

Riley, Kate

From: Jennifer Woodfin [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, January 15, 2020 4:22 PM
To: City Council; City Manager
Cc: Riley, Kate
Subject: Fall 2020 Incoming Parent Feedback on Tobin School/VLUS project

Dear Mayor Siddiqui, Vice-Mayor Mallon, City Councillors and City Manager:

I am writing in support of the Tobin School/VLUS project. Specifically, I would like to advocate for the following:

1. Resolving the school design debate as soon as possible so that construction may begin on schedule
2. Conducting thorough environmental testing and mitigation to address concerns of toxic contamination from the underlying landfill
3. Expanding the publicly funded and subsidized preschool slots available in Cambridge by adding capacity at the school

Although I got this template from my neighbor and fellow advocate Kate McGovern, my situation is a bit different.

My daughter was born on 4/4/17. When I first heard about the fact that pre-K in Cambridge is only available to children born before 4/1, I was shocked and outraged.

Although my husband and I both graduated from MIT with advanced degrees and have a solid employment history, having a child rocked our budget and rocked my career. The same VC-backed agritech and biotech companies who had wooed me pre-kids turned cold and brutal as soon as work-life balance entered the equation. I found myself quitting two jobs in the span of three years following bullying and belittlement from leadership, one while pregnant and one with a toddler, and I have been unable to work for the past 9 months.

When I opened the envelope and discovered that my soon to be 3-year-old daughter had landed a spot at Tobin Montessori for fall 2020, I almost fainted. All I could think about was what a relief it would be to save \$20-\$30K per year on preschool.

Although I believe this school is the best option for our family, it makes me sick to my stomach to think of depriving another child of the chance to attend preschool at all by taking this spot. I am well aware that there are many families who are unable to access preschool for their children, through the luck of their birthdays or lottery numbers.

I hope that in the future, this is not a choice that families will have to make, and that all will have access to public preschool. I hope that any opportunity to add preschool seats during this renovation will be thoroughly reviewed and considered.

Simultaneously, I hope that the review process with regard to environmental concerns from the potentially toxic landfill on the site will be thoroughly and skillfully addressed, and that the debate over the project construction will not derail the project from ever beginning at all. In particular, for families who entered the lottery this year expecting to be able to drop off their child at the Longfellow school site on Broadway, it will be a significant hardship to begin the year at the old school, which is in the complete opposite direction for traffic and commute. I hope that this will be strongly considered, as 3-year-olds are the only children ineligible to ride the bus.

I know that opposition has been raised because of concerns about traffic and the number of children who would be served at this location. I hope that the city recognizes that investing in early childhood education is an investment that will bear fruit for all in the community.

1

Please feel free to reach out if I may further clarify these comments.

Best regards,
Jen