The City of LOWELL Alive. Unique. Inspiring.

Getting Started: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) Lowell High School

Lowell's Partner in the School Building Project: Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA)

What is the MSBA?

The MSBA is the Massachusetts School Building Authority. They are a quasi-independent government authority created in 2004 to replace the former school building assistance program administered by the Department of Education (now the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education). They work with local communities to create affordable, sustainable, and energy efficient schools across Massachusetts.

How is the MSBA using taxpayer money?

They have a dedicated revenue stream of one penny of the state's 6.25-percent sales tax. In their eleven-year history, they have made more than $11.9 billion in reimbursements to school districts.

MSBA's mission: Partner with Massachusetts communities to support the design and construction of educationally appropriate, flexible, sustainable, and cost-effective public school facilities

Lowell High School:

Lowell High School is a community of educators whose core commitment is to provide students with exceptional instruction. Lowell High School educates over 3100 students in grades nine through twelve. The high school reflects the great diversity of the City of Lowell with students representing over 40 countries from all over the world.

Lowell High School Mission Statement - Commitment to excellence in everything we do: academics, activities and citizenship. Lowell High School provides a secure and cooperative environment where the emphasis is on mutual respect, curiosity, the free exchange of ideas, and the appreciation of education both as a process and a means to betterment.

We are a community

- That values a curriculum incorporating the best practices of both traditional and contemporary instruction.
- That creates and supports an atmosphere promoting high expectations for student achievement.
- That strives to meet the needs of a variety of ethnic and language backgrounds, career interests, and learning capabilities and styles by providing a broad range of programmatic offerings.
- That believes student accomplishment is a shared responsibility of students, parents, staff, administration, school committee, and community.
- That provides all students the curriculum to meet school and state graduation requirements, and assesses learning continuously in a variety of ways including mandatory state testing.

Overall Feasibility/Schematic Design Schedule August 2016 – December 2017

Module 3: The Feasibility Study (FS), typically 6-8 months, is the earliest and most critical part of the design process. This phase includes information gathering, investigation/assessment of current conditions, establishment of goals/objectives, definition of program and needs, development of planning options.

The MSBA defines the FS phase in two parts; the Preliminary Design Program (PDP) and subsequent Preferred Schematic Report (PSR) and, ultimately selection of a preferred solution. As information gathering and assessment of existing conditions occur, our team also begins to assess the District's educational practices, its goals and objectives for the future, including curriculum, organizational models, grade structures, teaming and teaching/learning methods.

Module 4: Upon approval of the Feasibility Study, the project would move into Schematic Design (SD), typically another 6-8 months where it is fully defined and scoped for a Project Scope and Budget Agreement (PS&B). Each step requires MSBA approval to proceed.

What's wrong with the schools we have now?

They Have Exceeded Their Useful Service Lives:

- They waste energy, which costs you money.
- Expensive repairs are needed in the future.
- They don't meet safety or accessibility codes to protect our children.
- They don't meet state and federal regulations.
- They no longer support the academic programs requirements being offered to our students or 21st Century Educational practices.
- They don't allow us to provide a competitive advantage to all of our children.

Why do we have to study all these different options? Why can't we expedite the process?

A Feasibility Study is a mandatory requirement by the State prior to any school construction project that is to be considered for reimbursement with State funding and study options. The SBC and its team collaborate with the MSBA to generate an initial space summary, document existing conditions, establish design parameters, develop and evaluate alternatives, and recommend the most cost effective and educationally appropriate solution to the MSBA Board of Directors.

This typically originates from the District's Educational Plan, and must be refined and articulated by the District (not the architect) in the form of the MSBA's Educational Program (narrative). The MSBA considers the Ed-Program the basis for design and holds the District and Design Team accountable for its contents and the responsiveness of planning options to meet its objectives.

During this phase, the SBC, in conjunction with its Owner Project Manager (OPM) and designer, will submit a Preliminary Design Program and a Preferred Schematic Report. After Lowell submits the Preliminary Design Program to the MSBA with several options, the next step is to narrow the review to 3 project options: one each for new, renovation and renovation addition.

The Feasibility Study will help answer five (5) basic questions for Lowell:

- How do we come to an agreement with the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) about the kind of school we should build?
- What should the new/renovated school have in it?
- How much will it cost?
- How much will the state contribute over the 2015 78.95% base rate, and how do we get those extra points?
- How long will it take to build?

Where will kids go during construction?

The proposed design for renovations or renovation/addition assumes that current high school uses would be relocated temporarily or suspended temporarily during construction. The temporary arrangement may include housing classes in modular classrooms although this would not accommodate vocational spaces. The temporary classrooms would be located in close proximity to the Lowell campus adjacent to the parking area directly attached to the school. In a new school scenario, students would remain in the existing school until the completion of the new building.

What will happen to the athletic fields?

Due to its minimal green space and lack of large buildable tracts of land, the Lowell District would like to maintain the same number of playing fields that the High School currently has.

How are you going to communicate with the Community?

Overview of Community Outreach

The School Administration is working with the School Committee and School Building Committee. Lowell plans to maintain a proactive community outreach effort during the Feasibility Study, the development of the Preliminary Design Program and the Preferred Schematic Solution. Key steps taken or to be taken include the following:

• The Lowell project website to be developed and updated regularly with presentations made to the SBC, School Committee, City Managers and others.

• A Survey by the District engaging feedback from the community through the various community groups. Develop an e-mail blast to go to all parents, guardians, and families with school age children attending Lowell to offer a Feasibility Study update. The results and findings of the various input meetings to be compiled, presented publically and posted on in the Lowell High School project website.

• Through the SBC, subcommittees to be formed: Educational Plan Task Force, Communications Sub-committee and the Subcommittee charged with studying District Funded Upgrades that would address the Educational Plan and Program goals over a much longer period of time.

The Lowell Educational Program Plan Sub-committee: specific charge to review the data and recommend a final education program plan to the full School Committee.

Potential School Reuse options are also to be explored. Lowell Executive Group has been active in community outreach through word of mouth, attending input meetings, and identifying groups for presentations describing the project and MSBA Feasibility Study process.

• A Public Forum presentation on the Educational Plan at the high school to be conducted, videotaped, and televised. A copy for viewing will be available on the Lowell Website.

• A presentation of Design Options to be made to the School Committee, SBC, City Council and Finance Committees.

Who decides what the preferred schematic option should be?

The SBC and its team collaborate with the MSBA to establish design parameters, develop and evaluate alternatives for a High School project and engage the community for input. A potential Project may include:

- **a renovation of the existing high school**
- **a renovation of and addition to the existing high school**
- **new construction of a High School**

A Study is conducted reviewing various program scenarios for various school options in order to understand the Pros and Cons and cost implications to the various options. It becomes

apparent with a study which option provides balance when considering what will have the least impact on the quality of the high school experience on students attending Lowell High School during a construction project, and what will be the most cost effective and educationally appropriate solution for the District addressing:

- Educational program goals
- Resources required
- Would allow for the desired Administration structure
- Allows for sports to continue and for greater ability to coordinate athletic programs, both intramurals and inter school district competitions

How much is it going to cost?

- The District will explore options that support all students, will have the least impact on the quality of the high school experience on students attending Lowell during a construction project, and what will be the most cost effective and educationally appropriate solution for the District. Once options are developed to a level that would allow for a comprehensive cost estimate, then we will be able to see the cost impact of the different options over time and the Taxpayer impact as well.

- The three options to be studied further: Renovation, Renovation with an Addition, New Construction

- After studying the merits and limitations of each option, the School Building Committee will recommend support of a Preferred Schematic Option to be identified as most beneficial to the District of the 3 Options in the Preferred Schematic Report (PSR) Submission. The MSBA will review the PSR Submission and will be the ultimate decision maker in what is considered the most cost effective and educationally sound option for the Lowell District. With MSBA Board approval, the District will move forward with Schematic Design Development of the one preferred option.

How are reimbursement points calculated?

Reimbursement rates for MSBA approved, eligible school construction and renovation projects are calculated pursuant to a formula that is established in Massachusetts General Law, Chapter 70B section 10 (M.G.L. c. 70B § 10). The statutory formula starts all districts at a Base Rate of 31 percentage reimbursement points. The Base Rate of 31 percentage reimbursement points may be adjusted based on three socioeconomic factors:

- Community Income Factor: the district's per capita income as a percent of statewide average per capita income. This data is provided by the Department of Revenue. Pursuant to statute, there is a sliding scale for the allocation of percentage points for this category based on community's relationship to the statewide average.

- Community Property Wealth Factor: the district's per capita equalized property valuations as a percent of statewide average per capita valuations. This data is provided by the Department of Revenue. Pursuant to statute, there is a sliding scale for the allocation of percentage points for this category based on the community's relationship to the statewide average.
- Community Poverty Factor: measured by the district's proportion of low income students, as defined by federal eligibility for free or reduced price lunch, as a percent of the statewide average proportion of low income students. This data is provided by the Department of Education. Pursuant to statute, there is a sliding scale for the allocation of percentage points for this category based on community's relationship to the statewide average.

The last step in the reimbursement rate calculation process is for the MSBA, in its sole discretion, to review if a district is eligible for Incentive Points. Statute dictates that no district shall be eligible for more than 18 Incentive Points in total, and that no one category of Incentive Points can be more than 6 points. Current categories of Incentive Points are:

- Model School Program (up to 5 points)
- Newly Formed Regional School District (up to 6 points)
- High Efficiency Green School Program (up to 2 points)
- Best Practices for Routine and Capital Maintenance (up to 2 points)
- Overlay Zoning (MGL 40R or 40S) (up to 2 points)
- Use of CM-at-Risk (up to 1 point)
- Renovation/Re-use of Existing Facilities (up to 5 points)
- Establishing a Maintenance Trust (up to 1 point with district match)
- The sum of the Base Rate, plus additional points, if any, from the three socioeconomic factors, plus Incentive Points, if any, results in the MSBA's reimbursement rate for a project. Base Rate (31 points)
  + Community Income Factor *(if any)*
  + Community Property Wealth Factor *(if any)*
  + Community Poverty Factor *(if any)*
  + Incentive Points *(if any, in the sole discretion of MSBA)*
  = MSBA Reimbursement Rate

If the MSBA BOD vote approving a Project Scope and Budget Agreement for the project the updated reimbursement rate at Project Scope and Budget will be applied to all approved eligible costs for the project.

What costs will not be Reimbursable?

See 963 CMR 2.00: SCHOOL BUILDING GRANT PROGRAM for a full description.

General Description

The MSBA site cost allowance is for basic site development costs related to an approved project. The Site Cost Allowance may cover a portion of site costs related to basic site work such as excavation, earthwork and site preparations, pedestrian walkways, basic site utilities, basic site drainage, basic play grounds/yards for elementary schools, fields for physical education and general student use, and basic landscaping. The goal of MSBA partially funding any site allowance is to fund basic, standard and common site needs for any school project pursuant to a building plan that the district and the MSBA agree upon in the Project Scope and Budget Agreement.

Allowance

The MSBA may provide a site cost allowance not to exceed 8% eight percent of approved building construction costs, as determined by the MSBA, for basic site work subject to: (1) the district submitting a written site plan description accompanied by an itemized scope and budget document in detail sufficient for MSBA review of the proposed site plan and related costs, and (2) prior written agreement from the MSBA on the scope and budget for the site costs and site allowance.

The MSBA will not reimburse for site costs that: (1) exceed 8% of the approved building costs of a project, (2) are categorically ineligible, (3) are not included within or are in excess of the MSBA agreed upon scope and budget document, and/or (4) are determined to be ineligible at any time by the MSBA including upon final audit pursuant to MSBA audit procedures.

Generally Eligible Site Costs, subject to submission of detailed budget/scope and approval by MSBA:

- Costs associated with basic landscaping.
- Costs associated with basic excavation and earthworks.
- Costs associated with basic site utilities.
- Cost associated with pedestrian walkways on the site.
- Costs associated with basic play yards for elementary schools.
- Costs associated with fields for physical education classes and general student use.

Potentially Ineligible Site Costs:

The following costs may be considered as eligible for reimbursement within the 8% site cost development allowance only upon prior written agreement by the MSBA as part of a Project Scope and Budget Agreement. The MSBA shall not consider any costs relative to the following site development items as reimbursable expenses if such items exceed the 8% site development cap:

- All costs associated with water/wastewater treatment and water/wastewater disposal systems including, but not limited to, septic systems, leaching facilities, treatment plants, water/wastewater lift stations, water or sewer pumping stations.

- All costs associated with non-hazardous site earthworks, including but not limited to, removal of rock or ledge.
- All costs associated with equipment for outdoor athletic facilities or outdoor athletic use.

Categorically Ineligible Site Costs:

- All costs associated with synthetic turf.
- All costs associated with athletic stadiums, including costs associated with excavation, earthworks, and pedestrian walkways within the stadium.
- All costs associated with off-site traffic improvements.
- All costs associated with spectator amenities such as concession stands, press boxes, and/or toilet facilities for outdoor athletic facilities.
- All costs associated with special waste and hazardous or contaminated materials remediation, removal and disposal.

Demolition and Building Abatement

Pursuant to 963 CMR 2.16 (5), all costs associated with the demolition of buildings are ineligible for reimbursement, unless such costs are deemed by the MSBA, in writing prior to said demolition, to be the most cost effective and educationally sound option. In certain circumstances, the MSBA may allow for an additional itemized allowance for building demolition and/or abatement to be in addition to the 8% site allowance, as determined by the MSBA and explicitly agreed upon in the Project Scope and Budget Agreement.

In order to be deemed to be eligible for reimbursement for building demolition, building abatement, or both building demolition and abatement within a building project, the MSBA may reimburse a community for a portion of the costs of building demolition and abatement only if: (i) the agreement is written in the Project Scope and Budget Agreement; (ii) the MSBA determines that the specific plan for building demolition and/or building abatement is necessary to complete the agreed-upon project scope; (iii) the building demolition and/or building abatement requested is not the result of a lack of routine capital investment or maintenance by the district, and (iv) the building demolition and/or building abatement is the most cost effective and educationally sound option. This policy only applies to the school facility itself, and applies only to the removal of hazardous materials within a building, as defined in the Project Scope and Budget Agreement.

How does a Debt Exclusion work?

Description of the local process for authorization and funding of the proposed project: The City Council will vote up or down support for the submission of this project for approval by the M.S.B.A. Upon the Authority's approval, the Council will then consider and authorize an appropriate ballot question if required locally, to be placed before the voters at a scheduled

vote for support of the proposed debt financing of this project, with said amount to be determined after final allowance, credits and approved by the authority.

Estimated Funding Capacity: To adequately fund the High School Project will necessitate a local debt exclusion vote that would fund the City's percentage share of principal and interest obligation through taxation outside of the levy. Each City may have adequate levy capacity outside of its general available levy for these purposes. The existing levy capacity within the City's allowed limit varies City to City. For some, the City must pursue a debt exclusion vote, a preliminary annual tax impact for the homeowner based on property value.

What will happen to the existing High School if a new school is built? Is there a plan for the School or will it remain empty?

A School Re-Use Subcommittee will be formed to study possible options.

Can we have a bigger auditorium if we build a new school?

The auditorium size is based on an equation that accommodates 2/3rds of the student population design enrollment.

Why don't we build a "Model School"?

Model Schools are not always the most cost effective or best solution for a district. Designs can be out dated and not fully code compliant. The MSBA requires a Feasibility Study (Module 3 - Preferred Schematic Study) to be conducted before inviting a District into the Model School program. At a minimum, the Feasibility Study should confirm that:

a. A new facility is the most cost-effective and educationally sound solution;
b. The District has developed a detailed educational plan;
c. The site will accommodate one or more of the Model School designs without substantial modification to the site or the design and construction; and
d. One or more of the Model School designs conforms with the requirements of the District's educational program, grade configurations, and enrollment without substantial modification to the design.

How can I continue to learn more about the project?

As the Feasibility Study evolves, there will be opportunities for community input and engagement. Information will be posted as it is developed and made available to the public. Questions may be directed to the City Manager's Office.