

15 March 2022

Brittany Gomes
Project Coordinator
Massachusetts School Building Authority
40 Broad Street
Boston MA 02109

Re: Fort River Elementary School
MSBA Project No. 201900080020
Preliminary Design Program Submission

Dear Brittany:

Attached for your review is the Preliminary Design Program Submission for the Fort River Elementary School Project.

We hereby certify that we have reviewed and coordinated the materials in partnership with DiNisco Design and that the submittal is complete. We also confirm that the Building Committee and the District have approved the materials for submission to the MSBA.

Please contact me with any questions or comments.

Sincerely,


Margaret Minor Wood

Cc: Cathy Schoen, School Building Committee Chair
Dr. Michael Morris, Superintendent of Schools
Allison McDonald, School Committee Chair
Paul Bockelman, Town Manager
Donna DiNisco, DiNisco Design
Tim Cooper, DiNisco Design

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The purpose of the Preliminary Design Program is to define the programmatic, functional, spatial, and environmental requirements of the educational facility necessary to meet the District's educational program, and perform the review and investigation required to clearly define the existing building deficiencies.

The original Study Enrollment Certification was to evaluate design alternatives for two enrollments:

- Grades K-6 at Fort River Elementary School with 320 students
- Grades K-5 at Fort River and Wildwood Elementary Schools with 575 students

Since the initial Study Enrollment Certification, the Amherst School Committee voted in October 2021 to move the sixth grade from the town's elementary schools to the Regional Middle School.

In response to this change, MSBA issued a new Study Enrollment Certification to evaluate design alternatives for the following enrollments:

- Grades K-5 at Fort River Elementary School with 165 students
- Grades K-5 at Fort River and Wildwood Elementary Schools with 575 students

Based upon the District's educational program and the revised Study Enrollment Certification we have identified and prepared the educational goals and programmatic space needs for the Fort River Elementary School project. Further, as part of the Feasibility Study to date, the District has explored the opportunity for consolidation of two of their elementary schools. The Fort River Elementary School of Grades K-5 with 165 students does not meet the educational objectives for the District. Therefore, after review and consideration of the two Study Enrollment options, the District prefers to combine the Fort River and Wildwood Elementary Schools with an enrollment of 575 students in Grades K-5 as part of this project.

The space needs along with an evaluation of existing conditions and site development requirements have formed our recommendation for a preliminary evaluation of alternatives. This list will be the basis for the remainder of the Preferred Schematic Report upon which the most educationally appropriate and cost-effective solution will be recommended.

Facility Deficiencies

Fort River Elementary School

The Fort River Elementary School is one of three elementary schools in the Amherst Public School system. It is located on a 31.5-acre site within a residential area. The building is bound by a neighborhood to the North and West with Bayberry Land Conservation around the South and East. Fort River runs along the eastern and southern property lines and there are wetland areas within the property. The overall site's topography is relatively flat, but the western edges exhibit some grade changes near the North East Street connection.

The Fort River Elementary School is located at 70 South East Street in Amherst, Massachusetts. The original school (1973), is an 82,000 gross square foot single-story building. No expansions or renovations have been done to the original building.

The school currently serves kindergarten through 6th grade. The 1973 building is an open concept floor plan with make-shift separations to divide the pods of four classrooms. The library is centrally located in the center of the building. The gymnasium has direct access to the outdoors. The cafeteria is located at one end of the building and is currently divided to allow for additional separation of the students due to COVID. The special education spaces are not integrated with the general classrooms primarily due to the open concept floor plan and the need for quiet areas.

Although the building is on one floor it is not fully accessible.

Despite some maintenance repairs to its envelope and mechanical systems within the past 20 years, the Fort River School remains largely original.

The original boilers were replaced with high-efficiency gas-fired boilers. The chiller is beyond end of life, a temporary chiller was used on site last year. Heating and cooling units consist of unit ventilators that are at end of life. The ventilation is provided by unit ventilators and internal air handling units for the interior spaces.

The building's electrical switchboard is rated at 200-amperes, 120/208 volts, 3-phase and is

original to the building.

All of the systems in the building are past their useful life, affecting comfort and safety as well as teaching and learning. The existing light fixtures are inefficient and produce glare on marker boards and computer screens. Heat is uneven, with some rooms too hot and others too cold. Ventilation is below standard and is altogether lacking in some spaces.

The building features a flat roof that was stripped to the decking and replaced with a new single-ply roof in 1997.

The 1971 building was constructed prior to the current Massachusetts State Building Code; accordingly, the structure was not designed for wind and seismic loads, this construction does not meet current code requirements.

Facility Deficiencies

Wildwood Elementary School

The Wildwood Elementary School is one of three elementary schools in the Amherst Public School system. It is located on a 14.3-acre site within a residential area at 71 Strong Street. The site has varying topography with a relatively flat area surrounding the building and large elevation changes along the north, south and eastern edges of the site.

The single-story building was completed in 1971. The building does not have any accessible entrances that meet MAAB requirements.

Heating and cooling in the building is provided by unit ventilators, the boiler and chiller are at the end of their useful life. Ventilation for interior spaces is provided by internal air handling units.

The building is provided with 2000-amperes services, 120/208 volts, 3-phase. The switchboard dates from the 1973 and was made by a manufacturer known for poor quality and virtually non-existent replacement parts. New electrical systems have been added over time using surface mounted raceways.

As with the Fort River School, the MEP systems of the Wildwood School have outlived their useful life and do not support personal comfort, safety or foster a suitable learning environment.

Refer to PART 4 | EVALUATION OF EXISTING CONDITIONS for a full report on the facility's existing conditions.

Program Deficiencies

Fort River Elementary School

The Fort River School offers a comprehensive K-6 academic program that is standards-based, largely aligned across the grade levels, and geared towards excellence for all students. Although there is adequate space within the building overall, the configuration of the space is inappropriate for a number of functions. The building was designed in the late 1960's with large open-space quads (4000 square feet each) which are totally inappropriate for education as it is conducted today.

Although various dividers and partitions have been erected, virtually every "classroom" suffers from severe interference from noise and distraction from adjacent classes. The result is that the instructional spaces are not conducive to learning, teaching, or academic work. Teachers and students often have a hard time hearing each other, and concentrating on assignments is difficult for many students. Students and entire classes must pass through other "classrooms" on their way to their own classrooms or the bathrooms. The constant passing through of classes and individuals is a steady disruption which severely interferes with efforts to provide quality instruction. If one thinks of a classroom as having four walls and one or two doors, there are actually only six classrooms in this whole large school, which currently houses 22 classes of students.

Although there is adequate space within the building overall, the configuration of the space is inappropriate for a number of functions. There are several special program and development spaces used for different purposes than for which they were originally designed.

In general, the shortcomings at the Fort River School include:

- Instrumental Music – Scheduling conflicts with cafeteria & small group instructional spaces
- Special Education – Limited quiet instructional spaces
- Library – The library is open to the corridors, limiting its functionality. Noise and traffic are a regular distraction to classes held in the library.

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- Speech & Language Therapy – Lack of self-contained space
- Health Room – Too small for the amount of medication dispensing and care for students (changing area for special needs students) on a daily basis
- IEP Meetings – Unsuitable or inadequate spaces for private conversations with parents
- Occupational therapy
- After school programs
- Inappropriate space for computer infrastructure, including network server
- Inadequate electrical supply for computers, causing frequent power outages

Programs needed with appropriate space currently unavailable:

- Performances & Drama, Assemblies: no auditorium
- Parent / Community Space
- Science Lab – There is not a dedicated space for STE programming.

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Program Deficiencies

Wildwood Elementary School

The Wildwood School mirrors the Fort River School. It is the exact same design as the Fort River School. It offers a comprehensive K-6 academic program that is standards-based, largely aligned across the grade levels, and geared towards excellence for all students. Although there is adequate space within the building overall, the configuration of the space is inappropriate for a number of functions. The building was designed in the late 1960's with large open-space quads (4,000 square feet each) which are totally inappropriate for education as it is conducted today.

Although various dividers and partitions have been erected, virtually every "classroom" suffers from severe interference from noise and distraction from adjacent classes. The result is that the instructional spaces are not conducive to learning, teaching, or academic work. Teachers and students often have a hard time hearing each other, and concentrating on assignments is difficult for many students. Students and entire classes must pass through other "classrooms" on their way to their own classrooms or the bathrooms. The constant passing through of classes and individuals is a steady disruption which severely interferes with efforts to provide quality instruction. If one thinks of a classroom as having four walls and one or two doors, there are actually only six classrooms in this whole large school, which currently houses 22 classes of students.

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MSBA Invitation

The MSBA invited Amherst Public Schools into the eligibility period on December 11, 2019 and extended an invitation to the Feasibility Study phase on February 11, 2021. Refer to the Appendix for the MSBA Invitation into the eligibility period and Feasibility Study.

Design Enrollment

The original Study Enrollment Certification was to evaluate design alternatives for two enrollments:

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A copy of the Updated Enrollment Certification is included in the Appendix of this report.

Capital Budget Statement

It is important for the MSBA and the district to have a complete understanding of the district's financial resources and ability to support a proposed school project. This Capital Budget Statement requests information regarding the Town and district capital planning and resources and is included in the Appendix of this report.

The Town of Amherst is in good financial health. S&P Global issued a municipal bond rating of AA+ in May of 2021. As of July 1, 2021, the Town has increased its reserves to \$23.1 million or 27% of the total budget. In April of 2021, the Town Council approved funding for the renovation and addition of the Jones Library. The Town is also planning for the replacement of its Fire Station and Public Works facility. The Town currently anticipates a debt exclusion vote for the Elementary School in March or April of 2023. The Elementary School project has broad support, and the community understands that this will be their last opportunity to fund the project with the MSBA's assistance. No other capital projects under consideration anticipate funding via a debt exclusion.

The proposed project will reduce operating costs for Amherst's school budget by reducing the overall square footage of space operated for elementary school students and by increasing the operational efficiency of Amherst's elementary school programs.

For additional information please view the [Town of Amherst Capital Improvement Program for Fiscal Year 2022](#).

The full Fiscal Years 2022 Capital Improvement Plan can be found in the Appendix of this report.

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Local Process

The local process began in January 2018 when the School District submitted a Statement of Interest to the MSBA for the Fort River Elementary School. The MSBA invited the Town of Amherst to participate in a Feasibility Study for this project at the Authority's February 11, 2021 Board Meeting.

Following the February 11, 2021 MSBA Board meeting that invited the Town into the Feasibility Study Phase, the search for an Owner's Project Manager (OPM) began. The Town selected Anser Advisory in June, 2021.

The OPM then worked with the ESBC and MSBA to select a designer. The RFS for designer services was issued on July 21, 2021 and proposals were received on August 18, 2021. The MSBA Designer Selection Panel selected DiNisco Design at the November 16, 2021 meeting of the MSBA Design Selection Panel.

A "scheduling working group" was established and comprised of representatives from ESBC, School Department and Town. This group meets with the project team regularly to ensure information is flowing appropriately and in a timely manner as well as ensure community engagement and other meetings occur as required.

The project team has also met with the Superintendent, Special Education Department, and Building Operations. In addition, the project team and District will visit MSBA elementary school projects to evaluate educational and design precedents and gather design ideas.

This has been an engaging process involving the Amherst Elementary School Building Committee (SBC), School Committee (SC), Net Zero Committee (NZC), Visioning Workshops (VW) with the educators and the community as well as Community Forums (CF).

- 11/18/21 SBC Meeting
- 12/02/21 SBC Meeting
- 12/14/21 SBC / SC Meeting
- 01/05/22 SBC Meeting
- 01/13/22 NZC Meeting
- 01/14/22 VW
- 01/21/22 SBC Meeting
- 01/25/22 VW
- 01/26/22 VW
- 02/03/22 CF
- 02/04/22 SBC Meeting
- 02/08/22 SC Meeting
- 02/10/22 NZC Meeting
- 02/17/22 VW
- 02/18/22 SBC Meeting
- 02/22/22 SC Meeting
- 03/04/22 SBC Meeting
- 03/08/22 SC Meeting
- 03/09/22 CF
- 03/11/22 SBC Meeting

The presentation materials for each meeting, meeting minutes, and summary materials related to the Project are available electronically at <https://www.amherst-school-project.com/>.

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Project Directory

A project directory with contact information for representatives of all District stake-holders, Designer and OPM is included in the Appendix of this report.

Project Schedule

The current project schedule is as follows:

Amherst Elementary School Building Committee
vote for Preferred Schematic:

June 24, 2022

Submission of Preferred Schematic Report:

June 27, 2022

MSBA Facilities Assessment Subcommittee
Presentation:

July 20, 2022 or August 3, 2022

MSBA Board of Directors meeting for approval to
proceed into Schematic Design:

August 31, 2022

Projected MSBA Board of Directors meeting
for approval of Project Scope and Budget
Agreement: **Anticipate to be approximately**

February / March 2023

Projected Town vote for Project Scope and
Budget Agreement: **April 2023**

A project schedule with key meetings and approval
dates is included in the Appendix of this report.
The current project schedule is to have the new
school completed by August 2026.

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