

RE: Penn Brook School Placement

Dear SBC Co-Chairs Michelle Smith and Ellie Sinkewicz:

Having reviewed the data submitted by the architectural firm DRA and our consultants for the project, MBC, I have several comments on the proposed placement of the Penn Brook School. My thoughts go back to the intent of 2011 spring town meeting and the task of the School Building Committee, to oversee a satisfactory and feasible design of a school that will meet the future needs of our school district. Our presentation that night focused on the many structural faults that are in immediate need of attention.

While looking at the best educational program is everyone's intent, we owe it to the taxpayer to look at cost savings when feasible. This should require a careful review of the project costs presented to us by our consultants. The SBC voted last week on a grade configuration and new building for the Penn Brook School that fits the district needs, but was also the most expensive option.

The last remaining site placement option is perhaps the most difficult choice we have faced. The choice of site placement has evolved from our original charge at town meeting, to looking at other town needs. Namely offsite improvements to Elm Street and satisfying the need for increased playing fields in Town.

An option to build in the woods has emerged that would meet those needs, but would create difficult challenges due to the topography of the land. These challenges would also increase the costs to the town by another 2.1 million dollars.

There are other offset issues involved with an option to build in the woods:

- The possibility of a second egress to Elm Street
- A future road access off East Street
- Abutting land purchases and possible land swaps

All these issues are feasible, but open up further difficulties to the process. A second egress to Elm Street would require for safety reasons, a wider route through an old cart path. The road is of cultural significance to the Historic Commission due to 500 feet of old stone walls that mark the bounds. Abutters on Elm Street, who are seeing damage due to increasing storm events, are wary of a road coming down from a steep decline that would exacerbate flooding.

An approximate 1500 foot road from East Street would require extensive drainage improvements to East Street, Central and Elm Street. The road would also require the taking of the Baker Adams land, generously donated to the Commonwealth with the intent of protecting this land in perpetuity. Baker Adams was a prominent citizen who bequeathed much of his will to the education and betterment of Georgetown residents. I believe this land taking would tarnish his legacy.

For these reasons, I believe the best option would be for the placement of a new building in the existing fields. I know this would cause a temporary hardship on our current field usage.

A compromise solution that could lesson the impact would be a project to place fields in woods. I believe this could be achieved with less site work and would not require a road network if continued out from the current parking area. A separate warrant article could be presented for such placement at the most convenient town meeting.

I apologize for not being able to make tonight's meeting. Please accept these comments in lieu of my presence.

Respectively,

George Comiskey  
Member - SBC

CC Ed DesJardins – Chair, Georgetown Historic Commission