

Updated 12-3-2010

ARTICLE 4. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate, or otherwise provide, including transfer from available funds or borrowing, a sum of money to be expended under the direction of the Permanent Building Committee, School Committee or other Town board for architectural design, consultation, engineering and permitting services, construction and/or equipment related to renovations at the Wellesley Middle School to meet demands posed by projected enrollment increases, and for which the Town may be eligible for a school construction grant from the Massachusetts School Building Authority (“MSBA”); or take any other action relative thereto. The MSBA’s grant program is a non-entitlement, discretionary program based on need, as determined by the MSBA, and any project costs the Town incurs in excess of any grant approved by and received from the MSBA shall be the sole responsibility of the Town.

(School Committee)

This Article requests an appropriation to the Permanent Building Committee (PBC) to fund design and construction costs required to renovate internal spaces at the Wellesley Middle School (WMS). These internal renovations, combined with increased utilization of existing spaces, are necessary to address the increased capacity needs on a timely basis with the least disruption and compromise to the students and faculty at an acceptable cost.

Background

The most recent renovation of the WMS (completed in 2007) resulted in an estimated capacity of approximately 1,100 students under its current programming format and scheduling practices. FY11 enrollment is currently at 1,135, which has been accommodated by converting four interior spaces at the Middle School into teaching spaces and more fully utilizing other space. Enrollment projections indicate that there will be a further increase in the number of students enrolled at the WMS with 1,178 in FY12, a peak of 1,190 in FY13, and a decline back to 1,123 by FY17. Without additional classroom space, the increase in projected enrollment will result in class sizes that exceed School Committee class size guidelines, particularly in the eighth grade where class size could increase to an average of 25.3 students in FY14 with a projected range of +/- 3.75 students (based on historical ranges).

A Middle School Building Committee (SBC) was formed in 2009 to review the estimated capacity and utilization at the WMS, as well as to evaluate the various options available to evaluate the additional teaching spaces necessary to accommodate projected enrollment increases on a cost-effective and timely basis.

Educational Program

The School Committee and school administration strongly believe that all alternatives considered must minimize the impact on the current educational program and environment. In reviewing the options available, the SBC considered the following elements to be important as it assessed options for handling the anticipated increase in enrollment:

1. Maintain the existing house, cluster and open enrollment format (three schools within a school).
2. Continue to support the expanding Special Education and English-as-a-Second Language programs.
3. Keep classroom sizes at or near the guideline of 22.
4. Support the current elective subject offerings.
5. Minimize teacher traveling between periods.

SBC Recommendation

The Report of Wellesley Middle School Building Committee (SBC Report), attached to this report, describes the SBC's process, the alternatives it investigated with input from many constituencies, including neighbors, parents, the School Committee and School Administration, the PBC and others. Among the options considered at various times were permanent building additions, the addition of modular classrooms, the relocation of the School Department's Central Administration to leased space and interior renovations. The SBC has recommended "Option X" which will add nine education spaces to the WMS at an estimated cost of \$1,600,000.

The key issues which the SBC evaluated included the following:

1. Working with School Administration to increase the current utilization of the existing building from approximately 71% to 78% in core classrooms and 72% to 74% in elective spaces by having certain teachers move between classrooms during the day.
2. Optimizing the use of available spaces through better scheduling including use of the cafeteria for study halls when possible.
3. Allowing some classes to exceed class size guidelines during the duration of the enrollment "bubble" but keeping the average size at slightly above or at guidelines. While not ideal, the School Administration supports this for a limited period of time.
4. Thoroughly reviewing all possible spaces in the current building. This process was challenged and re-challenged many times to ensure that all viable spaces were considered.
5. Altering room usage to maximize utilization. This included choosing to change the use of certain spaces into core classrooms and SPED space.
6. Choosing improvements that permanently improve the School within the existing footprint
7. Ensuring that the renovation can be completed on a timely basis to meet the enrollment needs, while minimizing disruption during the school day and assuring completion at an acceptable cost.

Based on these and other considerations, the SBC concluded that Option X adequately expands the capacity of WMS to meet the projected enrollment of the WMS between FY12 through FY17, optimizes the functionality of the possible education space in the building, provides some flexibility if additional classroom space is needed in the future and, most importantly, continues to support the educational program recommended by the School Administration in a timely and cost effective manner.

As noted in the SBC Report, the cost of Option X is currently estimated to be \$1,600,000, which is approximately \$230,000 higher than Option X-Prime. The SBC believes the additional costs of Option X, which primarily relate to the conversion of the second of two lecture halls to a classroom, are justified. Permanently improving this space during this proposed project is cost-effective and would be prohibitively expensive if addressed in a future project. Option X adds additional functionality to WMS and provides some expansion flexibility going forward if the student population grows above current projections.

Advisory believes that the SBC performed a comprehensive and thorough review of numerous alternatives and options developed for increasing capacity at WMS. Advisory is impressed with the way SBC has guided the evolution of this project. It is our belief that Option X, although not the least costly of the options considered, minimizes the impact on the education program, optimizes the use of existing spaces and permanently improves the building

Advisory supports the Permanent Building Committee's (PBC) recommendation, described in the Update to the SBC Report, to include the full demolition of the second floor lecture hall floor

as an "add alternate" to the bid request for this project. The "add alternate" would create more usable space at WMS if PBC determines that the bid is reasonable and if the project cost, including the "add alternate", does not exceed \$1.6 million. A few members expressed concern about the cost of increasing the scope of the project beyond renovations to address increased enrollment needs.

~~Advisory recommends favorable action, 14 to 0.~~

Advisory recommends favorable action, 12 to 0