

**Town of Needham
Select Board
Special Meeting
Minutes for September 25, 2025
Broadmeadow Performance Center
120 Broad Meadow Road
Needham, MA 02492**

6:30 p.m. Call to Order:

At approximately 6:30 p.m., Select Board Chair Heidi Frail welcomed everyone and asked the Chairs of each board to convene individually.

A meeting of the Select Board was convened by Chair Heidi Frail. Those present were Vice Chair Cathy Dowd, Joshua Levy, Marianne Cooley, Kevin Keane, and Town Manager Katie King. Also present were Deputy Town Manager Liz LaRosee, and Deputy Town Manager/Director of Finance Dave Davison. Also present were the School Committee, School Building Committee/Permanent Public Building Committee, Finance Committee, and Planning Board. Further, a non-quorum membership of the Park and Recreation Commission and Conservation Commission were present. Staff supporting each committee were present, as well.

6:35 p.m. Town Manager Katie King welcomed the group and acknowledged the significance of bringing all of the Town's boards together. She explained that each board will have a vote at some point in the process that either will materially shape the Pollard project or will determine its viability. Ms. King said that there is wide consensus in the community that this is a priority project for the Town to meet the needs of our students and that partnership with the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) is vital. Ultimately, the School Building Committee (SBC)/Permanent Public Building Committee (PPBC) must narrow down the current seven options to one for schematic design.

Ms. King outlined the four major decision points involved in the Pollard Project:

- Site: current Pollard site or DeFazio Fields
- Grade configuration: 6-8 or 7-8
- New build or renovation
- Size and scope of the auditorium

Ms. King reviewed the purpose of the meeting: To have Town Boards and Committees understand and discuss the advantages and challenges of both the Pollard site and the DeFazio site for the construction of either a 7-8 or 6-8 Pollard Middle School. She asked each board or committee to consider the essential question: Can the Boards provide guidance to the SBC/PPBC whether to eliminate a site option from the feasibility study? She explained that each board would be asked to deliberate for 15 minutes and share their discussions publicly with the group prior to the vote by the SBC/PPBC.

Superintendent of Schools Dan Gutekanst said that throughout his nearly 20-year tenure, he has witnessed numerous examples of strong collaboration in the Needham community. He then presented a PowerPoint update on the Pollard Middle School Building Project Feasibility Study. He reviewed the advantages and challenges of both the Pollard and DeFazio site options, noting that the field spaces at DeFazio would be temporarily impacted in any scenario.

Matt LaRue, associate principal for HMFH Architects, explained the new construction options, including the advantages and trade-offs associated with both sites.

The Superintendent recalled the jurisdictional land swap that took place at DeFazio in 2016. He then reviewed the advantages and challenges of the DeFazio option. The current goal is for the SBC/PPBC to present one site option to the MSBA by December 18, 2025 with the aim of the MSBA voting to approve the project entering the next phase, with a Town Override Vote in November 2026.

The Superintendent led a question-and-answer session regarding the Pollard Middle School Building Project Feasibility Study.

Planning Board member Adam Block asked about site circulation and how the community would access the remaining fields during construction. Mr. LaRue said that separating buses from parent drop-off will be important to avoid traffic backups. He noted that managing traffic will be a challenge at either site. He said that a traffic engineer will explore mitigating the impact.

Finance Committee Vice Chair John Connelly asked about the thinking behind the decision to request tonight's joint discussion and vote. The Superintendent said that he has learned that the MSBA requires at least five options as part of the Preliminary Design Program (PDP). The designers have also received feedback from the Park and Recreation Commission that the DeFazio site presents challenges. The Superintendent added that if DeFazio is an improbable site, the Town needs to recognize that.

Planning Board Chair Artie Crocker asked clarifying questions about the theater design options. Mr. LaRue explained that the addition/renovation option calls for the theater to be refurbished on the existing footprint.

Park and Recreation Commission member Cynthia Chaston asked if the current Pollard site would be turned into fields if DeFazio is selected as a site. The Superintendent said that while new fields are certainly an option, the use of the site would ultimately be a community decision.

The Superintendent confirmed for Planning Board member Natasha Espada that no swing space is currently under consideration.

Finance Committee member Steve Maxwell asked about the implications of building a new facility solely on current school department property. Building Design and Construction Department Director Hank Haff explained that the Department of Public Works Master Plan must be enacted first before the Pollard Project, therefore that option would require a full stop of the current Pollard planning process.

Each Board discussed its response to the question: Can the Boards provide guidance to the SBC/PPBC whether to eliminate a site option from the feasibility study?

The Select Board and Park and Recreation Commission recommended that DeFazio be removed from consideration. Several members of the School Committee expressed disappointment with the speed with which some stakeholders were willing to dismiss the DeFazio option, but agreed to removing it from consideration. The Planning Board and Finance Committee preferred to continue studying both sites through the remainder of feasibility. The Conservation Commission representative expressed concerns about the challenges at DeFazio but conveyed that the Commission had not taken a position on the matter.

School Committee Chair Michael E. O'Brien summarized the feedback presented, which did not yield a strong consensus. He noted the significance of the Town's seven boards coming together to discuss this critical project. He thanked the design team for creating the models and renderings. A second summit is being considered for later this fall to provide guidance to the SBC/PPBC as it seeks to narrow the project down to one design option.

Chair O'Brien noted that following adjournment of the joint meeting, the SBC/Permanent Public Building Committee will continue its meeting to discuss the feedback and vote regarding the submission of a supplemental report to the MSBA.

8:26 p.m. At approximately 8:26 p.m., each board individually adjourned.

Motion by Ms. Frail that the Board adjourn. Second by Ms. Dowd.

Ms. Frail: Yes

Ms. Dowd: Yes

Mr. Levy: Yes

Ms. Cooley: Yes

Mr. Keane: Yes

A list of all documents used at this All Boards Summit is available at: <https://www.needham.k12.ma.us/common/pages/GetFile.ashx?key=aEKCBBW5>

A video recording of the September 25, 2025 All Boards Summit can be found at <https://needhamchannel.org>.

