

SCHOOL BUILDING COMMITTEE UPDATE – 03/05/10

After seven years of dedication and diligent work by the School Building Committee (SBC), Sutton is close to clearing the last hurdle in securing a much needed high school/middle school complex for students.

The Massachusetts State Building Authority (MSBA) approved Sutton's latest design option at their board meeting on January 27. The project will then move to the next phase within the MSBA's guidelines with the submittal of the final schematic design, project scope and funding. This meeting will take place March 16.

Once approved, the proposal will likely be put before the voters at the annual town meeting on **May 10th**. A two-thirds majority vote is needed at this meeting in order to place the proposal on the ballot **May 25th**. The total cost of the project will be roughly \$60-63 million dollars with Sutton looking for a reimbursement of 51- 57% from the state.

The reimbursement rate is determined by certain incentives given by the state. The project is expected to reach the maximum percentage rate in order to reduce the overall cost of the building. The exact percentage will be determined shortly.

The original School Building Needs Committee was established in 2003 in order to evaluate the building needs of the Sutton School district. After the formation of the MSBA in 2004 the committee was expanded to 13 members, who included school and town officials, along with members of the community, each of whom bring their own expertise towards the project. Traditionally, the committee meets the first Wednesday of each month, with additional meetings schedule in order to meet MSBA guidelines.

How did we get here?

In order to get to this point, the town had to submit a statement of interest outlining the issues of working within a high school built in 1949 and a middle school built in 1955. Sutton listed six out of eight potential priorities for the justification of a new or renovated building. Among the most important issues was the health and safety of the students due to the general deterioration of the two buildings. Students are also not allowed to shower or drink the water due to corrosion of pipes throughout the two schools. Presently, water is purchased for drinking and cooking purposes.

The school's heating and electrical systems are also severely outdated. Many of the areas housing computers are linked by extension cords and power strips. An extensive laundry list was presented to the MSBA including; leaking roofs, inadequate learning areas, structural issues as well as security concerns.

Currently Sutton Memorial High School is on accreditation warning status due to the inadequacies of the school building. We will remain on warning status until facility issues are addressed. If the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) determine that the town is not meeting the standard, Sutton faces probation and eventually the probable loss of accreditation. In its justification, the committee also pointed out the need to accommodate future growth. The MSBA received building project requests from over 300 towns across the state, Sutton and 82 other districts were determined to be the most in need and were selected to move forward with feasibility and schematic design.

Once the statement of interest was approved, the project went through four difficult and arduous phases for approval by the MSBA. The SBC worked very hard over the past seven years to get to the final stages of phase four in order to receive final approval by the state.

One of the most important stages of the project is the hiring of an Owner's Project Manager (OPM) to help orchestrate and oversee the entire project. Because of new strict

application requirements by the MSBA, an OPM is required for any school building projects over \$1.5 million dollars. Last summer, the SBC chose Strategic Building Solutions (SBS) out of over 40 applicants for the position. Jon Winikur, co-founder of SBS, was chosen as the project lead. Mr. Winikur has overseen many successful projects in the area, including the building of schools in East Greenwich, Lynn and Loomis Chaffe School. He will serve as the facilitator between Sutton and the MSBA and is also working closely with the SBC and the community in addressing issues and concerns.

Mr. Winikur was the key speaker in presenting the overall project at two recent forums open to the general public in the Sutton middle school auditorium. More public forums are on tap in the near future in order to update citizens on the progress of the project.

What will the impact be to the taxpayers?

With the citizens of Sutton responsible for less than half the cost for the overall project, Jim Smith, town administrator, put together some **preliminary** numbers on the project. Based on the average house value of \$340,000, tax payers would see an increase of \$235 in the first year starting in 2013, peak at \$690 after three years, and then see reductions over the 20-year period of the loan. On a positive note, interest rates are at an all-time low at roughly 3%, which will help considerably in keeping the overall costs low. Labor and material costs are also significantly lower due to present economic conditions.

What could happen if this project is not approved by the community?

Asked recently what would happen if the people of the town did not pass the proposed schools, the answer given by Mr. Winikur and Wendy Mead, Chair of the SBC, were very compelling. Mr. Winikur projected the cost of “doing nothing” would be roughly the same cost incurred by the town for a new school just to bring the school up to acceptable standards. None of the cost would be reimbursable by the state and the town would most likely be faced with significant capital expenditures in the near future. Additionally, renovations to those schools would not guarantee reinstatement of accreditation status.

In terms of going through the process again with the MSBA, Sutton would go “to the end of the line” without any promise from the state that the reimbursement rate would be as high or available at all.

What is the plan?

Flansburgh Associates was chosen by the building committee as the architects for the project. Flansburgh also played a major part in the development of the feasibility study early on in the project. The study was put together by the committee to demonstrate the many issues with two older buildings.

Four building and renovation options were considered for presentation to the MSBA after a series of well thought out discussions by the committee. Of those four, one known presently as option DC-1, was chosen by the building committee and approved by the MSBA. The committee felt strongly to keep the “core” building structure since it is only 20 years old.

The design of the building will house both high school and middle school students in order to share resources. However, Flansburgh incorporated the school so both the high school and middle schools have distinct areas. Flansburgh presented the DC-1 version at the forum held on February 4th.

The school will include updated and modern classrooms along with much needed science labs. It will also include a gym for middle school use, an expanded library, an auditorium for plays and concerts, as well as address the needs of the special education department.

The drawing and more information can be accessed through town's web site at www.suttonma.org by clicking on "school building committee". To watch replays of the Sutton Building Committee meetings, tune into our local cable channels Verizon 30 and 31 or Charter 11 and 12.