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## Regarding the Brown Middle School Renovation

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To: Stacey Graham <wcagatl@gmail.com>

Cc: "Amos, Byron" <BAmos@atlanta.k12.ga.us>, "Kaye, Rebecca" <rkaye@atlanta.k12.ga.us>, "Hoskins, Larry" <lhoskins@atlanta.k12.ga.us>

Dear Ms. Graham,

I have received your email. Thank you for your thoughtful attached letter. While I haven't been here for all of this, I have been looking at and researching all of the building and infrastructure issues across the district, including Brown. We could speak about this I think it's more important that we have better documentation of this project because it has been difficult to keep the multi-year changes in order.

Here goes:

Size of classrooms in the historic main building

The size of the classrooms at Brown MS are similar to our other historic, 80 plus year old buildings. The GDOE space requirement for classrooms grades 4-8 is 660 square feet. During a renovation project, existing classrooms are permitted a 10 percent reduction in that 660 square foot number. That means that we can proceed with the current plans if the classrooms are not less than 594 square feet. None of the existing classrooms at Brown MS are that small.

During the conceptual design process, we examined two alternatives to make the classrooms larger. We looked at making the classrooms longer without changing the hallway size. The exterior façade of the school has a repetitive fenestration with only narrow wall spaces between the windows. To increase the classroom size would have required removing most, if not all, of the walls between the classrooms building new walls. The resulting classrooms would be long and narrow and not really provide a better learning environment. It would just make it farther to the back of the classroom.

We also looked at narrowing the existing hallway to make the classrooms larger. This would provide a better space shape configuration (more rectangular) but does not add a significant amount of space to the classrooms. It also gets into the structural configuration of the building and would result in columns in the classrooms, which would detract from any square footage gains.

With that said, please recall Brown's relatively recent HVAC renovations that included new finished ceilings and lights throughout the classrooms. Moving walls to accommodate classroom expansion will negate APS's HVAC and finished ceiling and lights investment. This and the extra necessary renovation costs would prove to be a very expensive and inefficient use of the district's resources.

Also, it is important to remember that the 750 square foot size stated in the letter is the current APS classroom space standard for all grade levels for newly constructed classrooms. This allows for changing grade levels by school or by floor without modification to the spaces.

Use of basement spaces

There are three locations of basement spaces on this campus. We have talked about all of them during the design phase.

There are two former locker room spaces under the seating in the gym. These spaces are on both sides of the gym and are not connected. The gym was built in the '40s, long before accessibility was required by Federal law or code. And the only access to these spaces is by stairs. The spaces do not have air-conditioning and may not have much in the way of heating. They consist of showers, drying and locker type spaces with wire cage partitions to facilitate drying of clothes and towels.

The third basement space is under the center of the main historic building. It was the boiler room and coal storage rooms. Now it is a large empty space. It is not air-conditioned and was not designed to be an occupied space, other than the building mechanics who needed to access and service the mechanical equipment. It, too, is accessed by stairs. Per our direction, the architect provided a design for this space and they calculated associated costs in excess of

\$650,000. They noted that moving forward with improvements in the basement spaces would provide a poor return on investment. This area is a tough one to sort out so I do understand the desire to want to see it renovated. I can't promise anything here but I am going to continue to try to find a quality affordable solution. For now, unfortunately, it is where it is.

#### STEAM and Health clinic

During the March design committee meeting, there was robust discussion about the direction the cluster planning meetings seemed to be going and the likelihood that the Washington cluster was moving to a STEAM focus. We discussed the possibility of waiting to specify the technical details of the already planned three CTAE lab spaces until the cluster planning process is completed. Which we understand to continue through this summer and probably into the next school year. We can do this without delaying the start of the rest of the project. We also discussed the need for the cluster to get specific about identifying the components of a STEAM focus - that will take time. It is a very broad descriptor of a curriculum focus and could range from mostly computer labs for engineering and math to science labs to hands-on labs for robotics, aeronautics, or other project-based learning activities. Please note we already have a location designated for the parent center in our current plan.

There was also an indication from WCAG that they were looking to have a community health service similar to the clinics at Whitefoord and formerly at Coan MS as provided by the Zeiss Foundation. They have not apparently identified a provider at this point. We discussed alternative locations for the proposed community health clinic and its need for a separate public entrance.

#### Project progression

As a reminder, my research shows that this Brown MS project was originally conceived as a classroom addition project during the redistricting process. It was conceived similar to the projects at Long and Young MS as they all became the sole middle school feeding the high school in their respective clusters. During the initial design process, APS then determined that Brown had enough core classrooms for their projected student enrollments if the classrooms were returned to their original planned use as core classrooms. They were being used for other non-core classroom uses. We also determined that the fine arts spaces were inadequate and in need of replacement to provide the proper size and height of rooms. This led ultimately to the replacement of the cafeteria as we began to look at how and where to provide the needed new fine arts spaces. As a result, the budget for the Brown MS project actually more than doubled from its originally conceived budget.

Lastly, documents show that the design process for Brown MS was started in August of 2013. It went through many iterations as the district and community investigated how to best to solve the existing design challenges. Because of the transformation from a classroom addition to a larger fine arts and cafeteria addition and relocation of the media center, the budget has always been a challenge. Throughout this process, APS followed our standard design committee procedures which included representatives from the community through the NPU and local neighborhood associations. The WCAG group did not come forward until we had basically completed our design process. Which had taken another year and a half of iterative process to complete because of the complexity of the design challenges. We have spent the last two design meetings going back over the design process, thoughts, iterations, and conclusions that have led to the current design. As mentioned above, we believe we can use the CTAE spaces to provide learning spaces for whatever direction the STEAM focus takes. And if the community health services clinic comes to fruition, the district can decide to use some of the CTAE space for community clinic or there is space on the site to construct a stand-alone clinic building that most functionally satisfies the need for a private entrance.

There is little mention of the March design committee meeting where these topics were discussed and there seemed to be some agreement about what we have mentioned above. Those conversations lead me to believe that they are looking for more funding to provide for more renovation or new construction. The building as designed has all of the normal functional space that we would provide for a middle school with the projected student enrollment and is commensurate with the other MS projects at Long and Young that were a result of the redistricting process.

#### Itemized Bid

We do not have an itemized bid for the construction project. JE Dunn, the construction manager, is working on their guaranteed maximum price (GMP). When we have a final project cost, we will schedule it for Board approval. We expect to go to the May 4, 2015 Board meeting with the GMP.

Regards,

Meria

Sent from my iPhone