

St. Joseph's-Alexander McKay Elementary School Steering Team (SST) Meeting Meeting Minutes #2

Date: March 4^h, 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
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
Jacob Ritchie	Director of Operations, HRCE

Call to Order: Peter Wicha

Welcome back everyone. There has been good momentum to be meeting again within such a short period of time. The Minutes from SST #1 are now posted on the new school web site. EECD and TIR have sent the Schematics to the SST. As we move forward, Peter asks that there be some patience with responses to the written questions submitted after the SST. The SST was encouraged to follow the communications protocols with regard to reaching out to Peter Wicha as the first point of contact. The group as a whole was thanked for their their hard work and patience.

Considering the Minutes from SST #1, are there any questions related to those minutes?

Q. CB – timeliness between Meetings. A number of the SST felt it was hard to provide questions without having the presentation and Minutes circulated earlier to reference. Going forward, what should we be expecting about communication between the meetings and time lines of sharing files.

R. DM – It is an iterative process regarding the design. There is some concern about what to share with the broader public to ensure that all information is received with the intended context and stage of the design. We will endeavor to get the Minutes issued earlier. When we do post designs at this early stage, we need to provide caveats to confirm that these are very early and changes are to be expected. With both of these points in mind, we do expect to have a smoother delivery on the Minutes and any shared graphics before the next meeting.

Q. VV – It is exciting that the design is iterative. Vince would like to contribute an understanding of what the SST group feels is valuable within this particular community school. Perhaps we could consider issuing an NDA so that the SST can be provided with what is considered sensitive information?

R. DM – Interestingly, there was an NDA considered but on reflection, EECD, DIH and HRCE wondered about that approach perhaps being too heavy handed. Any distribution of

documents should be in the context that these are 'works in progress'. This is the kind of message that should be encouraged with the circulation of these documents.

Q. VV – The full committee is hoping that questions can be asked specific to the building program side of things. It is not just the individual team feedback but the group feedback that is to be provided as part of the process.

Q. AH - Communication point. There was an SAC meeting last night. When will we get to the point where we can share with the larger community on the process and status? The SAC represents our parents and the broader communities.

R. DM – Depending on what comes out of this current meeting and whether adjustments need to be made, something could be posted very soon. This, with the standard cautions that these are still 'works in progress'.

Peter Wicha – Just a reminder to the SST, please send your questions in writing and we will post them as soon as possible. We do value everyone's input and seek to respond in a reasonable timeframe.

Schematic Design Update

Leif Fuchs

The design has been significantly progressed within the relatively short time frame since our first SST meeting. Importantly, we have increased the amount of area outside for play.

Site Planning – we will review the graphics and discuss the following areas.

Existing School Grounds, Previous proposed Site Plan (SST #1), Revised Site Plan, Comparison and the New Building.

Site – Existing. Stantec undertook an analysis of the existing play areas. Largely they are adjacent to Russell and Kaye Street on either side of the existing building. The existing two

playgrounds have similar play equipment and some of it is in good enough shape to be re used and re located as part of the new school.

Site schematic as per SST #1. This showed the parking to the West and an L shaped building with the 'bump out' to Russell and play distributed largely along Russell Street. There was some concern that the play areas were not large enough in this configuration.

Site schematic as per SST #2 – Proposed Revision. The parking lot is now worked into the corner of Kaye Street which has opened up more opportunity on the Russell St. side. The interior spaces that formed the 'bump' on the Russell side have been reallocated within the larger building envelope. This has created a much larger area of contiguous play all along the Russell St. side. As we know, the upper and the lower play areas are mostly flat. Between the two is a slope and or terraced area. Images were shared of how the slope could add to the excitement and character of the play space by possibly incorporating a natural playground, slide, stepping stones and timbers up and down the slope etc. There could also be food gardens as well both here and elsewhere incorporated. Detailed design needs to be done in collaboration with the SST and school admin/staff.

Site – Outdoor Play Areas Proposed

Stantec undertook a comparison between the existing available play space and the proposed available play space. The proposed area includes soft and hard surfaces and is primarily located uninterrupted, along the Russell Street side. Fences and suitable berms and or protections will be incorporated to ensure that students and ball play do not end up out into the street areas conflicting with vehicles. A possible additional play area is located at the back of the building for Learning Centre students.

Site – Future Expansion. Two Options

Determination of future expansion options is under way. One option being explored is to expand horizontally over the parking lot. A second option could be to add a fourth floor which would straddle the core classroom and common space. Planning would be for this floor to

connect to the Atrium and core to maintain that continuity and forming part of the whole. This level would be connected via structural and services for future expansion.

Building

An explanation was provided by Stantec of the general layout to either side of the main entrance including the administration area and to the right, the Gym, Cafeteria and Music Room. The Music Room is at the same level as the cafeteria. There is a Classroom located along Russell Street side which 'could' be designated as the Core French classroom (*see below). There is a glass wall on both sides of the Atrium to allow natural light in.

DM – DIH and EEC'D's have had experience with other projects where after the delivery, the width of the doors had to be increased. For SJAM, the main stairway and the doorways are all extra wide for greater comfort and capacity.

Q. AH – * The classroom at the Russell side main level will likely be a regular classroom. The French Teacher is only at the school part time (half of the week) so likely not dedicated.

LF – If so, then the total classrooms available is **19**

We look at the Pre Primary levels. They are grouped in their own little suite including food prep. The 3 P classrooms are gathered around the Hearth and Home space. This is a smaller break out space to share food and to gather. A very pleasant and smaller scale area with lots of natural light and seating options. Access to the outside is direct for this age group.

The story telling area's remain central to the Atrium. There will still be small spaces designed for more intimate story telling. This area can be transformed into a performance space or into a quiet storytelling area through the use of an operable wall.

The story telling canvas/wall extends all the way through the building both horizontally and vertically.

We discussed the image of the Story Telling canvas spanning all three floors as a backing to the Atrium. The Communicating stair, which is extra wide, connects up to the 3rd floor common areas that include a story telling “nest”. It is an active and interactive core to the school. When you are in a common space in the school, the story telling canvas wall is there both in plan and elevation and throughout the floors.

On the top floor, additional classrooms have been added. The West wing is designed for the lower grades. These will all have access to washrooms. They will have a smaller more intimate neighbourhood area immediately outside of their classrooms that they can make their own through furnishings, break out group or educational sessions and small work spaces.

The other classrooms are arranged around a larger collaborative area. There is another small storytelling area that could be enclosed or open located at the Atrium and story telling wall again. Along the south face is the Learner Commons, to be a combination of the Library and Discover/Maker/Visual Arts. There is a large, generous storage area along one full wall here to support this space.

How to develop this area is yet to be detailed. Perhaps there will be low counters, sinks, shelving for books, or areas to support art? The SST can provide feedback to guide those details.

Collaboration Areas – these are extended classroom spaces. There will be opportunities for furniture placement, break out teaching, white boards and a wealth of flexibility. The Discovery Lab, the furniture and storage in this location will help to define how this space is used and made useful. Images were shared of how furniture can both enhance and shape the use of a space including; Lego wall, sinks, mobile maker cart, fun furniture etc.

Example of a Classroom Commons. Variety of teaching materials, opportunities for small groups and variety of types of teaching and seating. Flexible and varied seating areas to use, reshape and relocate. This is a good opportunity for displaying elements that cannot always be contained within a classroom. Projects or classroom materials. Learning and achievements displayed to the entire communities and enjoy interaction with the greater school population. Mixing the grades echo's a more naturalized environment and promotes a connection to the outside world.

Storytelling – provide a comfortable, intimate space that is dedicated to story telling.

The intent is to create spaces for the students to have fun, move physically and explore their environment.

Q. VV. There seems to be a great improvement in the design. There are better opportunities for more play space outside. Currently at SJAM, a lot of the kids use the playground spaces after school hours. It seems the use of the exterior is a great way to encourage and support this.

Q. Question for Amy. How many classrooms are in SJAM now?

R. AH. Currently SJAM has 15 Classrooms P to 6 but typically it is 16. Given the registration information, we are already looking at 3 Primarys however. With this in mind, a total of **19** classrooms is definitely better than the schematic design shared during SST #1. Amy said she love's the design, the changes, the fine tuning, it is very exciting. There is worry about the growth in the North End. The increase in population may come sooner than we think?

Q. VV. When looking for more space, the Common areas are often the first to go. Would like to flag the number of classrooms as a concern and that this will very soon be at capacity. He expressed concern about the isolation of the one classroom that was thought to be the Core French room along Russell Street. Where does this sit relative to the others?

R. LF – It may seem a little isolated, but this has been an ongoing design challenge.

R. DM – Regarding the number of classrooms. The DIH is designing to the projected enrollment numbers that HRCE has provided. The maximum projection out 10 years is 355 but DIH has designed the school capacity to 370. The classroom sizes are in the range of 825-840 sq ft. There is always that balance between the functionality of the rooms and having the open collaborative areas with regard to sizing the classrooms in the context of the greater building. How many classrooms can we fit within a collaborative and flexible space.

Q. CB. It is exciting to see what has changed and many of my questions have been answered. It is nice to hear some solid numbers on the projected enrollment. Back to discussing the space around the Library and Discovery Center...asking about the Library component. These new plans include a distinct and discreet space for a traditional library with books? There has been a trend to turn libraries into learning commons environments, what is the impact on book culture? Concerned about a library that is being used for multiple things

R. DM – some feel that an open approach is not the best way, however the story telling area can be closed off and used as a quiet space. Increasingly the library is more open and it includes a mix of spaces both quiet and on the noisier side. You can go to the storytelling for enclosed and quiet space, for example. Bible Hill Elementary school is a great example of this approach which has been lauded by the school population there.

R. LF – these will be distinct spaces relative to programming. Shelving for books, seating, quieter space and louder space. It will not be a large uninformed room. They will be designed to do their job.

R. PH – Furniture will help to organize the space and give it a sense of presence.

Q. CB – what was not seen in the images is books.

R. DM – we are not at that level of detail yet, as we are still in the Schematic Design stage.

Q. CB – ensure that the book collection at SJAM now will be brought over. Let's keep storage of books in mind.

R. DM – On behalf of programming, whomever deals with the Library functions, they are fully involved and engaged with the detailed design process yet to come

R. PW – there has been a big effort over the last years to bring books back into the classrooms. Every classroom has the appropriate grade level of literature. There are so many books at EEDC that just arrived for classroom and teacher use. While the number of library books have not gone up, the number of books within the classrooms has gone up significantly.

Q. AH – in the space at SJAM now, the library use of space has evolved. Although there is still the transactional borrowing and lending. We are fitting our pedagogy into the traditional space. Architects will work with Amy on what the library looks like. We want to preserve that time and space for kids to get 'lost' in their reading. In classroom, there are libraries there now too. We are not moving too far from this. The story telling circle can be enclosed and insulated.

R. DM – yes. The choice of opening or closing through operable walls.

Q. MN – very pleased. The gaps in the first presentation have been filled in. The exterior play space has really improved, thank you. Curious about the space constraints to expand? Currently it is only 2 stories on one end and 3 on the other. What is the design thought of keeping it quite low on the St. Josephs side.

R. DM – Considering the main floor and the important and appropriate spaces that belong there, it is difficult to say that we could relocate the Gym, Music, Lobby, Cafeteria, Admin out and move to another floor. There is not much more that we could put on the 4th floor to save space.

Q. MN – wondering about more classrooms on the third level. It seems quite low being a two story is there an opportunity for another level and classrooms.

R. DM – re expansion. The design detail has not yet evolved to confirm exiting, washrooms, the logistical details, etc. that must be resolved as the design progresses.

Q. MN – the open spaces are they chopped up moving forward to try to isolate and provide quieter space?

R. DM – interestingly, in 2013 the Bluenose Academy was the first in this style. Some are more grand in terms of the open areas such as at Bridgetown or Yarmouth. Folks are enjoying having the options and flexibility. Acoustics are important, agreed. The operable walls are quite good sound barriers. There has been very positive feedback, which is why TIR continues to utilize these walls.

Q. CB – Building on the question of noise and building materials. The partition between the Gym and Music room. The potential of opening this up is enjoyable. Is there noise happening between the gym activity and music activity.

R. DM – nothing is 100% but there is a very good, high quality operable partition between the two spaces. There have not been complaints to date on this partition between these two spaces in other sites where this application was used. Even in Junior High's where they have bands. It has been successful.

Q. VV – Considering the building massing on the street and functionality of the school, it appears to be relatively large in footprint but low in height. Is there a study to explore a third story in total?

R. DM – We might ask, to what end? There is a lot of functionality that needs to be on the main floor. What can we move from the main floor to the next level? The Gym, Cafeteria, Music Room all tend to want to reside on the main level.

Q. VV – The ramps on the second story. Is that because of the Gymnasium?

R. LF – the Gym itself is high with a large span so a deep structure is required. The remainder of the school does not require this floor to floor height over the Admin wing and Cafeteria, to reduce costs, the Gym was dropped by a meter and Music and storage as well. This has resulted in a couple of ramps. We do not want a school with multi levels, as it is too complicated.

These are very shallow ramps because they assist with reconciling the height differential.

Adding a floor to the Gym would bring us above the zoning allowance along the street which is 30'. The Gym is not like a condo where there is 9' floor to floor. The building is not as low as one might think. It is actually quite high.

The second reason. We endeavor to make the school feel like one space. It is harder to have the feeling of commonality with a fourth floor. The more floors you add the more difficult it is to make the Atrium work. A couple of these are the reasons why an additional floor was not pursued.

Q. MN – if you continue to increase the site coverage at the expense of open space it becomes a problem. As you start to build in an increasingly dense environment, this becomes a problem.

R. DM – We feel that this is a very efficient building when you consider all the constraints that have challenged the design team.

Q. MN – I am pleased to see the changes and I do agree, the design is moving in the right direction.

R. DM – It is a balancing act that is quite successful.

R. PH – Safety. If there is a need to evacuate the building, fewer floor levels expedites the exiting. There are competing interests here that contribute to the two floors

R. DM – There is also the consideration of what the parking, washrooms and play areas can handle in terms of capacity. There is a tipping point in terms of diminishing returns.

Q. JM – the design looks great. The only concern, is again the growth in the North End.

R. DM – HRCE, and the Boards enlist the services of a professional demographer who develops the data and analysis to build the projected enrollment numbers. The current design exceeds the projected enrollment forecasted for the next 10 years.

Q. VV – What would you move from the main floor to the upper floor? Vince has seen it handled and dealt with to move the Gym from the ground floor to the second floor. Has the team cited efforts previously to do this.

R. DM – JL Ilsley has the Gym on the second floor. It required increasing the structural design to accommodate. In this case we are putting it on the main floor. If we go below the gym there is pyritic slate which is problematic from an excavation and disposal perspective. Again, locating the Gym was analyzed on a number of levels.

R. LF – we chose to go above to remove the impact of noise, reduce costs, site constraints etc.

Q. CB – Regarding the gym. When you build schools, the gym may also be a recreation space for the community. Are there design considerations that you factor into this for weekend access?

R. DM – yes, we do consider public access. What you see on the Main floor is largely public space. There is a secondary entry from Kaye Street but typically most people will come in through the main doors. Every school in the Province, is built to a Provincial Standard that is flexible to grade levels etc. So, an Elementary school gets the standard sized gym for an elementary school.

Q. CB – if the gym at SJAM would be designated as a community rec space would HRM need to be involved now?

R. DM – there is an agreement where community use of the school is managed and scheduled by HRM. DIH knows this from the start and works to accommodate this.

Q. CB – in the neighbourhood there is not a lot of indoor space to take kids. It would be great if this school could be used after hours for the kids

R. DM – the new gym is significantly larger, higher and better equipped than your current gym

Q. AH – the current gym only has a Vinyl Composite Tile on concrete as a flooring material. It is hard and slippery.

R. DM – a very high quality sports floor will be installed. You need a high quality synthetic due to the size of the kids. This detail will be discussed in the detailed design.

Q. VV – the idea of using the roof as a playground space. Is this being considered? This can be a well used space and amazing how it can transform the space.

R. DM – that is a very expensive proposition. The Province works hard to allocate funds Province wide and not just for the new schools within the HRM area.

Q. AH – can we look at the Russell street play area. How to imagine separating or not the various play areas. Could you explain the grade and different things. Is the play next to the parking for Basketball or more for climbing? Interested in supervision etc.

R. LF – this is not yet detailed out. Upper area is flat, then the slope separates this from the flat area below. PP needs to be enclosed and fenced in. It can be as open or separated as you like. Great visual lines from the Admin area. This can be discussed to meet your needs for hoops or for playground structures.

Q. AH – this is helpful. Teachers and staff will have a lot of feedback on this. The ‘ball in the street’ is a daily part of current life. Is there a dedicated entrance for PP?

R. LF – yes. We can put a vestibule in but yes, they have access at grade directly from their areas.

Q. JM – When will you be bringing this back to the SJAM staff? It is important for some decisions from teachers to have input?

R. LF – no schedule yet but we will work with you every step of the way as part of the detailed design, together.

R. DM – In terms of the overall process. We are in schematic design phase now. The next phase is Design Development, where the design is progressed in more detail and then Construction Documentation, which is when the documents for tendering are produced.. To Amy’s question on the play areas. We can look for this feedback now. On the Art piece, Amy have you started on this?

R. AH – yes, there are amazing artists working now as part of the celebration.

R. DM – we can seed these artists into the design soon

R. AH – Let’s think about some dates after March break to meet on this.

Q. PL – Looking at the top floor layout. Question on the natural light in the classrooms on the north side of the building. If there were fewer classrooms on the North side, is this possible?

R. LF – North is actually quite good for classrooms due to reduced glare and passive solar heating.

R. DM – the window areas are quite large relative to the standard. They are pleasant spaces.

Peter Wicha

Good questions and excellent feedback from the Architects and EECD.

Please send questions directly to Peter Wicha and he will distribute.

Q. PW - When to get together again relative to the design progression?

R. DM – DIH and EECD need to take the feedback and analyze on the time required to implement changes. DM would like to have input from the art project group and the staff in terms of play...would like to have this prior to the next meeting.

R. Roger Tulk. Can we get some of this secured before we get together again.

R. DM – Suggest that we progress the design a bit further before we get together again.

Q. VV – is there a way to filter through an email response, for more immediate responses to provide feedback in a few days? Versus waiting 3 weeks and responding at that time. Or is the current format the most conducive?

R. DM – we take the feedback from the SST meetings. We do need a chance to write up the Minutes and EECD and DIH need time to reflect with the Architects and incorporate feedback.

Q. VV – 3 weeks does seem fast to gather the Minutes and digest and think about the design

R. DM – we were working to see if we could come up with an improved play area. We have made good strides and we feel it will move more quickly now.

PH – Here is a comment for Amy and her staff. In the not too distant future, we want to spend a day with the teachers to see how the rooms will be fitted up, what do they know, what do they want? This is coming.

Q. JM – thank you for explaining the process. Just want to ensure that teachers are heard

R. LF – every piece of furniture and cabinet will be discussed with you.

R. DM – Darrell has spent many years in the midst of educators and feels they are some of the most inventive people he has ever met. DIH really enjoys receiving input from teachers.

Q. AH – April 8th is a parent teacher date that might work. The next Celebration Meeting is scheduled for the 31st and Amy will loop Darrell into it.

Q. PL – Checking to see if the Minutes and feedback will be circulated soon?

R. DM – We will give the Minutes to Peter Wicha to distribute once they are reviewed.

Peter Wicha

Thank you to everyone. Let's take a few days to digest and we will announce the next meeting date.

Amy Hunt

Thank you for everyone's time. SJAM is a special and dynamic community. She has appreciated the listening of their concerns and ideas and the incorporation into the design.

Meeting Adjourned

Next Meeting - TBD

Minutes prepared by: M. Mason

Minutes approved by: EECD, DIH and HRCE