

District: Uxbridge
School Name: Uxbridge High School
Recommended Category: Preferred Schematic
Date: March 31, 2010

Recommendation:

That the Executive Director be authorized to approve the Town of Uxbridge as part of its Invitation for Feasibility Study, to proceed into schematic design for the replacement of the existing Uxbridge High School, subject to certain limitations set forth below. MSBA staff has reviewed the designer's options for the Uxbridge High School and accepts the District's preferred solution to replace the existing building with a new facility on the Quaker Highway site.

Background:

The District submitted one Statement of Interest (SOI) for the Uxbridge High School. The school was built in 1937 and totals 99,000 gross square feet, which includes an addition in 1952 and renovations in 1967, 1989 and 1998. The school serves grades 9-12, with a 2009 enrollment of 460 students.

The District has stated that it has a system-wide capacity and overcrowding issue and serves 2,002 students, Grades PreK -12, in four buildings:

- Pre-K and Kindergarten classrooms are located at the Early Learning Center which is housed in space leased from a local church;
- The Taft Elementary School, behind Uxbridge High School, serves grades 1-4;
- Whitin Middle School, approximately one mile from Uxbridge High School, serves grades 5-8;
- Uxbridge High School houses Grades 9-12.

The District identified a number of building issues with the high school associated with the HVAC, electrical, and life safety systems which have resulted in ongoing NEASC accreditation issues. In addition to the physical plant issues, the District has identified programmatic deficiencies as a result of undersized classrooms, lack of project-based learning spaces and insufficient teacher collaboration spaces.

On November 27, 2008, the MSBA Board of Directors approved staff's recommendation to issue an invitation into the Feasibility Invitation category to further study the problems identified at the Uxbridge High School.

Discussion:

District's Proposal

The District submitted its feasibility study to the MSBA in October 2009 which included several options for new construction and addition/renovations with its recommendation for a preferred schematic for a new high school on the Quaker Highway site. The District's preferred solution for the new high school allows for a district-wide grade restructuring plan, which includes:

- utilizing the existing high school facility as a middle school for Grades 6, 7 and 8;
- moving the 3rd and 4th graders from the Taft Elementary School into the Whitin Middle school creating a 3-5 school;
- moving the Pre-K and K grades from the leased spaces to the Taft Elementary school as a Pre-K to 2.

Although the District has expressed that the current high school does not meet the needs of its high school program, the District has stated that it is confident that the existing high school building with minimal infrastructure repairs can be used effectively as a middle school, housing grades 7 and 8. The District states that the new school is critical to allow for the grade restructuring which helps alleviate overcrowding at the Whitin Middle School and provides educational space for the Pre-K and K.

In support of its proposal, the District has stated that previous renovations to the high school have not addressed the educational program needs for the high school, and NEASC placed the high school in probation status even after the two most recent renovations. The District feels strongly that a new high school on the Quaker Highway site is the only solution to multiple issues facing the district including: high school accreditation status, the large amount paid by the Town due to the large increase in choice out students from the loss of accreditation, overcrowding at the middle school and the lack of permanent space for its pre-K and K population.

After review of the study and the District's recommendation, and after several meetings with District officials, the MSBA had concerns regarding the District's preferred solution and the significant costs to the District and the MSBA, including:

- Significant state commitments since 1988 – \$32 million in grants, including \$13.9 million for the District's priority Statement of Interest, Uxbridge High School.
- District's projected enrollment of 600 students assumes that 50% of school choice out students or almost 100 students will return to Uxbridge High School with the construction of a new school.
- Uxbridge High School is small – a new building for 600 students is less efficient and less cost-effective.
- The District's proposed solution adds a fourth facility to the District's school building inventory and comes with operating expenses.
- There has been significant community discussion surrounding this project. The MSBA's process requires the District to be responsible for educating its community regarding the project and building consensus among the town boards and community members for the preferred schematic recommendation as well as the final total project budget for the potential project. The Board of Selectman has yet to vote on the preferred schematic recommendation.

MSBA Evaluation and Proposal

In light of the MSBA's concerns with the District's proposed solution, the MSBA and the Town of Uxbridge have been working to attempt to address these concerns and come up

with an educationally sound and economically feasible solution. The MSBA met with District officials several times and toured all of the District’s school facilities with its consultants. The MSBA committed the time and efforts of its architectural consultant, at its own expense, to assist the District with finding an educationally sound, cost-effective solution that could receive community support. With its architectural consultant, the MSBA developed, in concept, a plan that would renovate and provide an addition to the existing Uxbridge High School, renovate the Whitin Middle School and provide a 20,000 square foot addition to the Taft Elementary School. The MSBA believes that it developed a reasonable renovation alternative that:

- meets the District’s educational program at a lower construction cost, with minimal phasing and modular requirements;
- minimizes the District’s operational expenses by maintaining the three current facilities; and
- provides an alternative solution which reduces Uxbridge’s share of the project’s costs.

MSBA staff reviewed this alternative with the School Building Committee and members from the Board of Selectman at a meeting held on March 3, 2010. Although the renovation option for the high school offered by the MSBA utilized a number of the same components as the renovation option developed by Uxbridge, it was a more modest renovation overall both at the high school and the middle and elementary schools. The District, however, disagrees that this renovation option is the correct solution because

- it does not adequately address all of the program needs for the high school;
- it creates a 900 student elementary school which is not desirable programmatically;
- it further aggravates the existing circulation issues at the elementary school;
- it doesn’t include a large enough addition at the middle school to relieve overcrowding; and
- it results in the loss of baseball fields utilized by the school and the Town and does not allow for additional fields for the high school.

The MSBA evaluated the costs and the potential grant amounts for the District’s preferred new and renovation/addition options presented by the District as well as the conceptual plan offered by the MSBA. As shown in the table below, the MSBA potential grant would range from \$21 to \$27 million for the three options presented, with little variance in the MSBA grant amount between the District’s proposed solution on the new site and the MSBA’s conceptual plan. We believe that the table below illustrates that the key determining factor is the need to establish what the community will support. Although there is variation in the potential MSBA grant amount due to different reimbursement rates and scope exclusions, the most substantial difference between the options is the amount of the Town’s share of the project’s costs.

Please note that the grant amounts appearing in the table below are for discussion purposes only, and any MSBA grant for a proposed project would be subject to further review and MSBA Board approval.

Option	Uxbridge’s Proposed New Construction Quaker Highway	Uxbridge’s Proposed Reno/Addition	MSBA’s conceptual plan
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Schools Affected	New HS & Old HS	HS, MS, ES	HS, MS, ES
Square Footage of High School	123,000	125,000	125,000
Estimated Total Project Costs	\$54.4 M	\$47 M	\$35 to \$38 M
Potential Reimbursement Rate with Incentive Points	56.53%	60.87%	60.87%
Potential Maximum MSBA Grant*	\$24 M	\$27 M	\$21 to \$23 M
Amount to be funded solely by Uxbridge	\$30 M	\$20 M	\$14 to \$15 M

*Assumes Estimated Total Project Costs minus scope exclusions based on preliminary information developed. For discussion purposes only; subject to further review and MSBA Board approval.

The MSBA acknowledges the efforts of the District to date to reduce its original budget for the proposed new high school at the Quaker Highway site from its original proposed total project budgets of approximately \$51 million for the new and renovation/addition option and has listened carefully to the District's objective that this new school will be a long-term solution for the District rather than requiring an additional project in the near future.

Given the District's stated preference for a new high school on the Quaker Highway site, and offering a maximum MSBA grant amount of no more than that supported by the MSBA's renovation option (\$21-23 million), the MSBA stated that it would be willing to process a recommendation to its Board of Directors to support the District's preferred solution for a new high school at the Quaker Highway site if the Town of Uxbridge met the following conditions:

- 1) Reduce the total project budget for the District's proposed option of a new high school on the Quaker Highway site to no more than \$350 per square foot for 123,000 square feet or no more than \$43 million.
- 2) Demonstrate that the recommendation for the preferred schematic option of a new high school on a new site is supported by affirmative votes of the Board of Selectman, the Finance Committee, the School Committee and the School Building Committee.
- 3) Hold at least three additional public meetings, subject to the open meeting law, to present the information necessary to properly inform Uxbridge residents of the process, the educational program needs, the advantages and disadvantages associated with each option, including the MSBA's proposed conceptual option, the cost to the community and the associated tax impact, a complete discussion of the operational budget required to support each option and any associated overrides or other impacts to the taxpayers. The responsibility for the information provided and the presentations are exclusively that of the District, and the MSBA would not be required to prepare and/or participate in these meetings.
- 4) Put forward a non-binding referendum, by town-wide ballot vote, which would specifically ask for the community to show its support for a specific project of a specific budget with the estimated amount to be funded solely by Uxbridge.

The District has stated that it has reduced its total project budget to \$43million, and has scheduled public meetings in May 2010. The District has requested that the MSBA

waive the requirement for its Boards (Selectman, Finance, School Committee and School Building Committee) to re-vote on the preferred schematic and to hold a non-binding referendum. Staff are willing to recommend that these requirements can be waived and that the Town of Uxbridge be approved to proceed into schematic design to replace the existing Uxbridge High School with a new High School at the Quaker Highway site subject to the following conditions.

- 1) The maximum total facilities grant will not exceed \$23 million.
- 2) The proposed project will comply with the maximum allowable gross square footage, as determined by the MSBA and in accordance with the MSBA's guidelines for individual spaces.
- 3) The District and its Designer will submit the concept layout for the new construction for review and acceptance by the MSBA to ensure that it supports the District's educational program, provides flexibility for multiple educational delivery methods, optimizes daylight and allows for the flexibility of future expansion. The District's preferred schematic option would be subject to review at the MSBA's Facilities Subcommittee review.
- 4) The District will follow all regulations, guidelines, policies and procedure of the MSBA.