



The Advisory Committee Report to Special Town Meeting March 2, 2026

Background for this report:

The Advisory Committee Bylaw Chapter 9, Section 13A of Town Code: It shall be the duty of the Committee to consider all matters included within the articles of any warrant for a Town Meeting hereafter issued, and the Committee shall, after due consideration of the subject matter in said articles, report thereon, in print or otherwise, such information and recommendations as it shall deem best.

Advisory Recommendation for Article 1

Voted 7-0-0 (Yes-No-Abstain) to support.

Summary: This article proposes to fund a feasibility study for renovation and building improvement options for the Margaret A. Neary Elementary School, with the goal of estimating the cost of these options. The target cost of \$15,000,000 for Option 2 is inclusive of the cost of the roof and any ADA compliance that is being considered under Article 4.

- Article 1 was unanimously supported by all Advisory members.
- Study would examine both full renovation and a limited-scope option which may be beneficial
 - **Option 1:** Full renovation of Neary
 - **Option 2:** Targeted upgrades to extend life of the school
- Article 1 likely provides the most viable and straightforward path forward and builds on past feasibility studies.
- Support Article 1 given the immediate need to replace the Neary roof and the necessity of Neary remaining open for some period of years even if the reconfiguration described in Article 2 or 3 was ultimately approved.
- Lowest cost study option not to exceed \$175K.
- Also unanimously supported by Select Board & School Committee.

Advisory Recommendation for Article 2

Voted 1-6-0 (Yes-No-Abstain) to not support

Summary: This article proposes funding a feasibility study for the P. Brent Trottier Middle School and the Mary E Finn Elementary Schools to determine the feasibility of constructing additions to accommodate Grade 5 at Trottier and Grade 2 at Finn. This would result in the Margaret A Neary Elementary School no longer being used as a school. Phase One of the study will include building system capacity analyses, and land and wetland surveys, for both schools. If Phase One indicates feasibility, then Phase Two will include schematic design, architectural and engineering work, preliminary site development plans, and cost estimates. The estimated cost of Phase One is \$260,000. and the estimated cost of Phase Two is \$240,000.

- Committee did not support Article 2 and the concerns included:
 - Highest cost option at \$500K.
 - Likelihood study would not lead to a feasible project
 - Overlap with other studies makes this a less desirable option
 - Possible site-specific challenges that include septic and traffic constraints at Trottier and Finn

Advisory Recommendation for Article 3

Voted 3-4-0 (Yes-No-Abstain) to not support.

Summary: This article proposes to fund a Feasibility Study for the Mary E. Finn Elementary School to evaluate renovation and expansion of the existing facility to accommodate grades PreK – 3, including schematic design, architectural and engineering work, preliminary site development plans, and cost estimates. This would result in the Margaret A Neary Elementary School no longer being used as a school.

- More members supported Article 3 than Article 2 but Advisory still did not support Article 3.
- Cost not to exceed \$324K from free cash.
- Concerns included:
 - Cost and site complexity
 - Questionable feasibility of expanding Finn due to proximity to major highway and challenging environmental and site-specific obstacles that are known from past exploration.

Advisory Recommendation for Article 4

Vote at Special Town Meeting

Summary: This article proposes to fund costs associated with the replacement of the roof at the Margaret A. Neary Elementary School, and associated ADA upgrades.

NOTE: Formal vote on Article 4 is deferred to Special Town Meeting due to content and wording of article 4 which may be updated pending the outcome of vote on Article 1.

- Advisory strongly supports funding the Neary 30-year roof replacement.
- Committee voted unanimously in a *straw poll* to support a revised Article 4 that:
 - Clearly lists the roof amount as \$4.5M
 - Separates or removes ADA costs
 - Clearly explains when ADA upgrades are triggered (30% “circuit-breaker” rule) since Advisory recommends transparency to voters on potential ADA triggers and related costs.

Important information related to the funding of Article 1, 2, 3:

Voters may vote to study all options, no options, or a combination thereof. Voters should be aware that approving Articles 1, 2, or 3 will use funds from free cash as listed in the warrant. The amount of free cash spent on each study will not be available to offset costs in the 2027 budget cycle and will therefore have the direct impact of raising your FY27 taxes. Article 4 does not use free cash but authorizes borrowing to fund the roof replacement. Article 4 will also require a vote at the ballot if passed at the Special Town Meeting.

**Respectfully submitted,
Marci Jones, Chair
Andrew Pfaff, Vice Chair
Timothy Martel
Howard Rose
Barry Rubenstein
Larry Samberg
Erik Glaser**

Additional information from some members providing rationale for their votes on Articles 1-3:

‘Yes’ on Article 1 and ‘No’ for Article 2 and 3

Member 1:

The Town spent close to \$1M to study feasibility and design of a new school project that failed to pass at both Town Meeting and the ballot last year. Supporting all Articles 1, 2, and 3 would spend almost another \$1M on studies using free cash. Supporting only Article 1 may be attractive to the taxpayer concerned primarily with cost and spending for several reasons:

1. Article 1 funds the least expensive study (\$175K) with potential to build on information from the last \$1M study.
2. Article 1 will provide cost comparison of a full Neary renovation versus an essentials-only upgrade.
3. Free cash not spent on studies in Article 2 (\$500K) and 3 (\$324K) will help reduce tax increases in FY2027.

Member 2:

While we appreciate, and in some cases share, the community’s interest in exploring additional options for the future of our school buildings, the Advisory Committee’s primary responsibility is to safeguard the fiscal well-being of the town.

After careful review of the report detailing the condition of the Neary roof, Article 4 (replacement of the Neary roof) is unavoidable. Although we had hoped a temporary solution might allow for further exploration of alternatives, the findings indicate that such an approach is not viable.

The town will face several significant financial obligations in the coming years, including additional school roof replacements and ongoing road maintenance needs. Given these anticipated expenditures, committing \$4.5 million to a building that could potentially be taken out of service within two years would be fiscally irresponsible.

Restoring Neary appears to represent not only the most financially sound course of action, but it is also the preferred option of the Select Board and, more importantly, the School Committee. Renovating Neary aligns with their established vision and expectations for providing an appropriate learning environment for our educational programs.

Furthermore, allocating any additional funds to study alternative options, many of which present logistical challenges and the likelihood of greater expense, would not, in our view, represent a responsible use of taxpayer resources.

‘Yes’ on Article 1 and 3 and ‘No’ on Article 2

The motivation for voting for 3 and not 2 had three parts:

1. I believe we need at least one alternative to moving forward with a large Neary project, in case that doesn’t pass.
2. Spending money on two feasibility studies seemed wasteful (i.e., doing 2 and 3)
3. The cost of modifying two buildings (Trottier and Finn) would likely far exceed modifying one building

‘Yes’ on all Articles 1, 2, 3

The reason for the “YES” votes on Articles 2 and 3 is the same as the reason for also voting “YES” on Article 1: offering Southborough voters more choices for a long-term solution to the Pre-K through 8 school building situation.

Among the multiple reasons causing the failed vote for the new 4-grade Neary school was the lack of alternatives for voters to consider. In response, the Pre-K to 8 School Building Committee was tasked to evaluate other potential school configurations (besides the new 4-grade Neary) based on a variety of parameters, most notably educational alignment and estimated cost. Among the 10 configurations we considered, seven (7) were

categorized as having “District & School Committee support”^{1,2,3}, meaning these configurations could either (i) meet all district education goals or (ii) meet district goals with tradeoffs.

These 7 options included:

- **Three (3) different Neary renovations**, varying from minimal to deferred maintenance, with full ADA compliance through gut renovation of the structure and full renovation
- **Moving 5th grade to Trottier and 2nd grade to Finn WITH EXPANSIONS, reflected in STM Article 2** (closing Neary as a school)
- **Moving 2nd and 3rd grades to Finn, reflected in STM Article 3** (closing Neary as a school)
- **Prior New 4-grade Neary school** (from the failed May special town meeting vote)
- **New pre-K to 5th grade school** with a location to be determined (closing Neary, Woodward, and Finn as schools)

A limitation of the pre-K to 8 School Building Committee's work was that the cost analyses we developed were incomplete. We made attempts to estimate construction costs using data from the prior new 4-grade Neary project, but it became obvious that more work would be needed by experts in school construction, thus supporting the intent to fund feasibility studies described by STM Articles 1-3.

As was evidenced from the failed May vote and the subsequent town survey, the high cost of the new 4-grade Neary school was also a critical factor driving the “NO” vote. We learned from the Pre-K to 8 SBC work that there are options other than the Neary site that can meet Southborough’s education needs, but it’s impossible to make an apples-to-apples comparison to the Neary options without accurate cost data. Unless ALL three (3) of the feasibility studies are funded, the voters will yet again have limited choice.

To be clear, the “YES” vote does not underpin an endorsement for any one of the given school configurations in Articles 1-3, but instead represents the desire to provide voters with ALL of the critical information to make as informed a decision as possible on a potential long-term solution to the Neary situation.

The town will need $\frac{2}{3}$ support for any borrowing articles in the future to fully solve the PK-8 School Building situation. You can vote “YES” on one or all the articles, these are simply surveys to get answers and cost data. The reason these articles are broken up as three independent articles is to get an idea of support for each option and eliminate unfavorable projects earlier in the cycle, reducing the total cost to the taxpayer.