

**School Building Committee Update - 04/01/10**  
**(also submitted as a press release to The Uxbridge Times)**

Thanks in large part to Representative Jennifer Callahan (D-18<sup>th</sup> District), the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) voted March 31, 2010 to approve the proposed project for a new middle/high school in the town of Sutton. The proposal will go before voters at a town meeting slated for **May 10th**. If approved by a two-thirds majority at the town meeting, the proposal will be placed on the ballot at the town's annual election on **May 25th**.

"The Sutton Middle-High School has structural and programmatic deficiencies that a sensible renovation and addition will remedy", stated Katherine Cravin, MSBA Executive Director, in approving the school project.

In order to get to this point, Sutton 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The school's heating and electrical systems are also severely outdated.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 that run along the classroom floors. The heating units are so loud that the heat has to be unplugged when the teachers speak or they can't be heard. A choice has to be made between heating the room and teaching the students. An extensive laundry list was presented to the MSBA including; leaking roofs, inadequate learning areas, structural issues as well as security concerns.

Due to the inadequacies of the schools, Sutton High School is also in fear of being placed on probation by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC). The school is currently on a warning status due to the space and structural issues. Students looking to attend college would be severely affected if the school was placed on probation. In its justification, the committee also pointed out the need to accommodate future growth.

Total project costs for the proposed school will be \$59,945,472 with the state picking up \$29,843,511 of those costs. Cost to taxpayers will be \$30,100,000.

With the help and urging of Representative Callahan, the MSBA agreed to reimburse the town an additional 7,000 square feet of space for utilization of three foreign language classes and a team room. In her argument, Callahan stated, "These areas are a key part of the curriculum for the students of Sutton and should be included in the overall reimbursement of the project."

"Representative Callahan was tremendously beneficial in helping not only to get the school project approved, but in getting us the additional space for reimbursement," commented Wendy Mead, Sutton School Building Committee Chair. Jon Winiker, project manager and president of Strategic Building Systems also praised Callahan for her help during a committee meeting on April 7. Winiker, who is acting as a liaison between the town of Sutton and the MSBA also thanked Senator Richard T. Moore (D-Worcester/Norfolk) for his help in getting the project approved by the state.

Jim Smith, Sutton's town administrator, outlined the cost to taxpayers for the proposed project at a recent town forum on March 25 and at the meeting on April 7. Smith said the impact on a single family home valued at \$340,000 was originally going to cost an average of \$510 a year. However, due to debt roll off for projects coming off the books in fiscal 2013, the cost will be reduced to approximately \$356 a year over a 20 year period. Smith sighted Tim Harrison, Sutton's town accountant, with coming up with some innovative ways to pay the debt off earlier than expected. According to Smith, the cost may be reduced even more given that interest rates for projects such as this have fallen to as low as 2.75%.

As part of the forum and discussion to the public on March 25, Vince Dube, architect for Flansburgh Associates, gave a 3-D schematic design of the proposed school. 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 school is designed to use as much natural light as possible to reduce energy costs and to promote a better learning environment. The project was given an additional 1% reimbursement for its green initiatives built into the design of the school.

Both Winiker and Dube pointed out that nearly \$1 million dollars towards the cost of the project was reduced through slight modifications. Most of the changes were aimed at the sight plan, an area not reimbursable by the state in order to reduce the burden on the town.

"We felt it was in the best interest of the town to look at ways to saving money for the taxpayers," said Winiker.

If approved by the town, the start of the project would begin in the spring of 2011, and completed in the summer of 2014 before the start of the school year.

The drawing and more information can be accessed through town's web site at [www.suttonma.org](http://www.suttonma.org) by clicking on "school building committee". A public forum will be held at the middle school auditorium on **Thursday April 29<sup>th</sup> at 7pm**. All Sutton residents are urged to attend.

Ken Stuart  
Sutton Middle/High School Building Committee