NORTH STONINGTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

PROJECT UPDATE DECEMBER 17, 2015

WHEELER MIDDLE & HIGH SCHOOL - 7th thru 12th Grade Configuration: The scope of the project demolishes a large section of the existing school and relocates the central offices to the 1996 addition at the existing high school. The project will include a 44,500 SF addition at the gymatorium for a consolidated school at the west side of Route 2. The existing gymatorium building would be renovated to meet code and educational program requirements. The project would meet all educational needs. Security will be upgraded and the Route 2 connector will be not be modified.

The scope for both projects include:

- Address Hazmat and health concerns in all schools.
- Address storage issues in each school
- Consider alternative energy / solar etc.
- Address security at the schools
- Address all NEASC citations
- Title IX at all buildings
- Meet educational specifications
- Maximize state reimbursement
- Address building and fire codes concerns in all schools.

NORTH STONINGTON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - Relocate the 6th grade to NSES for a PK thru 6th Configuration: There is space available on the second floor of NSES to accommodate the 6th grade students. By relocating the 6th grade students to the elementary school the town is able to get the full reimbursement of 46.07% for the project at this school. The project includes a 2,600 SF addition for a central kitchen. The existing building would be fully renovated to an "As New" status. The project would meet all educational needs.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

QUESTION 1 - Why do this project?

ANSWER - The Elementary School, Wheeler Middle/High School and the Gymnatorium have serious issues that impact building structure, student safety and security, and academics. These need to be addressed.

QUESTION 2 - Why not limit the fix to a few essentials? Just do the top priority items? For example, a renovate "as new" project calls for fixing the mortar (repointing) in the brick veneer of the buildings. Why not just skip that?

ANSWER - The number of items that need to be fixed in the buildings is extensive. Fixing those items alone would probably cost taxpayers more than doing a full renovation to "as new" and thereby obtaining state reimbursement.

If we renovate the buildings to "as new" condition, the state will partially reimburse us. The state's contribution would be forty-six percent if their space requirements are met, as compared to zero if we don't renovate "as new". Construction of a completely new building would be reimbursed at ten percent less than renovate "as new".

In the example of repointing the brick veneer, the exterior surface will likely degrade visibly if we don't do repointing. If we don't renovate "as new", it is more likely that an item like that, as well as other new, expensive problems will surface in coming years.

QUESTION 3 - Why not do Wheeler now and put the elementary school off for a few years (4-5) to avoid building too much debt? Wouldn't "do Wheeler first" let us do the most expensive of the two schools, while interest rates are low? (Furthermore, the science labs were singled out by NEASC as one of the most pressing issues. This approach would help the high school keep its accreditation.)

ANSWER - There is not enough space for the 6th grade in the current elementary school. If we just do Wheeler, it will have to contain space for the 6th graders. That would end our plan for them returning to the Elementary School.

- The need for more space would drive up the cost of the high school project. It might also necessitate that kitchen facilities be added to the high school project.
- Delaying the elementary school means the elementary school students would not see the improvements in climate conditions, safety, and security for some time.
- It is likely that the price for the elementary school project will increase in the coming years because of borrowing and construction cost increases.
- If we do both schools in one project, we get one shared kitchen, a shorter completion time & the ability to allow for one contractor, which all will save us money.

QUESTION 4 - Why build a new high school? Couldn't we just renovate Wheeler? Wouldn't this cost less?

ANSWER - It would actually cost more to renovate the existing Middle/High School for a variety of reasons.

- In the proposed approach, we get a brand new building that will be modern and energy efficient.
- Students will not use the tunnel because classrooms and gym will all be on one side of Route 2, eliminating this security problem.
- The building would be constructed without interrupting education in Wheeler.
- There would be no problems with cleanup of toxic substances (PCBs, lead, or asbestos) during construction, as there would be with renovation.
- The economics of the process help pay for the building.
- Since the new building is attached to the gymnatorium, we would get "renovate as new" reimbursement, which is ten percent more than the reimbursement for a freestanding new building.
- Adding the new wing to the gymnatorium is much faster than remodeling Wheeler in place. It avoids extra costs due to yearly increases in labor and materials.
- Extra costs due to phasing (stop/start/stop/start) would be eliminated.
- We won't have to build a cover for the tunnel walkway, which we felt was required as part of a renovation of the old Wheeler building.

QUESTION 5 - Why not do the Elementary School now and put Wheeler off for a few years (4-5) to avoid building too much debt?

ANSWER - (Note that doing the "Elementary School first" has some logic. People relocating to North Stonington for a better family might be more motivated by the elementary school than the high school. Furthermore, this approach joins the 6th grade with the elementary school immediately and solves known problems with toxic substances in the structure and the lunchroom/gym.)

ANSWER - Delaying the high school project could cause the slow death of the school. Failure to commit funds to the high school will threaten its accreditation. Additionally we have ADA, safety, code, & environmental concerns that must still be immediately addressed.

Students in Wheeler would lack the benefit of upgrades, like HVAC, for a longer period of time.

If the high school were to close, we would have to find a permanent home for the junior high school students. That would involve some renovation of Wheeler or the construction of a new junior high school. It is likely that borrowing and construction costs would make a high school project more costly in the future.

QUESTION 6 - How were costs taken into account in the design of the projects?

ANSWER

- Design of the entire project was done with an eye to space criteria for state funding. The Elementary School projects will receive the full reimbursement.
- The Elementary School and Wheeler will share kitchen facilities.
- The architect and the committee focused on optimizing classroom space, adjusting for past and projected enrollments and creating flexible room sizes in other cases.
- Frills were avoided.

QUESTION 7 - How much extra capacity will the schools have for students in the event that more families are attracted to North Stonington?

ANSWER - The schools can handle twenty percent more students without creating serious overcrowding.

QUESTION 8 - What will be the fate of the current Wheeler building and how much will it cost?

ANSWER - The older wing of the Wheeler building that now houses grades 6-8 and the cafeteria will be torn down. This cost is included in the November 23rd proposed project budget.

The "Central Office" for administration will occupy the area that is currently the Wheeler building's administrative space and the media center. There is no commitment by any party to use the remaining southeast wing of the remaining structure, but potential tenants are being pursued. In the worst case it would have to be demolished.

QUESTION 9 - Why is the new proposed project only slightly less money than the 2014 proposal? Didn't the 2014 referendum fail because it was too expensive?

ANSWER - While we are unsure of the reasons the last referendum failed, it is reasonable to assume it was due to cost. The School Modernization Ad-Hoc Committee has worked hard to reduce costs on this proposal. A few examples are utilization of a centralized kitchen serving both schools and minimal funds devoted to new furniture, lockers and fixtures.

Although we reduced many costs, construction costs have escalated and there are different requirements for environmental testing which have driven up PCB abatement costs at the Elementary School that require more funds in this area. . It should also be noted that costs escalate on average 5%. To have a new project proposal 2 years later that actually costs less money than in 2013 and still meets the needs of our town and creates a state of the art facility is a great accomplishment.

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