



School Activists Talk Possible Sites with BRA

by **Eddie Small**
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The push for a public school in central Boston is moving forward.

On February 4, state Rep. Marty Walz and Downtown Schools for Boston member Bob O'Brien met with Kairos Shen, director of planning for the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA), to discuss possible sites for a school downtown. Walz and O'Brien said they left the meeting feeling very heartened about the possibility of a new school coming to the area.

"I'm very encouraged based on the work the city is doing to find locations for a downtown school," said Walz.

O'Brien said he agreed. Although he would not identify the specific sites discussed at the meeting, he said they looked at "several" and that he was happy with the efforts the city had made so far.

"There is still further work that needs to be done within City Hall and elsewhere among the city agencies, but it's gratifying to see the progress that has been made," he said.

O'Brien even raised the possibility that more than one school could eventually come to downtown Boston. He said the city had not made a decision about this yet, but the

demand for new schools downtown seemed to be increasing, so the area may ultimately require two of them.

O'Brien would not comment on whether he thought a new school could open in downtown Boston by his organization's stated goal of fall 2014. He emphasized that participants were still in the beginning stages of the procedure.

"We're talking now about site identification and evaluation," he said. "That's the first step in a very long process, but a very significant first step."

Ania Camargo, one of the leaders of Downtown Schools, said that members had already compiled a list of about 30 potential sites. They were now focused more on figuring out the criteria the BRA had in mind for what would constitute an appropriate location.

"It would be more like, 'How do we make this decision?'" she said. "There are a lot of buildings that are options. Right now, Boston is full of buildings that could be converted."

Camargo referred to Walz's upcoming departure from the Massachusetts House of Representatives as "bittersweet" due to her strong backing of Downtown Schools for

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Boston. However, she said the group still had the support of several other local officials, including City Councilor Mike Ross, so she was not worried about Walz's leaving making the process of establishing a school in central Boston more difficult.

"BPS (Boston Public Schools) has already sort of agreed that this is an issue, so now we just have to continue going," she said. "It

doesn't change anything for us in terms of what we want to accomplish."

Walz emphasized that her commitment to getting a school downtown would not end when she stepped down from her position in the statehouse to serve as president and CEO of the Planned Parenthood League of Massachusetts.

"The need for a downtown school is so important to me personally that I will stay engaged with this work even after I leave the legislature," she said. "And I don't even have kids."
