

Commonly Asked Questions 5-3-18

- 1) Are there enough classrooms to support the current number of students and allow for future growth?**

MSBA did a thorough analysis of enrollment data and made projections for future enrollment numbers. Classroom quantities are based on their projections and the District's Educational Program.

During the Preliminary Design Phase, an analysis was required by the MSBA to ensure that there were enough classrooms and specialized instructional spaces to deliver each component of the instructional program to the expected enrollment of students. Bear in mind that each classroom in the project is a third larger in size than our current classrooms. There are 3 prekindergarten classrooms, 6 kindergarten classrooms, and 5 general classrooms per grade level (Grades 1-8) in the design with at least one other room large enough to accommodate another classroom at each grade level. This assures adequate space for current class sizes as well as the possibility of future growth at each grade level while maintaining desired student/teacher ratios. Additionally, there are ample specialized instructional spaces to deliver the desired instructional program – 3 physical education teaching spaces, two art rooms, three music rooms, and two library/media centers.

- 2) Will elementary children be riding the bus with middle school students? Will more students be eligible for riding the bus?**

Elementary children will not be riding buses with middle school students. Busing will be provided as it is now with staggered pick up and drop off times. Early review suggests that more children will likely be eligible to ride the bus, though this doesn't necessarily mean they will choose to do so. Easthampton has a transportation fee, so additional riders will likely result in additional revenue.

Busing will be provided in the same way it is currently provided. Middle school students will be picked up and dropped off first and then the same buses will be used to pick up and drop off elementary students at a later time.

- 3) Will younger students and older students be mixed together in a K-8 school?**

The school is designed to keep younger students and older students segregated in separate areas of the building with separate entrances. The common facilities and community use spaces are located in the center of the building and separate the elementary and middle schools.

The school is designed to keep younger students and older students segregated in two separate sections with separate entrances, cafeterias, libraries, art rooms and music rooms. A shared gymnasium is accessed by separate entrances for the elementary students and middle school students, with operable partitions to segregate different aged teaching stations. At the same time, there are ways teachers can join students from the elementary school with students from the middle school for projects and activities beneficial to both age groups when desired.

- 4) Will CPA funds and funds donated by Friends of Football have been wasted with the change of the siting of the football field?**

In 2014 the football field was determined to be an unsafe playing field for our athletes. Funds from the CPA and donations from Friends of Football enabled us to repair the field for use. The renovated field has been used for three seasons and will see two more seasons of use prior to being replaced in the building project. At that time, it is believed that renovations to the field would have been necessary due to wear and tear. Anything from the current field that can be reused will be used in the new field.

5) Why was the White Brook site chosen for a new building project when the soil conditions are so bad?

Soil conditions are similar to those encountered at the new high school and challenges can be solved similarly. No other sites are available for this project.

Three Soil borings were conducted and analyzed by the Geo-Technical Engineering firm, O'Reilly, Talbot & Okun. Findings revealed subsurface conditions to contain soft silt and clay materials which result in an unsuitable bearing layer for foundations. The same Geo-Technical Engineering firm performed the soils analysis for the recently completed high school building and describe the subsurface conditions to be very similar at both locations. Technologies have been developed since the mid-1970's when the White Brook school was constructed which overcome the detrimental effects of the poor soil conditions. At the Easthampton High School, stock piles of earth were brought in at the same weight as the building and placed in the location of the proposed school to pre-settle, or compress the building pad site. This is not anticipated to add cost to the project because the material used can serve as fill material in regrading efforts on the site rather than needing to discard them off site. A grid of geo-piers were then installed below the building to stabilize the soils in their compressed state. This technology allows the new building to be constructed without risk of movement, due to settlement or expansion of sub-base materials. No additional cost is anticipated.

6) I've researched geopiers after hearing they may be used on the proposed school and understand they can contaminate aquifers when they are installed. Knowing that the school is over the Barnes Aquifer, can you tell me what the process would be to decontaminate the aquifer?

We believe, in reviewing the history of this happening, the degree of risk and the likelihood of this happening at the White Brook site is remote, and we are taking all necessary steps to prevent any adverse effects. Follow this link for a more detailed answer to this question. For a more detailed explanation, go to <http://epsd.us/district/geopiers.pdf>

7) Will the community have had enough time to get the information they need before a vote if the vote is in May?

The timeframe for the PreK-8 project is similar to the timeframe for the Easthampton High School project and most pertinent information is available now. The building committee has been meeting now for over two years and the 1/16/18 forum is the fourth held to inform the public. More forums and School Building Committee meetings will take place between now and the May vote. Additionally, the Ballot Initiative Committee will conduct an extensive public information campaign between now and the May vote.

Notes from the Committee for Better Schools state that the high school project vote was May 18, 2010. Chair of the committee, Deb Lusnia, has definitive tax impact numbers prepared and given to her by Mayor Tautznik in a note dated April 6, 2010.

8) How big will the gymnasium be and how many basketball courts will it have?

In total, the proposed design includes 12,000 sf. of gymnasium space, which is the maximum permitted by MSBA, regardless of the City's financial contribution. The planned gymnasium is bigger than both the existing EHS and White Brook gyms and will have one competition and 2 practice courts.

There is a large, main gymnasium of approximately 9,500 sf which will include a competition basketball court, 2 practice courts, and spectator seating. A separate, smaller gymnasium is provided to support Adaptive P.E. and wellness alternatives, such as aerobics, yoga and dance. This space is approximately 2,500 sf. In total, there will be ample space for three gym classes to occur simultaneously.

9) A suggestion was made to have Pepin renovated for the middle school students so the building on the White Brook property could have one less wing and keep the current football field. Is this possible?

Just as an improved Pepin building and site would be problematic for elementary level, it would be more problematic for the middle school. In addition, MSBA will only fund one building project and that project must include Maple School, designated in the Statement of Interest as the priority school, and therefore the cost of any improvements to Pepin as a middle school would need to be paid 100% by Easthampton tax payers.

The capacity of the Pepin Elementary School does not meet the needs of Easthampton's current middle school population, even if reduced to grades 6-8. Classrooms are undersized and the number of classrooms are insufficient. The Pepin site does not allow for sufficient development of outdoor spaces, necessary to support education, play, or parking needs.

10) Were other options considered before deciding on the PK -8 project?

MSBA considers a school project as a single building, and does not fund multiple building projects under their grant agreement. Maple Elementary School was the project selected by MSBA and any building project proposed by the district must include Maple School as part of the project.

The feasibility study investigated the potential of addressing just the Maple Street School needs through additions and renovations, and as a single new building. These options were not pursued, as they would not have resulted in educational equity to all Easthampton elementary-aged students, nor did the small site allow for sufficient development of outdoor spaces, necessary to support education, play, or parking needs. The feasibility study also investigated an option to provide a new consolidated elementary school at the White Brook campus. This option would have provided educational equity to all elementary students but would have left middle school students in the existing poorly performing White Brook building. This option also did not support the District's desired grade reconfiguration to bring fifth graders out of the middle school setting and into the elementary school environment. Lastly, the feasibility study looked at multiple addition and renovation options to capture portions of the existing White Brook Middle School building for re-use in a PK-8 solution. The cost estimates performed for these options did not yield sufficient savings, over new construction, to warrant their pursuit.

11) Why were the changes to the siting of the football field made so late in the process?

The Architect and project team worked to avoid affecting the field for over a year in the preliminary study and design as directed by the School Building Committee. It was only when all of the details in site design, implications of building layout, and phasing the project were fully developed that the impact of retaining the field was fully understood.

The School Department and Building Committee were consistent and clear from the onset that the football field at the White Brook campus was off limits for development. In the late fall of 2017, it became clear that, while a school could be constructed without disrupting the current field, it would result in construction phasing costs of \$2.7 million and negatively impact the building design and site layout. When faced with the decision to, instead, include a new improved football field as part of the project for \$2 million, the Building Committee endorsed that option.

12) What would be the timeline for being entered into the MSBA grant process for a new project if this project is voted down, and what would be the potential cost implications?

The Statement of Interest for the current project was submitted in April 2014 and was invited into the Eligibility Period in March 2015. The vote for this project will take place in 2018. It is expected that there would be a similar timeline for a new project with inflationary costs currently at approximately 4% per annum. Additionally, the MSBA will not participate in funding the feasibility study or significant portions of the schematic design phases of a new project.

13) Was a traffic study be done for the White Brook project? What will be done to mediate the challenges of increased traffic due to the new school?

A traffic study was conducted by Berkshire Design Group and was posted to the District's building project web page last month. The existing intersection in current conditions was rated an "F" and it becomes even more challenging with the increased traffic anticipated as a result of the construction of a PK-8 school on the site. Berkshire Design Group proposed three potential measures on and along Park Street to improve conditions. The Building Committee has endorsed the solution that will incorporate a round-about at the school entrance and it will be included in the specifications for the project's bid documents. This solution will result in the least amount of land acquisition from abutters, will force traffic to slow in both directions on Park St. while not creating vehicular stacking, will increase pedestrian safety, and will improve historically problematic intersections at the entrance to the White Brook Site and the South St./Park St. intersection.

14) When will decisions concerning staffing and staff space assignments be made?

If the voters approve the funding of the project in May 2018, the estimated date of completion of the project is 2021.

It is not possible at this point to determine specific information on staffing in the new building as there will be many things that may change between now and then, including enrollment, staffing needs, and number of students with special needs. The project is designed to provide appropriate facilities for the staffing of all needs. It is, likewise, much too early to assign individuals to the various work spaces. We are, however, confident that work space located and outfitted appropriately for the various roles exist in the design.

Although the proposed building project's design continues to evolve and change, Special Education Director Sarah Mochak, Superintendent Nancy Follansbee, and Business Director Dayle Doiron recently met with Design Architect Bert Gardner to ensure that there was an appropriate and well-located work space for each professional staff member and for those who provide contracted services. We are confident that not only is this the case, but there are additional work spaces not needed to accommodate the current staffing, in the event that we add new staff members. (including OT, PT, Title 1 Reading, Psychologists, Special Education Teachers not in self-contained programs, Guidance, Special Education Coordinators, ELL teachers, Reading Recovery, Behavior Analyst, and Speech and Language personnel).

15) Do parents drop students off at the same place the buses unload? Will there be adequate parking?

No, there will be separate approaches for bus and parent drop off and pick up of students. In addition, there will be a separate drop off and pick up location for students with disabilities. There are 292 identified parking spaces among three lots, more than enough for staff and family parking needs.

Bus drop off and pick up times will continue to be staggered for elementary and middle school students as they currently are.

16) Why was the plan for the building flipped so it is placed where the football field is?

The original northwest location of the preferred solution resulted in an overlap of the proposed building with the existing school, at the location of its electrical service entrance and boiler room.

Construction of the new school at this location would require provisions to temporarily continue these utilities during construction to avoid disruption to students in their current classrooms. The estimated cost for temporary boilers and electrical service equipment and for re-feeding these systems throughout the existing middle school was estimated at \$2.7 million and confirmed by MSBA to be ineligible for reimbursement through their grant program. In addition to not being eligible for state reimbursement, this investment would be discarded when the old school is taken down. For an estimated construction cost of \$1.5 (natural turf) to 2 million (synthetic turf), a new field can be built as part of the project. Based on the received cost estimates for each approach, reconstructing the football field at an alternate location is expected to save the District between \$.5 to 1 million over temporary measures to heat and power the existing school during construction. The investment to relocate the field will also result in a permanent asset which both the school and community can enjoy through the life of the building. Site development costs are eligible for reimbursement, up to 8 percent of the building construction costs, though the MSBA grant program.

The Design Team investigated moving the conflicting middle school wing north, outside the footprint of the existing school, and found it to be uncomfortably close to the west end of the existing track (approximately 30 feet). This proximity presented challenges in bringing emergency access and a service road around the building.

A significant area is required around the proposed building's footprint to allow the Contractor room to store materials and accommodate operation of large construction equipment. The severe developmental restrictions associated with the riparian (riverfront) zone to the west of the site, would only leave room to the east (existing football field), or south (existing bus loop) to the Contractor for this purpose. At best, this would limit access to the current field location via the service road entrance to the south of the school, and at worst would encroach on the field, taking it off line regardless of best intentions.

By mirroring the plan and locating the proposed school at the current football field location, the plan's organization is able to support dining adjacent to the middle school entrance, which will function as overflow space to community events. At the same time, both cafeterias are able to share a single kitchen while allowing services to be located behind the building where they will be out of site.

Layout of the site becomes clearly organized and planned as an efficient campus. The proposed field will be highly visible and easily accessed, where previous solutions had it tucked behind the new building and at the lowest point on the site. This is a significant community investment intended to serve the City of Easthampton for a minimum of 50 years, and as such, the layout of the building and grounds should make sense to visitors, both now, and in years to come when the necessary, recent investments to the existing field's safety are no longer a consideration.

17) Why weren't the options of doing minor or major renovations of White Brook Middle School chosen?

The benefits of a new building over renovations to all or portions of the existing White Brook School, include increased opportunities to fully incorporate current technologies into all aspects of the building, from classrooms to control of the mechanical systems.

In addition, current construction technologies allow for much higher energy efficiencies in the exterior walls and roof, than seen in the current 1970's era school. Also, working outside the constraints of existing wall locations ensures that all classrooms will have access to natural daylight and views outside. Lastly, and specific to the Easthampton community, the existing White Brook School is perceived to be structurally flawed since its original construction. A survey of the existing building has confirmed that the structure has settled in isolated locations, since its construction. Understanding the soil conditions and having the opportunity to apply current construction technologies to the design a new foundation system will best serve the long-term stability of the school.

18) What are the reasons for not considering double sessions at the new high school?

We are not considering double sessions as there is no need to displace our students from White Brook during the construction process.

Like the high school project, White Brook would remain intact for our middle school students until the new building is completed. Once our middle school staff and students are moved into the new building, the old building would be taken down.

19) What fuel will be used for the HVAC system? If it's natural gas, is there enough volume in the current pipes now at WBMS? Will the pipes need to be replaced? Is there enough volume on Park St?

Based on the proposed Pre-K to 8 building size and energy efficiency goals, early calculations show that there should not be an increase in natural gas demand, over what the existing gas-fired equipment at the current White Brook Middle School uses.

The project's HVAC engineers have also had preliminary discussions with the gas company to verify that the existing gas service can be transferred to the new school. This is important because of the gas moratorium which is in place, prohibiting the installation of new service installations. Although sizing of the equipment and supply piping does not occur until the next design phase, it is anticipated that

significant replacement of the 45-year-old piping will need to take place and the new pipe will be sized to support the revised load of the building. This funding is already in the project budget.

20) Is the stage or area for performances for a K-8 group large enough to fit everyone in a one-court-size gym?

The stage proposed for the new PK-8 school is larger than both the current WBMS and EHS stages.

It will be equipped with high quality lighting and sound systems. Stage openings are planned to both the large (2 basketball court) gymnasium and the smaller adaptive physical education space, allowing for performances that may involve both large or small audiences as may be appropriate depending on the nature of the performance and the age of the performers. At the stage opening to the large gymnasium, there will be a stage extension that allows use for speakers and presentations to occur with the wall dividing it from the band classroom closed. Although the gymnasium is sized to accommodate the entire student body, we anticipate that performances involving middle school and elementary aged children will be separate. Further, we anticipate scheduling all performances in a manner to ensure that the audience members can be comfortably and effectively accommodated.

21) Will the lights or noise from the football field bother families in Treehouse?

The designers are aware of and will be sensitive to all abutters to the property in the design and installation of the football field.

Site lighting selected will be constructed and installed to focus light beams onto the playfield. The orientation of the field layout and spectator placement will direct noise back toward the school rather than toward neighbors.

22) Cracks have been found in the concrete in the new high school. Has anyone investigated these cracks to determine the cause?

Bert Gardner of Caolo & Bieniek, the architectural firm for the high school, and a structural engineer have examined the cracks and have determined they are non-structural in nature and offered assurances that they have nothing to do with the soil conditions. If someone wants to view the entire report, it can be made available.

23) Were other sites consider for the proposed project?

No. The White Brook Middle School Site is the only suitable City owned property available. Acquiring another site would add considerable expense to the project and is not eligible for reimbursement under the school building program. The WBMS site is a beautiful parcel with access to varied natural resources and ample space to accommodate the school's recreational needs.

24) How and why were the Owners Project Manager (Colliers International) and Design Architects (Caolo & Bieniek Associates) selected for this project?

Colliers International and then Caolo & Bieniek were selected at the conclusion of rigorous, open, and competitive processes mandated by the Massachusetts School Building Authority. The City's and School Department's very favorable experiences with Colliers as Owner's Project Manager and Caolo & Bieniek

as Architects on the high school project was a factor in selecting both firms again. Furnishing oversight and coordination of the design team's, contractors', and subcontractors' involvement from inception through construction to closeout, Colliers performed all their responsibilities in a highly satisfactory manner. Caolo & Bieniek's participation in the feasibility study, design and bidding, and construction management of the high school project was, likewise, highly satisfactory. Additionally, Curtis Edgin and Bert Gardner of Caolo & Bieniek are residents of Easthampton and, accordingly, have a highly personal stake in the success of our PK-8 project. The high school project was finished on time and under budget in large part due to Collier's and Caolo & Bieniek's involvement. Both firms were persistent in resolving the complications, problems, and challenges inevitable in any large scale construction project, ensuring that the new Easthampton High School will serve the community well and efficiently for many years to come. The general contractor and subcontractors for actually constructing the project will be selected in the summer of 2019 based on the low bid from a pool of pre-qualified companies consistent with Massachusetts procurement law.

25) What will the project cost and how will unforeseen construction costs be handled?

The Building Committee has set \$109 million dollars as the maximum total project cost and will not, under any circumstances, exceed it. Within the project budget are substantial contingency funds to cover any expenses that may crop up that cannot be planned for. If the total contingency fund is not needed, then those funds will not be spent and the project will come in below budget. The intent of contingency funds is to ensure that the project as planned remains within the established budget even in the event of change order work during the construction and outfitting of it.

26) What student safety and building security provisions will be included in the new PK-8 school?

The new school will include state-of-the-art design features and equipment, resulting in a facility that is much safer and more secure than the current 100-year old elementary schools and open concept middle school. Easthampton's public safety officials have collaborated with the design team in exploring these issues and have expressed to the team that they prefer to have all PK-8 student in a single facility in the event of a crisis event. The school will develop a comprehensive safety and evacuation plan for the building in advance of occupying it that will be practiced by students regularly once occupying the new school as are the current safety and evacuation plans currently.

27) What will happen to the three elementary schools?

No longer needed for school purposes, the School Department will turn the buildings back to the City that will initiate a process to have them declared surplus and entertain options for re-use or disposal.

28) Is the City considering any plan to assist seniors, veterans, or disabled individuals afford the increase to their property taxes that the school project will necessitate?

Under consideration currently is an increase of the current rebate from \$700 to \$1000 and lowering of the qualifying age from 70 to 65 for income eligible seniors.

29) If the PK-8 school building project is not approved by voters on May 22, can a vote be taken in November to approve a different project?

No. The MSBA will not allow a vote on a revised or completely new project in November. See question #11 for the MSBA timeline for consideration of a new project.

30) What is the total project cost of proposed PK-8 project on a per square foot basis? How does this compare with the cost of the high school project and other school construction projects in MA?

*It is important to keep in mind that the true cost of the proposed PK-8 school will not be known until it is bid, constructed, and completed. The Building Committee is committed to a not to exceed **total project cost** of \$109.3 million. The total project cost includes **each and every** expense associated with the project: administration of project, consultant fees, construction costs, furnishings and equipment, etc. The proposed PK-8 project currently measures 176,155 gross square feet, so the cost per square foot calculates to \$620.48 per square foot at present on a total project cost basis. The Easthampton High School total project costs were \$43.7 million while the school measures at 87,411 gross square feet, calculating to a cost of \$499.94 per square foot on a total project cost basis. Construction at the high school was completed in 2013. Construction costs have increased 4% per annum since. If built today, the high school total project cost would increase to \$60 million.*

*The budgeted per square foot costs of the proposed PK-8 school compare favorably with the cost of recent MSBA projects across the Commonwealth. The MSBA collects and makes available comparative data on the **construction costs** of all projects they fund. The construction costs include only those project costs associated with constructing the project under the general contract. It **does not include** the administration of project expenses, consultant fees, furnishings and equipment, etc. included in the total project cost mentioned above. The construction costs for the PK-8 school are currently estimated at \$90,234,965. The construction cost only for the PK-8 school on a square foot basis calculates to \$512 per square foot. To review data on other MSBA projects, click on the following link:
http://www.massschoolbuildings.org/building/CP_Information_Cost_Data*

The slide presentation from tonight's forum and these questions and answers can be found on line at:
<https://epsd-my.sharepoint.com/:f/g/personal/epsd-us/ErDZHhKnudlCjg2oy0yP0bwBquNN1fbfrLcLqUESfpM3hw?e=l30wJp>

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