



#Building for the Future – Join in!

By Sally Chapman Cameron

When I was in journalism school, the old saying was that sunlight is the ultimate disinfectant. It refers to the role that the steady light of information and full disclosure plays in making sure that public projects are in the public interest.

That sunlight is shining brightly on the effort to build a new Durfee High School, thanks in part to a business-funded effort to keep Fall River residents informed about the project. An information campaign called “Durfee Rising” sponsored by Bristol County Chamber of Commerce Foundation is partnering with the School Department to engage Fall River residents in understanding the process and decisions being made, and providing their own input, with the goal to have confidence that the new high school will be a place of pride for the whole city.

The Durfee project began when the Fall River School Department received funding approval from the Massachusetts School Building Authority— up to 80 percent of qualified costs -- to replace the current high school. It follows years of patching and retrofitting a building that was constructed with little oversight and input from educators or the public. With the funding approval comes thorough reviews and requirements, one of which is to demonstrate community engagement and involvement.

Creating this companion communication effort in Durfee Rising is unique to Fall River and is yet one more demonstration of the business community’s commitment to education in **southeastern Massachusetts**, according to Robert A. Mellion, Esq., president and CEO of the Bristol County Chamber of Commerce. “Business leaders have stepped up to support this community engagement project through the Chamber’s Foundation,” said Mellion. “The business community recognizes this important opportunity for Fall River to use state money to pay for the bulk of the cost of a new high school. It is a complicated project, and understanding the need and the process will help make it happen.” he added.

So how does Durfee Rising share with the community? As its manager, I work with the Building Committee, the School Department, and the Chamber to promote the news and announcements of the process. There’s a website, DurfeeRising.com, which outlines the needs and the process, dates for events, and how to get more information, as well as the news and links to the public documents that have been shared at public forums. Designs growing out of the robust planning and visioning sessions will be shared as they start to evolve. The site offers a comment link to share concerns and questions.

You can also follow the process on Facebook, by liking the page DurfeeRising. Announcements of public meetings, links to news articles, and videos and photos of the design and proposed siting are posted there. The page has seen some vigorous discussion so far!

There's a Twitter feed as well, @DurfeeRising, and the hashtag for discussion is #BuildingForTheFuture.

That hashtag illustrates what this effort is all about – by sharing with City residents and shining light on the good, thorough work being done by the educators, leaders, and the City itself to build a new school worthy of our children and our future, we can have confidence that the project is done right. The community will get a brand new high school that will equip and prepare generations of young people for the challenging world of the 21st century. Join us in #BuildingForTheFuture.

Sally Chapman Cameron is Communicator for ThreeC Strategy and a member of the Bristol County Chamber of Commerce Education Committee