

Riley, Kate

Subject: FW: Letter from concerned citizens re: Tobin/VLUS

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From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, December 9, 2019 6:01 PM
To: City Manager <CityManager@CambridgeMA.GOV>
Subject: Letter from concerned citizens re: Tobin/VLUS

December 9, 2019

Louis DePasquale, City Manager, Cambridge

City Hall, Cambridge, MA

Dear Mr. DePasquale-

We write to you as teachers, public health advocates, urban planners, architects, and much more; but most importantly as longtime Tobin/VLUS neighbors with a number of significant foundational concerns and questions about both the process and plans for reconstructing the school building, and reconfiguring Callanan Park and the public open spaces. A smaller group of us would like to meet with you to discuss those concerns.

We should start by saying this: we know the current school needs to be replaced, and for the sake of our childrens' education and well-being as well as the city's future, we are 100% supportive of a new building (frankly most of us don't consider the option of keeping the current building and adding on to it viable, and the architects don't seem to believe in that option either).

To distill our concerns about the three options which were presented a few weeks ago for the first time:

1-Layout/footprint: It seems like with every passing day there is new research showing that to thrive in school (and life) children need to move, be outdoors, learn to play together, and experience nature. And, of course, the community benefits from space that fosters outdoor recreation and brings people together for recreational activity as well. Assuming some additional number of students will be attending a new Tobin/VLUS, if anything, the new design should increase open/recreational space, not shrink it.

2-Traffic/safety: The representation of how traffic patterns, drop-off, car/bus routes, parking, and more in the proposed three options seem to us to vastly underestimate the implications of a school that increases in student size by more than 50%, and faculty and staff size by x%. We say "x" because we haven't even seen that estimate, which is a separate though related problem, as it is information that should have been provided.

3-Citywide holistic planning: Virtually all of us have been involved in some capacity with Envision Cambridge, with the Innovation Agenda, with Cambridge Digs DEEP, and more—all of which are supposed to inform decisions that are made about Cambridge's infrastructure, including its schools and public amenities. The proposals for the various programs to be housed at the new Tobin/VLUS don't appear to be connected or synchronized in any way with standing goals the city has committed to—and in fact at least some of it seems contradictory.

4- The process, particularly that related to the program expansions and the decision to permanently remove the ball fields, has been lacking in community input. We are aware of two community meetings to date related to the design scope of the Tobin/VLUS project; the February 2019 meeting on the site conditions was purely informational. Questions posed by residents at the April meeting about projected enrollment and programs, the building footprint and siting, and transportation/traffic plan were left unaddressed until the architects presented their 3 conceptual designs in November, each based on doubling the school population and significantly reducing open space. Those predetermined assumptions surprised many people.

Given the deficient public communication to date, we would like to speak with you directly and expedite the resolution of our concerns, so this project can move ahead apace. With so many questions having arisen about the very significant increase in the programs and population of the Tobin/VLUS that were offered for public consideration only a few weeks ago, we are concerned that the rush to choose a preferred footprint by the end of January will result in many people shut out of the decision process. That is not the right foot to start off on when proposing to spend \$250 million and four years on a project that will disrupt many people's everyday lives.

We will call your office this week to follow up on this request and schedule a meeting at the earliest possible date that is convenient for you with whatever smaller number of residents you think appropriate for a productive conversation.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Bill & Guillemette Simmers, [REDACTED]
Jon & Betsy Damian, [REDACTED]
Jodie Siegel, [REDACTED]
Janet Domenitz & Jon Scarlett, [REDACTED] Joy Hackel & Robin Lubbock, [REDACTED] Norma Finkelstein, [REDACTED]
Noam Kirson and Dana Yalin, [REDACTED] Mallory & Ylva Slate, [REDACTED] Ann Robbart, [REDACTED] Nancy Haslett, [REDACTED]
Vassal Lane Wendy Zens, [REDACTED] Scott Kenton, [REDACTED] Doris and Jessica Engelman, [REDACTED] Lynne
Carvalho and David Adamian, [REDACTED] Lucy Wilhelm, [REDACTED] Liz Marran and Karl Baden, [REDACTED] Y
Yesselman, [REDACTED] Nancy Menzin, [REDACTED] Ed Buck, [REDACTED] Emmanuel Stefanakis, [REDACTED]

cc: Jan Devereux, [REDACTED]
Patty Nolan, [REDACTED]