building design and specifications should be developed in a practical manner that facilitates conversion to higher efficiency systems coupled with LCCA to drive our energy intensity down to achieve net zero.
- The project team should evaluate alternative locations for the backup generator and transformer, and options for visually and acoustically screening equipment.
- The project team should evaluate options for guardrails and bollards for pedestrian safety along bus loop and entry plaza.
- The team should develop a site photometric plan to confirm adequacy of exterior lighting, and to ensure that direct glare sources are appropriately cut off in response to the significant grade changes.
- The design team should continue to investigate site conditions to refine storm water management design options including alternative location of pollinator garden and landscape relative to playground. The design team will review options with Planning and PR&C for providing additional trees within the wetlands buffer. The project will coordinate with DPW, and Planning with respect to potential improvements of the intermittent stream and the South Meadow Brook.
- The design team will evaluate pathways and look to reduce and simplify. The team will review with PR&C potential netting between left field and the wetlands.
- All facades of the proposed building addition should be refined to address concerns over massing and buffering of the building from the abutting properties.
- The project team should continue to work with NPS, DPW Traffic staff, and city Accessibility Coordinator to ensure that the plans work well with the site distribution and pedestrian and bicycle safety, as well as developing a Parking Management Plan that identifies opportunities for accessible loading zone(s).

Sincerely,



Ellen Light, AIA, LEED AP BD+C



Thomas P. Gloria, Ph. D.

Design Review Committee, Co-Chairs

CC: Joshua R. Morse, Commissioner of Public Buildings  
Jonathan Yeo, Chief Operations Officer  
Maureen Lemieux, Chief Financial Officer  
Dr. Anna Nolin, School Superintendent  
Liam Hurly, Deputy Superintendent/Chief Administrative Officer