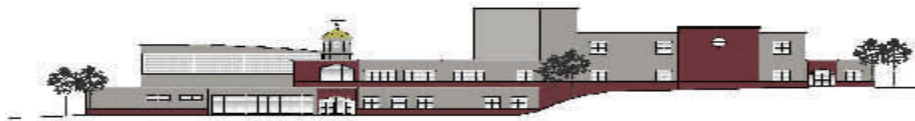


LEBANON SCHOOL BUILDING PROJECT INFORMATION FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT



Lebanon Junior High School Project

The School Board will ask for public approval in the March voting of its proposal to construct a new middle school for grades 5-8 on the Moulton property site on Route 4 at a cost of \$24.9 million. The district would be eligible to receive about \$8 million of state building aid for the project. If the proposal is approved, then construction of the new building would begin this summer with a projected opening of January of 2012. Because the project involves the issuance of bonds, it must be approved by 60% of the voters on March 9 in order for it to proceed.

The building will include about 100,000 square feet on three floors, and it will include a full gym with a stage opening into it, a library, a computer room, and a full-sized cafeteria as well as classroom space for about 550 - 600 students. The site of approximately 26 acres is large enough to accommodate three full-sized athletic playing fields.

The need to replace or to extensively renovate the junior high school building on Bank Street has been under consideration in Lebanon for decades; the School Board has become convinced that the current building is educationally inadequate because it lacks sufficient classroom space as well as appropriate commons areas (e.g. gymnasium, library). Moreover, the building has violated several fire and safety codes that have often been cited as problems in recent years and which have demanded remedial measures and waivers.

This proposal is essentially the same as the proposal that was not approved by the district's voters in March of 2009 although it did earn support from 58.5% of the voters at that time. The following chronology lists the events and the School Board actions that have occurred in the last ten months:

Spring 2009. Before classes closed in June, the School Board had expressed support for the Route 4, grades 5-8 proposal again while reiterating the opinion that the property space at that site was advantageous. However, the Board acknowledged the need to review all options publicly and the need to affirm the costs that would be involved. It subsequently directed Banwell Associates, the project's architect, to prepare plans for four possible options: (a) a renovated and expanded Seminary Hill School for grades 5-6 and a renovated and expanded junior high school building at Bank Street for grades 7-8, (b) a renovated and expanded middle school building for grades 5-8 at Bank Street, (c) a new building for grades 5-8 at the Bank Street property, and (d) a new building for grades 5-8 at the Route 4 site.

Members of the School Board expressed the general opinion that these options represented the most appropriate combinations of sites and renovation/new construction work from amongst the many possibilities. Other plans, such as a smaller-scale, phased-in renovation and addition for the current junior high building to continue to house grades 7-8 generally were considered to be inefficient cost-wise and inadequate, untimely, and unpractical in solving the district's needs.

Summer 2009. The School Board's Finance and Facilities Committee met weekly to review the plans prepared by the architects and engineers and to consider the costs as well as the advantages and disadvantages of each option.

Fall 2009. Following continued review by the committee and the full board, the School Board hosted a public forum in early October at which the four options were presented and public input was solicited. Shortly after that meeting, the Board selected two options for further consideration: (a) a new 5-8 school on Bank Street and (b) a new 5-8 school on Route 4. Board members generally expressed the desire to build new construction instead of renovating. No experts or state officials have recommended renovation, and the costs of the projects that included both renovation and new construction exceeded the costs of new building alone. Also, the first two options which included renovation work would have posed significant and unresolved problems of where to house students for classes as the work moved into the current buildings.

The School Board subsequently directed the architects to continue detailed planning for those two proposals for new buildings, and it also contracted with Conestco, a firm from Maine, to separately and independently review the plans and to prepare its own cost estimates for the two proposals. It also directed the project's engineers to submit applications to state and local officials for site permitting for the work that would be required on the new site on Route 4.

December 2009 – January 2010. Once more detailed plans had been prepared and the independent cost estimator had completed his estimates, a second public forum was held on December 12 at Mt. Lebanon Elementary School. The cost estimates were disclosed at figures that were slightly lower than the previous estimates although they were within a 2% range. Those revised costs have been used since that meeting. Public input was again solicited at the Mt. Lebanon session.

On January 6, the School Board selected the Route 4 option as its choice for a final proposal for the warrant. Three sets of considerations were cited as critical to that decision:

(a) The cost for the Route 4 was slightly less (about \$1.5 million) than the cost for the Bank Street construction. Although the building plans are almost identical, the site preparation for the Bank Street site involved considerably more cost because of the soft base soil at the basin area there.

(b) Although the Bank Street site would have kept the school closer to town, members of the Board expressed a strong de-

sire to utilize the larger property at the Route 4 site. The Bank Street site consists of about eight acres, and that is smaller than the 15 acres that current state standards demand. The district could probably obtain a waiver for that site, but the Board members expressed a strong preference for the additional space at the Route 4 setting. Among other things, the use of the Route 4 site would enable the school to hold all of its athletic and recreational activities on-site instead of relying on busing students to off-campus fields.

(c) The construction work will not interfere with the conduct of classes. The Bank Street option would have entailed the construction of a new building across the driveway from the current building which would still be used for at least a year and a half of classes during the construction. Board members were never totally reassured about the safety or appropriateness of that work.

A twenty-year bond for \$24.9 million would initially raise the tax rate in FY2013 by about \$1.15 per \$1000 after the state aid of almost 40% is deducted. Offsetting that increase, however, will be the termination of the school district's current debt obligations in that same year, 2013. The termination of those obligations for the high school lab project and the heating and ventilating projects throughout the schools will reduce the rate by about 30 cents thereby reducing the total impact.

There are two other aspects of the development that have been important, the grade span for the new school and the status of state construction aid.

Grade Configuration

There has been much discussion about the placement of fifth grade in a new middle school and, particularly, whether students of that age can be served effectively in a facility with older children. The National Association of Middle Schools recommends both 6-8 and 5-8 configurations for middle schools claiming that both models can function well in addressing the educational and social needs of pre-teen students. Middle schools across the state of New Hampshire are split between the two models with more than twenty schools of each configuration.

Therefore, the decision of officials in Lebanon has focused on what serves the local community best, and there have been three prime factors involved in that assessment:

Costs. Adding the fifth grade to the school's configuration reduces the per pupil cost of the construction by about \$10,000 per student. The common areas remain essentially unchanged while the additional classrooms add about \$1.5 million. However, that cost increase is more than offset by the addition of 120 fifth grade students, and that reduces the cost per pupil.

Long-term planning. The long-term facility needs of the district are addressed with the addition of fifth grade to the new building. With that addition, all of the district's grades are appropriately housed for the immediate future with the future possibility of someday constructing a new elementary school at the Bank Street property. If fifth grade is not included at the new school, then there would be resulting dilemmas in housing and planning for the fifth grade.

Curriculum and staff work. Lebanon has had housed its fifth and sixth grades together for generations although classes were split across the two sides of town. The fifth and sixth grade curriculums fit together well, and the teaching staffs work well together. That model and that cooperation would be maintained in the current proposal, and the teachers have expressed a general desire to remain together.

Moreover, the Board has expressed great interest in a model by which the new school would open with co-principals and in the hope that Andy Mellow and Martha Langill would fill those roles for grades 7-8 and 5-6 respectively.

State Aid

The state of New Hampshire has struggled with its budget throughout the current difficult economic period, and state building aid has been a frequent target of budget cutters. State officials have been concerned about the amount of money dispensed in aid especially since this year's aid is being covered by state bonds. They have also been concerned about the lack of decision-making the state has in awarding aid. A legislative committee has met throughout the fall to consider those problems and to plan for the likelihood of suspending aid.

Board members and administrators from Lebanon attended some of those committee hearings to explain Lebanon's situation and needs. I believe that our arguments and those of officials from Claremont have been persuasive insofar as the committee ultimately recommended that state building aid be suspended after this year's voting. It appears most probable that the full state legislature will approve the continuation of building aid for projects that are approved this year but that it will suspend aid for any further projects for at least several years. In other words, we can expect to receive about \$8 million in state aid for our project if it is approved on March 9. It is likely, however, that no aid would be available for any new projects for at least some period of years. It is inconceivable that Lebanon could attempt to undertake a building project of approximately \$25 million without state aid as would be the case for the next several years.

~~Opportunities to see the designs and ask your questions—District Meeting and Public Forum~~

Please attend the District Meeting on Saturday, February 6 at 9:00 at Lebanon High School Gym and a Public Forum on Saturday, February 27 at 9:00 at the Lebanon High School Cafeteria.

Voting Day—Tuesday, March 9 - 8am until 7pm at the three wards: Ward 1 - Mount Lebanon School, Ward 2 - Methodist Church on School Street, and Ward 3 - lower level of Lebanon College. If your plans take you out of town that day, or if you have a college student away on March 9th, you may request an absentee ballot from the City Clerk of Lebanon just by writing to:

Lebanon City Clerk at 51 N Park Street. Include your signature and your mailing address, a ballot will be sent once available.

Visit www.sau88.net for more information on the building project and watch for a NEW Building website coming soon.