

The March 15, 2016, Board of Education meeting marked the beginning of a process.

Ship Bottom extended an offer to the Board of Education, in writing, to purchase the LBI Grade School property. This letter is important because it means we can enter into a real conversation about how we might transfer this significant piece of seaside real estate to the Borough of Ship Bottom who will keep the property in the public domain, for community use, instead of simply selling it to the highest bidder.

Like any agreement of this kind, the numbers will need to make sense. Furthermore, it will need the blessing of all five boroughs, and we will need full-on public support when we go out for referendum.

The agreement will not be successful unless all of these boxes are checked.

The conversation we are about to enter into with Ship Bottom cannot and will not be open-ended. Very early on in this process, we will set a deadline by which we must come to an agreement or abandon the idea of one. We may miss the September opportunity to go out for referendum. We will not miss December's.

We must all accept the possibility that this process may fail and that we, as a Board of Education, may be left with only one option—to continue to search for a buyer. The bidders are still out there, with possibly more in waiting. We owe it to those bidders (and to our students) to return swiftly to them, and to that particular process, if we cannot strike a deal with Ship Bottom.

For now, however, our hopes are high that this process will be fruitful and an agreement will be reached that satisfies all parties. We, therefore, call this option, "Plan A."

The LBI Board of Education voted five years ago to consolidate into one building. The general consensus is that consolidating to the Ethel Jacobsen School makes the most sense. It is time to follow through on these decisions. We believe the vote on March 15th was the first step in the final stage of that journey.