



## CAMBRIDGE CITY COUNCIL

Alanna Mallon  
*City Councillor*

December 3, 2019

Dear Colleagues,

I want to thank the City and School staff, as well as the architects from Perkins Eastman, for the special presentation of the Tobin Montessori/VLUS building proposals to the City Council and School Committee at Monday evening's roundtable discussion. This was an important component to a critical community process, and it was informative for all who attended.

As we were time limited, I wanted to enter my concerns to my colleagues, city and school staff and the residents as part of the public record via this communication.

Overall, I have concerns about doubling the size of this school campus from 600 students to 1200 students. Before we agree to double the number of students on this site, we need to fully understand the future and the capacity of the two swing spaces that have been utilized for close to a decade while the Cambridge Street and Putnam Avenue campuses have been under construction. The Longfellow School has served as an elementary school swing space for Dr. M.L.K Jr. and King Open Schools, and the Kennedy-Longfellow School has served as an Upper School swing space for PAUS and CSUS. Once the Tobin/VLUS campus is complete, what is the future and what is the capacity for these swing spaces? Even if we fully renovate an elementary school, such as the Graham and Parks, we would not use both swing spaces. As discussed during the Universal Pre-K conversation on Monday evening, could the Longfellow School serve as the pre-school site that is being planned for the Tobin site? There are a great many factors that I don't feel confident we have the answers to at this time, and I would urge the City and the Schools to do that facilities inventory and provide us with the information so we can feel confident with a decision.

It was stated Monday evening, that the Cambridge Street and Putnam Avenue Upper Schools were built without significant space to grow, particularly in the middle schools. This is a considerable problem and a mistake not to be made again. We should be planning for \*some\* growth so that we can remove the unfair "caps" in 5<sup>th</sup> grade in the VLUS feeder schools to ensure socio-economic equity among the Upper Schools. However, I am concerned about adding the bulk of the middle school population growth into one school and planning to increase the school size by 50% (300 students to 450).



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The Vassal Lane Upper School is already the largest in the district and houses the entire 6-8<sup>th</sup> grade SEI population as well as several other complex programs. Given the complexity of this Upper School already, it seems unwise to plan for all middle school growth in this proposed building.

Maintaining the Open Space at this site and ensuring **at least two fields** than can be played on concurrently is critical. Losing 1+ acres on this site, and in particular going from three baseball fields to one baseball field and one soccer field – that cannot be used at the same time – is not acceptable for this site location and alternatives that will allow for two fields that can be used concurrently should be found. This open space and playing fields serve an important function for the students at Tobin Montessori/VLUS and should be maintained. Additionally, on nights and weekends, these fields serve as a community open space resource for the many families and residents who live in the neighborhood.

As my colleagues mentioned, the design should not include any surface parking, all parking should be planned for underground. This will help maintain the open space. Additionally, we need to plan the appropriate number of parking spaces to match the planned number of adults in the building who need parking. As we know, the majority of our teachers do not live in Cambridge largely to the high cost of housing and parking is a challenge at all of our schools.

As a City, we are proposing to spend close to a quarter of a billion dollars on this project, we should take the time to look at this project in relation to other goals of the city and have a more holistic process to ensure a thoughtful outcome that meets the need of the neighborhood and the City. I look forward to City staff and Perkins Eastman continuing to engage with the neighborhood, reviewing feedback from the community as well as the feedback they received on Monday night, and updating the options accordingly.

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