

St. Joseph's-Alexander McKay Elementary School Steering Team (SST) Meeting Meeting Minutes #1

Date: Feb 11th, 2021

Time: 6:00 pm – 8:00 pm

Location: Microsoft Teams Meeting

Attendees:

Name	Organization
Peter Wicha	Facilitator, HRCE
Amy Hunt	Acting Principal, St. Joseph's-Alexander McKay Elementary
John Moshett	School Guidance Counsellor
Suzy Hansen	Parent & SAC Member, St. Joseph's-Alexander McKay Elementary
Creighton Barrett	Parent & SAC Member, St. Joseph's-Alexander McKay Elementary
Matt Neville	Parent, Urban Planner & SAC Member, St. Joseph's-Alexander McKay Elementary
Paul Lenarczyk	Parent, Educator & SAC Member, St. Joseph's-Alexander McKay Elementary
Vince Vandenbrink	Parent & Architect
Peter Howitt	Regional Director, EECD
Joe MacEachern	Director of Finance, EECD
Darrell MacDonald	Director of Education Facilities Project Services, DIH
Pedro Martinez	Design Team Leader, DIH
Parsons Robyn	Project Manager, DIH
Tulk Roger	Project Manager, Stantec
Leif Fuchs	Lead Designer/CA, Stantec
Jacob Ritchie	Director of Operations, HRCE
Maryann Mason	Capital Manager, HRCE
Yanan Gou	Planner, HRCE

Regrets:

Name	Organization
Kim Casey	Acting Vice Principal, St. Joseph's-Alexander McKay Elementary
Katie Mott	Classroom Teacher, St. Joseph's-Alexander McKay Elementary

1. Call to Order & Introduction

- a. **Facilitator Peter Wicha called to order the St. Joseph's-Alexander McKay Elementary (SJAM) SST meeting #1 at 6:00 pm, Feb 11th, 2021**
- b. **Terms of Reference (Appendix A)**
- c. **Preamble**

Jacob Ritchie - Director of Operations, HRCE

It is a win for HRCE to get investment in this new project. This new school is an exceptional architectural solution to the educational issues at SJAM. It is great to see the community contributing and sharing in the process.

Given our experience to date with EECD and DIH (formerly DTIR), our expectation is that they and their design team will deliver a new school that meets the need and evokes leading educational design. It will not only be an educational asset but also an integral contributor to the fabric of the community for many years to come.

2. Project Description – EECD and DTIR

a. **Joe MacEachern - Director of Finance, EECD**

Outlined the parameters of school design. This new school will be a great solution to replace the existing SJAM school. The SJAM SST can provide advice on how we put the package together. From a very high level perspective, schools are designed for the scope and scale based on the Provincial Space Allocation program. This program tells us that certain spaces are required to deliver this school. There is a matrix of spaces required. The SST can contribute to the discussion of the interior adjacencies. In this case, we are going to build a new PP-6 School to replace the existing SJAM building.

If there are major issues that need to be addressed, we will create a Sponsor Group containing senior people from EECD, HRCE and DTIR. This group will filter through major issues and provide opinions or advice to EECD. EECD holds the budget for the project while DTIR are mandated to manage and deliver the new schools to HRCE. The budget authority resides with EECD. HRCE will be responsible to then operate the school. Again, the Space Allocation program drives the amount of area required for new schools. It is a standard to all new school construction.

b. **Darrell MacDonald - Director of Education Facilities Project Services, DIH**

In NS, we are progressive and invested in the training of staff with regard to school design. As the Director of Educational Facilities at DIH, DM is an Accredited Learning Environment Planner (ALEP) and Stantec has an ALEP on this design team. NS has invested in modern school design with the highest rate per capita of ALEP professionals in Canada. Nova Scotia sees the value in creating great buildings for our students and communities. I am excited to see SJAM evolve and expects a very exciting solution.

c. **Project Design Information - Leif Fuchs**

• **Site and Context**

To construct a new school on such a constrained site is the most challenging part of the project. Core Strategies: 1. Play and Green Space - looking at the site to identify area for green space/play space. South corner of the site is an ideal place for outdoor play and green space. Along Russell Street, we want to preserve existing trees with green space and buffer encircling the building. 2. Vehicles - We

decided to place parking to the shaded side of the site (shadow of adjacent building). It is the least desirable side. 3. Classrooms and Admin - The idea is to wrap classrooms and other enclosed spaces around the North elevation and these envelop more open common spaces, which are directly linked to green spaces and brighter southern exposed area.

Comparing the existing footprint to proposed, the new building is roughly comparable in size. As a LEED project, the important technical principle is sustainability. LEED, Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, is an international rating system for sustainable buildings. LEED covers aspects such as sustainable sites, water efficiency, indoor environmental quality, energy, materials and resources, etc. LEED v.4.1 is the strictest version so far. Government has mandated that all provincial capital building projects achieve a LEED Silver outcome. LEED starts in the schematic design process with scorecards to collect points relative to design attributes. There is a dedicated LEED consultant as part of the Design Team.

Other considerations include:

- ✓ Safety and Security for occupants, based upon the principles of CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design)
- ✓ Wellness (emphasized by Biophilic Design) - Biophilic design points the way toward creating healthy and productive habitats for modern humans. It brings nature into the space through visual and non-visual connection with nature. We also consider thermal and airflow variability, material connection with nature, and complexity and order through our biophilic design.

Building Design

The intent is to avoid heavy use of retaining walls and place the building within a green space. We will make up elevation difference using berms and slopes to create a green buffer along the parking lot to block view of it.

We have 3 main play areas. There are 2 along Russell Street, one of which is for PP in the lower area. A Food Garden is proposed along protected slope. Additional play area is placed on the other side.

Three dimensional views of Russell Street gives us a sense of elevations and changes in grades. Main entrance can be accessed here at grade. There are no steps and no retaining walls.

We start to think about what some of the themes might be like for the building design as we go forward. The school and communities it serves are rich in their history and cultural diversity. The design of the school is such that the story of the community can be celebrated throughout. For example, on the top floor, within the three story atrium space, is a storytelling room that can highlight the cultural aspects of the community.

Another theme guiding design principle - large central wall as a storytelling canvas. We are thinking about culture expression importance and to represent them physically in the building. The 'communicating' stair ascends through all three levels. The large wall continues along the entire length of the school and it is a connecting feature along the school

Main Level

Main level is accessed from Russell Street. You can enter school through secure vestibule and reception. Admin is immediately off this. Gym is located along Kaye Street and entered right off the lobby. Music is located directly off the Gym and the Cafeteria. The Gym is dropped while the Music room is elevated to support a stage. Window openings to Gym will be carefully considered to avoid glare, while allowing for natural light and views into the Gym from the school. Cafeteria and Seminar rooms are located on South exposure looking out to the Green spaces on South elevation.

There is potential for expansion of space above lower floor at Russell Street. View of the storytelling canvas runs through the building from South to North. Seminar room is located off Lobby.

Lower Level

Lower level can be accessed through stair from atrium or elevator. The first thing you see when you enter this level is neighborhood collaboration area and the lower grades such as PP, Primary and Grade 1. The concept of 'home and hearth' - youngest students are outside of home for the first time, so we designed smaller scale space to serve food that is less intimidating than the cafeteria. Reading recovery is also here and has access to outdoor play area. View of the floor plan was shared. Every classroom here has washroom and PP share washroom.

Top Level

Storytelling canvas runs vertically and horizontally. There are 11 classrooms on this level wrapping all around the North side of the building. There are extended learning spaces outside of those 2 groups of classrooms. Consider the open areas as little neighbourhoods somewhat contained but they are still very open. There is a Learner Common on the South side of the building, along with Maker Space and Library, which act as an additional collaboration space. Again, there is potential for future expansion to provide 3 classrooms and expansion of common space. View of the floor plan was shared. The storytelling space is an integral feature.

3D view of the storytelling wall, visual from the inside.

Darrell MacDonald - The intent for these open collaborative areas is for students to focus on maker/hands-on active learning activities. This will allow students to get away from the enclosed rooms. The idea is if you give teachers and students options then you are probably going in the right direction. Allow for collaboration.

Washroom design is about visibility and safety as is the design of the change rooms. Students in recently opened new schools have said this is their favorite design element as it eliminates bullying.

d. Question and Response

Q. Creighton Barrett: How does the information get shared outside of this group? How to keep people who are not here to be informed?

R. Darrell MacDonald: SJAM website will have updates on the status of the project. This is VERY preliminary and subject to change. We are in Schematic Design phase only. Once we land on consensus, we will transfer into Design Development. We then move into Construction Document phase. It is very fluid at the moment, and this is the time to make changes and not later. Distributing floor plans and details at this time is not desired, as they are very subject to change.

Q. Creighton Barrett: Who have authority on the design? When will the Minutes and information be posted to the public? When do we expect the phases to change? When is that supposed to happen?

R. Roger Tulk: I am the Project Manager with Stantec. Schematic Design completes in early April. Design Development completes shortly after that in mid-June. The Demo package of the existing building is to tender by end of March so contractor mobilizes end of June. Construction of main school begins in early 2022, with completion date of August 2023.

Q. Vince Vandenbrink: Would it be possible for SST to have presentation to look at more thoroughly and forth from the site plans to building?

R. Darrell MacDonald: Yes, we can provide high level design ideas/drawings, with agreement that they will not be distributed beyond this group.

Q. Vince Vandenbrink: The design of the exterior spaces - as a team could you describe what the decision-making process are to prioritize the activities that are taking place outdoor? All of the green space is a placeholder or what sort of programs will be happening in and around the playgrounds?

R. Darrell MacDonald: It is not going be all green. Some hard surface are planned for kids to play. The more grass the more mud. The students will travel around school with mud. We would like to receive input to effectively use the outdoor space.

Q. Vince Vandenbrink: The hard scape does not follow the biophilic standards. Kids at this age really look for hard surface for play opportunities. It appears to be 90% green rather than hard surface play area?

R. Leif Fuchs: Green space is a place holder. Basketball Courts, skipping and play areas will be there.

Q. Vince Vandenbrink: Vince suggests that he has school design experience. Is there possibility of looking at the expansion area on upper level? Could it become a Gym space instead? Just looking at if there is other ways to minimize structural cost, and find another way of organizing the lower floor plan to have classrooms look out on the opposite side?

R. Leif Fuchs: First and foremost the compactness of the site. The Gym is a 2-storey volume. We cannot have more above or below it without adding footprint and acoustic challenges for adjacencies. Secondly, there is a slope of 18' from one corner to the other with slate below. We need a school that straddles the grade and does not result in too much excavation. The concept works really well with the Admin wing at grade. Gym drops down a little to allow for the stage to happen so that the building can wrap around and down the hill and this works really well. Also, the Common Spaces on different levels are connected to the outdoor spaces. It would be very disruptive to the floor plan to have the Gym in the center. The Gym should not be located at the South corner given the sunlit exposure.

R. Darrell MacDonald: We walked through the building yesterday. At the library on the 2nd floor, we met a gentleman who knows the history of the community, the school, and Halifax explosion. He was a history buff and wealth of knowledge on the SJAM community. It was a great conversation. Somehow the storytelling wall really could use input from a person like that. Local stories and knowledge sharing using the wall will be wonderful contributions.

Q. Matthew Neville: What are provisions for active play on the site?

R. Darrell MacDonald: Normally we put a play structure on site. We will reuse the existing play structure if assessed to be sound. We try to optimize what is possible on this site.

R. Leif Fuchs: We have spent lots of time to reduce the footprint of the building without resorting to 4 storeys. We try to stack our space as much as we can logically to make it an efficient solution.

R. Darrell MacDonald: We are considering the inclusion of a "traverse climbing wall. Grips are located to not support climbing to unsafe heights. Children navigate it horizontally, thus the "traverse" part of the name. Climbing mounts are bolted right to the wall of the building and around the corner with soft safety tiles placed below it. This is one way to optimize active play.

Q. Matthew Neville: What is the importance of the area around the school? What is the importance of the PP play space as it takes away from the other play areas for Grades P-6? I am surprised to see washrooms are shared between PP classrooms? Are there washrooms in the PP classrooms?

R. Darrell MacDonald: DIH worked with PP Education and Early Childhood experts, the intent is once you come through double doors you are in PP land. The whole area is a separate zone. The washrooms do need to be accessible and there will be a dedicated kitchenette. PP's do not go up to main level cafeteria. The detailed configurations are not finalized. There is still a lot of work to do. Washrooms are shared within the PP 'suite'. The walls may not all be totally closed. The PP teachers are not isolated in each room.

Q. Amy Hunt: Share concerns around usage of outdoor space? Is there possibility of rooftop space? I have concerns around the number of classrooms. Currently there are 2 PP classrooms and 16 P-6 classrooms. It looks like the design has 15 P-6 classrooms and 3 PP classrooms. We will need additional P-6 classrooms. Leif did share room for expansion, but that the expansion will be necessary now. North End population density is growing faster.

R. Leif Fuchs: Actually the design shown does not reflect that we have already added 3 more classrooms. So there are **19 classrooms in total.**

Q. Amy Hunt: 1 of the 3 PP classrooms should be built to possibly convert to Primary or Grade 1 classroom. Currently the PP classrooms are not full.

R. Darrell MacDonald: Yes, one of the PP classrooms could be made to be flexible to convert to Primary classroom.

R. Leif Fuchs: We want to make sure outdoor space is fully used. Outdoor program and facilities will be developed and feedback from SST is welcome.

Q. Paul Lenarczyk: Is there a reason why we are not considering a 4-storey school? What is the reason that there are no auditoriums in schools?

R. Darrell MacDonald: It would be time-consuming for kids to traverse 4 storeys to get outside. When a teacher has 25 kids, it is time-consuming to get the kids out of the building to enjoy recess. Auditoriums are incredibly underutilized spaces. These are incredibly expensive buildings. We must be strategic and diligent that every inch of the building is used to its fullest. In Charles P. Allen (CPA) High School, they developed a cafetorium. At the cafetorium's first opening night, the Architect of the CPA cafetorium was standing behind the woman who had been very angry about the lack of an auditorium but she recognized that the way the designs are done now, will be able to facilitate performances. The advocate thought the CPA's Cafetorium is a great design.

R. Darrell MacDonald: One of the tasks is to identify potential elements that could be reused or relocated from the old building to the new one. This will enable carrying through a bit of the history into the new facility. As the designers work through the Demo package, they will identify what existing elements can be repurposed into the new design, such as stone or wood, granite. We will also reach out to local renovators to reclaim materials.

3. Next Meeting

Next SJAM SST meeting will be held on **March 4th, 6:00pm – 8:00pm**

4. Adjournment

- a. Facilitator Peter Wicha adjourned the meeting at 7:55pm, Feb 11th 2021
- b. Minutes submitted by: Yanan Gou
- c. Minutes approved by: Maryann Mason

APPENDIX A – Terms of Reference

St. Joseph's-Alexander McKay Elementary PP-6 School Steering Team (SST) Terms of Reference

The St. Joseph's-Alexander McKay Elementary School Steering Team (SST) is a group that represents stakeholders for the school community.

Role

- To work with the Regional Education Centre or Conseil scolaire acadien provincial (EC), the Department of Education & Early Childhood Development (EECD) and the Department of Transportation & Infrastructure Renewal (TIR) throughout the design phases of the project to provide input into developing the general floor plan layout and the overall design of the building.
- The SST acts as a key resource to gather input and provide information to the school communities they represent to enable a public connection to the school project.
- The SST is an advisory body, it does not have authority to approve project changes.

SST Membership

- Sponsor Group (members from EC, EECD, TIR)
- One (1) School Principal and Vice Principal from; St. Joseph's-Alexander McKay Elementary
- School Advisory Council Chair or Designate, Teacher(s), SAC Member(s), Parent(s)

SST and Sponsor Group Responsibilities

The SST is a key advisory resource for the Sponsor Group during the project. It will be most active during the conceptual and design development phases where prioritization of items is required.

During the construction documentation phase, the role of the SST changes as all design related decisions have been made and the SST becomes more focused on receiving status reports of construction progress.

If, however, matters arise in implementation of the project that have the potential to change the project goals and objectives, the SST will continue in its role as an advisory body.

The Sponsor Group will provide the SST with regular project status updates.