

# Wellesley H.S. project takes shape

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School may not have been in session for the summer, but the High School Building Project team has been hard at work. After many weeks of developments and decision-making, we are close to a final Project Plan. As September begins, we are in the midst of designing a high school that will achieve the stated objectives and deliver a project that is both fiscally prudent and meets the educational needs of today and tomorrow. We are excited! Excited to have the endorsement and collaboration of the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) and excited to be in the throes of actually designing the school after many years of planning.

**Summer Progress:** The MSBA worked extensively with us this summer, asking us to consider additional options: 1) a renovation/addition to the 1938 original High School building proposed by their architects; and 2) an all-new option using a “model school” based on the Whitman-Hanson Regional School. Because of our past analyses and review of many options for the high school (including renovation and new construction), we were able to respond promptly and thoroughly to all MSBA requests. After extensive dialog, we agreed upon the following project: A 280,000 square foot, one phase, all new construction facility on the current site, with construction and design costs not to exceed \$110 million. This agreement makes our project eligible for state funds of up to \$44 million; to have refused to reduce the scope of the project would have been fiscally irresponsible. While the project size is less than originally planned, we are confident we have a project that will receive town support and provide for the educational program. The School Committee has worked through space reductions to arrive at specifications which meet the educational program. To protect the number of classrooms to support projected enrollment and breadth of program, the largest reductions came from the larger common areas plus smaller incremental changes to actual classrooms, classroom support and non-instructional spaces.

**Budget:** We anticipate a total high school project cost of approximately \$135 million, consisting of \$110 million “*eligible project costs*” for design/construction and approximately \$25 million in costs *not* eligible for reimbursement by the MSBA. These *ineligible but required costs* include a number of items: The purchase of the three properties on Seaver Street; projected costs for off-street parking during construction; sidewalk and traffic mitigation; escalation and contingency costs above those in the \$110 million construction budget; up to \$1.5 million in green technologies primarily educational in nature; air conditioning for most of the building; costs for short term classroom space due to increased enrollment; and some prior planning funds. Thus, Town Meeting Members, and if they approve, town residents, will be asked to approve a total project cost of approximately \$135 million, of which up to \$44 million will be paid by the MSBA.

**Pieces of the Puzzle:** We are proceeding on many fronts: The architects and the Permanent Building Committee (PBC) are in the midst of designing the building. Much effort has been

expended on the interior lay-out of the spaces and attention is now focused on the exterior of the building. Systems and materials are being selected and site studies have been undertaken. Traffic studies are ongoing and parking both during and post-construction is being reviewed. The additional green technologies for educational purposes are being analyzed. Because there will be no student parking during construction, innovative transportation solutions are being explored. Together, these discrete efforts will come together in a cohesive, comprehensive project.

**Pace of the Project:** All of the work we have done over the past years has allowed us to pick up the pace of the project. Because of the agreement with the MSBA, we now can move forward with the design of the building and detailed cost projections. If approved by Town Meeting and then the voters, we would expect to break ground in March 2010 and open the school in the winter of 2013.

**Public Input:** We remain committed to an open process and an ongoing dialogue with town residents. We have set up a series of meetings whose purpose is to detail the progress to date and to ask you for your input. Our next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, Sept.10 at 7:30 pm in the Town Hall. The dates of other meetings can be found on the School Building Committee homepage on the town's website: [www.wellesley.ma.gov](http://www.wellesley.ma.gov). The homepage is also where you can subscribe to our newsletter about the High School Project and you can email us your comments and questions. We look forward to hearing from you.

*Katherine L. Babson, Jr. is chairman of the School Building Committee*