

Peter Sturges  
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May 20, 2020

Dear Superintendent Salim and City Manager Depasquale:

We are writing in response to the recent email update that you sent about the Tobin Montessori/Vassal Lane Upper School construction project (the "Project").

We are long term Cambridge residents and the parents of grown children who attended Cambridge Rindge & Latin School and the grandparents of children who attended the Tobin Montessori and Vassal Lane Upper School. Our younger grandchild is currently in the 7th grade at the Vassal Lane Upper School. We write on behalf of our grandchild and her family.

We can understand that the Project had to be delayed due to the impact of COVID-19. However, we were astounded to learn that the plan is to start the Project midway through the 2020-21 school year. Indeed, we find this decision very problematic for many reasons.

With schools closed since March due to the coronavirus pandemic, administrators, teachers, students, and families have been dealing with an extraordinary and unique disruption to the educational process. Assuming that school is able to resume safely this fall, everyone involved will continue to address difficult challenges after a significant absence and in adjusting to a "new normal." In addition, according to health experts, it is likely that there will be a spike of COVID-19 in the fall, combining with the flu season and COVID-19 in the winter. Moreover, as of today, the state has not even worked out the details of how and when schools will be allowed to open.

If the Project starts as proposed, teachers will have to open their classrooms in September, pack up in the middle of the year, and then open up again in an entirely new set of classrooms. After having made arrangements in the fall, parents will have to make new arrangements mid-year for scheduling, childcare, and transportation – while they themselves may be struggling with new or changed work situations. And the students will have to face yet more challenging and, quite possibly, harmful disruption in their lives. This will be particularly hard for the young children who will be just starting school as well as those who will be graduating from the Vassal Lane Upper School. The graduating students will be adjusting in the fall to school after a long absence, then switching to a different school in the winter, and then moving on to high school the following fall.

All of this disruption might be justified if the current school building were in danger of falling down or if there were a significant hazard: this does not seem to be the case. Indeed, if it were the case, there would be no justification for opening the building at all this fall.

In short, the Project should start after the 2020-21 school year. Waiting an additional few months will substantially reduce the challenges, difficulties, and risks that students, teachers, administrators, and families will be facing in the coming school year. In the interests of the wellbeing of the community, we strongly urge you and those responsible for the Project to reconsider the decision to start the project in the middle of the 20-21 school year as proposed.

Very truly yours,  
Peter Sturges and Sasha Lauterbach

cc: City Council and School Committee Members  
Ms. Kate Riley