



A Blueprint for New School Construction and Capital Improvement for New Bedford Public Schools

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Introduction

New Bedford Public Schools are saddled with the dubious distinction of operating arguably the most antiquated stock of school buildings in the Commonwealth. Moreover, the District has been outpaced by many communities in its efforts at new school construction in recent years, with precious resources diverted to environmental remediation. Two construction proposals—for Taylor and Hannigan Schools—have been in limbo, with both stalled at state and municipal bottlenecks in the approval process. This plan seeks to address the situation. It modifies existing proposals for Taylor and Hannigan to allow them to move forward. It proposes new capital improvements to address known deficiencies at New Bedford High School. And it leaves room for further community engagement to prioritize and fund additional school needs.

It is important to acknowledge up front that for this proposal to be implemented, certain procedural requirements must be met, including the City Council's authorization/appropriation of \$750,000 for a state-required Hannigan Elementary School feasibility study and schematic design by a state-imposed deadline of March 29, 2013. Attached is a copy of the authorization for this purpose that is being submitted to the City Council.

It is also important to acknowledge that this proposal sets forth the broad parameters of a school construction plan, but many details remain to be worked out. In order to improve the City's school building stock there will need to be a strong partnership between the City Council, the School Committee, and the Mayor.

In addition, the City has benefited from the support and guidance of the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA). The MSBA will continue to advise the City as to whether it will reimburse particular costs, and these determinations will influence decision-making on an on-going basis.

Goals and Objectives

The broad goals and objectives of this proposal are then as follows—

- **Provide Our Students With Modern Education Facilities**—New Bedford's children deserve first-rate learning environments that will help them become productive contributors to our community and compete successfully in the global economy.
- **Minimize the Burden on City Taxpayers by Maximizing Use of Existing State Funding Commitments**—Any new school construction proposals in New Bedford are effectively constrained by the terms of previous state funding commitments. The overall terms are financially very favorable to the City (as will be detailed in the following pages), so it is imperative the City take advantage of this state support. At the same time, the terms of state support do restrict the City's options—specifically, the City must honor an understanding with the state that these state funds will be used to construct a full-time elementary school at the Sea Lab site. In short, the City's must play its hand with the cards it has been given.
- **Equity and Fairness for Neighborhoods**—This plan seeks to comprehensively address the school needs of the entire peninsula area of the South End, providing elementary students in two neighborhoods (at both the far south peninsula as well as further north on the peninsula) with 21st century learning environments. All students in this area of the South End are equally deserving of great schools. Residents need to know that the City's decision-making on where and how much to invest in schools is approached with a sense of fairness and equity.
- **Move The District Away From Large, Impersonal Schools Toward Neighborhood Schools**—School administrators and parents are in broad agreement that schools with enrollments too large for a principal to know the names of all the school's students often function very differently as institutions than smaller schools. While there are exceptions to the rule, community sentiment seems to be generally in favor of smaller schools rather than the larger school projects pursued in the past. And, as a city of strong, distinct neighborhoods, smaller schools can function as institutional anchors that help to stabilize neighborhoods and foster community and personal connection.

- **Preserve Sea Lab’s Identify and Secure Its Place For the Long-Term**—For too long, Sea Lab, a beloved institution and signature success story, has operated at a level of uncertainty as various school construction scenarios have been contemplated. This plan, by accommodating Sea Lab’s long-term needs as part of a new construction project, finally resolves the issue. The Sea Lab community can now rest assured that the institution will have adequate space and facility upgrades it needs to serve its students.
- **Modernize New Bedford High School’s Capacity to Support Science and Technology-oriented Curricula**—New Bedford High School has made strides in launching an engineering academy and developing a stronger science, math, and technologically-oriented curriculum. The school is hampered, however, by outdated laboratories, and information technology infrastructure. Modernizing the High School in these areas must become a top priority if the City is serious about giving its students opportunities for high-level, hands-on learning in so-called “STEM” areas.
- **Complete the Environmental Remediation at New Bedford High School**—The City has spent \$36 million in cleaning up environmental threats in the areas proximate to Keith Middle School and New Bedford High School, and is still actively pursuing litigation to recoup these costs. That said, certain remediation projects are needed to put in place permanent solutions, including a permanent remedy for concerns related to the mechanical room at the High School.
- **Engage the Community on Additional School Building Needs**—Under this plan, the City will also seek to engage the entire community over the next several months in a dialogue about New Bedford’s other school building needs and deferred maintenance projects. The list of these needs is a long one, and a new Superintendent will be charged with setting priorities. The sooner the City and District receives community input, the better-informed decision-makers will be, and the faster that additional state-funding be pursued.

Even with these multiple objectives in mind and restrictions on the use of state funds, the path forward is still fairly clear-cut: Securing vital state support for our schools depends on a three-part approach:

- (1) Construction of an addition at the Sea Lab building to make it a fully functioning elementary school (as previously pledged by the City);
- (2) Completion of a state-required a feasibility study as the next step in moving forward with a new Hannigan Elementary School; and
- (3) Undertaking a series of capital improvements, including remaining required environmental remediation measures, at New Bedford High School.

Background

The school construction and capital improvements outlined in this proposal are based in part on the funding previously committed to the City by the MSBA. The state funding can be divided into two broad categories and comes with significant constraints.

The first category of funding available to the City is approximately \$17,053,933 in so-called “grant conversion” money. In general, this is grant funding that was originally allocated to the City by the Massachusetts Department of Education for particular projects, but that was later reallocated or converted to other projects, including Keith Middle School, New Bedford High School, and Sea Lab. This \$17,053,933 million is often referred to as “90% money,” which means that the state reimburses the City for 90% of the total cost of a project. Thus, the \$17,053,933 could fund up to \$18,948,814 in projects; the City would pay for 10% of these projects (\$1,894,881), and the state would pay for 90% (\$17,053,933).

MSBA, which is administering the grant conversion funding, has informed the City that these funds can only be spent on projects at the Sea Lab building, New Bedford High School, and Keith Middle School.¹ Further, MSBA has informed the City that the grant conversion funding must be spent in the very near future, or it will no longer be available to the City. The 90% reimbursement program has been replaced by an MSBA program that reimburses school districts for 80% of project costs. If New Bedford were to lose the \$17,053,933 in grant conversion funding, it would have to reapply for funding for any projects that could have been funded by the grant conversion funding, and the projects would only be reimbursed at the 80% rate. Losing the grant conversion funding therefore would send New Bedford to the back of the line for school construction, and financing school construction would become a much more expensive endeavor for the City. In other words, the City must act now.

The City has engaged in a dialogue with the MSBA about how the grant conversion funding can be spent, and the MSBA has given the City preliminary determinations about specific projects it would consider funding. Those proposed projects are part of this school construction plan and are described below. The MSBA has asked the City to provide additional information about these projects by February 15, 2013. After MSBA has reviewed this information, it will make its funding decisions. At that point, the Administration intends to seek the additional bond authorizations/appropriations necessary in order to proceed with projects.

The second category of funding potentially available to New Bedford is for the Hannigan Elementary School (“Hannigan”). This funding would be part of the MSBA’s existing school construction program and would be reimbursable at a rate of 80%. As a first step, the MSBA has invited the City to collaborate on a feasibility study to explore the options for Hannigan. The MSBA has emphasized that it has not approved a construction project relating to Hannigan, and that it might consider conducting a pre-feasibility study before authorizing a full feasibility

¹ The projects eligible for MSBA funding at the Sea Lab building are those related to its use as an elementary school, not projects related to the Sea Lab program. *Thus, any project that expanded the Sea Lab program, either by adding new classrooms for it or converting existing classrooms for its use, would be ineligible for reimbursement.*

study. However, the City's agreeing to conduct a feasibility study is an essential first step on a path to a new Hannigan School. MSBA has informed the City that if the City wishes to conduct a feasibility study for Hannigan, it must, among other requirements, submit certified votes of the local funding appropriation for the feasibility study phase by March 29, 2013.

A Way Forward: A Three-part Approach to School Construction and Capital Improvements

Given the needs of the District and the MSBA funding immediately available to the City, it is clear that in the near-term, the City should: (1) as contemplated for several years, use a portion of the grant conversion funding to construct an addition at the Sea Lab building to make it a fully functioning elementary school to replace the existing Taylor Elementary School; (2) move forward on plans to construct a new Hannigan School; and (3) use the remaining grant conversion funding to make capital improvements and complete environmental remediation at New Bedford High School.

For multiple reasons it is imperative that the proposed addition to the Sea Lab building and the construction of a new Hannigan School move on parallel tracks. There is an urgent need for modern elementary school facilities in the South End. Since 2006, when a portion of the Hannigan roof collapsed, Hannigan students (except kindergarteners) have attended school at the Sea Lab building, which does not currently have all the requisite features of an elementary school, such as a gym. Hannigan kindergarteners attend the Gomes School, which is overcrowded. The rest of the South End's elementary school students attend the Taylor Elementary School, which was built in 1898 and is the City's oldest school building still in operation. Simply put, all elementary school students in the South End need and deserve new schools.

Securing Sea Lab's Future

To meet a state-imposed February 15, 2013 deadline, the City intends to request under this plan that the MSBA permit the City to use a portion of the grant conversion money to fund a 26,142 square foot addition to the Sea Lab building that would cost approximately \$12.5 million. With the proposed addition, the Sea Lab building would contain two classrooms per grade for grades K-5, plus a preschool class. Assuming a class size of 23-25 for grades 1-5, 20 for kindergarten classes, and 15 for a preschool class, the enlarged Sea Lab building would hold approximately 285-305 students.

Attached is a preliminary floor plan of the Sea Lab building with the proposed addition. It is important to underscore that this is a conceptual drawing only and that the details of the proposed addition will be finalized only after input from the City Council, the School Committee, and the community. Besides new classrooms, the floor plan shows that the addition would include a gym, a media center, an expanded serving kitchen, and various offices and teacher prep rooms.

Most important, the attached floor plan takes particular care to preserve Sea Lab's identity and to facilitate its program throughout the school year. In recognition of Sea Lab's importance in the

community and the origins of the Sea Lab building, the Sea Lab administrative offices and meeting space would be located in the central office area. Four classrooms and a technology room on the west wing of the building would be reserved for Sea Lab's exclusive use throughout the school year, and Sea Lab's aquarium room would be moved closer to those classrooms. Covered storage for Sea Lab's equipment, and possibly its boats, would be added to the back of the building.

The timetable for the proposed construction would be worked out after the City receives approval from MSBA on the overall project. At that juncture we would also evaluate whether students could attend school at the Sea Lab building during construction, and if they could not, where they would go. The present hope is that the timing and duration of the build-out would reduce the dislocation of students, if required, to no more than half of a school year. But again, multiple factors, including weather, will influence the approach taken.

Feasibility Study and Schematic Design for a New Hannigan

The second major part of the school construction plan is a new Hannigan School. In order to move ahead on this project, by March 29, 2013, the City Council will need to authorize and appropriate \$750,000 for a feasibility study and schematic design. As stated above, MSBA requires an appropriation for the feasibility study by this date in order for the City to proceed on the Hannigan project. The MSBA has advised the City that many municipalities appropriate funds for the feasibility study and schematic design at the same time. On that basis, it makes sense for the City to appropriate the feasibility study and schematic design funds simultaneously, as it will expedite the entire Hannigan project.

Based on recent costs from the construction of other new elementary schools in Massachusetts, we have been advised to appropriate \$750,000 for the feasibility study and schematic design. Because the MSBA would reimburse us at an 80% rate, the city would ultimately pay only \$150,000 of these costs. Under MSBA regulations, participants in both the feasibility study and schematic design phases would include the School Building Committee, the owner's project manager, and the designer. The District selects and the MSBA approves both the School Building Committee and the owner's project manager. The designer is selected through the MSBA's Designer Selection Panel.

It should be noted that under MSBA regulations, the City's remaining so-called "90% money" (that is, money that would remain leftover after fully funding the new Taylor School) cannot be combined with "80% money." Because the cost of a new elementary school in Massachusetts typically exceeds \$20 million, the City would not have enough leftover "90% money" to fully construct another new school, even if the MSBA were to reverse its stated position and contemplate the use of 90% money at other locations.

Modernizing New Bedford High School's Science and Technology Infrastructure

With the remaining grant conversion funding, the City would propose to the MSBA the following capital improvements and remediation projects be undertaken at New Bedford High School. *The numbers in parentheses represent the total project cost of each item, for which we would seek reimbursement at the 90% rate.*

- (1) Technology infrastructure upgrade (\$1,000,000): The network wiring and communications infrastructure for the entire New Bedford High School campus need to be upgraded to bring them to current industry standards. The upgrade, which would cost approximately \$1,000,000, would also include wireless internet (Wi-Fi) access and voice-over-ip communications controllers.

- (2) Science laboratory upgrade (\$1,236,000): There is an urgent need to modernize New Bedford High School's science labs, which have not been touched since the facility was built in the early 1970s. The condition of the existing labs severely hampers the high school's ability to offer its students the full range of "STEM" curricula. The proposed project would upgrade four science labs (one in each of the school's four houses) at a cost of \$309,000 per lab, or a \$1,236,000 total cost.

- (3) HS-8 soil remediation and solar park (\$1,780,000): From 2006-10, the City's environmental consultant, TRC, collected approximately 273 soil samples from within the top foot of soil at the high school campus, in addition to deeper samples, to prepare the Phase II Comprehensive Site Assessment report that was submitted to the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) in April 2011. Remediation began in April 2011 and continued intermittently through December 2011, completing all areas except the area known HS-8, which is the grassed northern portion of the New Bedford High School campus between the northeast and northwest parking lots. This plan envisions grant conversion funds being allocated to a \$1,780,000 project to remediate the soil and construct a solar park on HS-8. This project would enable the City both to achieve remedial goals and to promote sustainable energy.

- (4) Remediation of mechanical room soil and groundwater (\$1,000,000): Polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) and volatile organic compounds (VOCs) have been detected above regulatory limits in groundwater underneath the mechanical room at New Bedford High School. Last year, the City and TRC determined that the extent of chemical impact is largely limited to an area near the former incinerator pit. Working with TRC, the City has developed two viable permanent cleanup options, either of which would cost approximately \$1 million: *in situ* treatment, in which a chemical would be injected into the soil to neutralize compounds of concern, or alternatively, removal of compounds of concern through soil excavation. This plan envisions the use of grant conversion money to fund this remediation.

- (5) Purchase of 36 new univents for first floor A-block classrooms (\$750,000): Thirty-six new univents are needed for first floor classrooms in the A-block at New Bedford High School. These classrooms were built partially below the ground surface, which has led to consistent moisture problems in these rooms, requiring that dehumidifiers run constantly during the cooling season. The replacement of these 36 univents with new univents with air conditioning

capabilities would help mitigate the moisture problem and eliminate the need for staff to empty the dehumidifier tank after hours and on weekends during the cooling season. The total cost for the 36 new univents would be approximately \$750,000.

(6) Locker replacement (\$114,000): Many locker doors and locks at the high school have been irreparably damaged and need to be replaced. Their total replacement cost would be approximately \$114,000.

(7) Boiler retrofits (\$200,000): Grant conversion money would be used to retrofit two boilers at the high school, for a total cost of approximately \$200,000. The City expects that the retrofits would generate cost savings that would pay for the cost of the retrofits within 18 months.

(8) D block exit doors (\$31,060): The D-block exit door frames are rotted, and the doors do not lock properly. The replacement of these two doors would cost approximately \$31,060.

(9) Bus stop roof repairs (\$15,000): The roofs at the bus stops for the Green/Gold and Tan/Blue houses need to be repaired, at a cost of \$7,500 per roof, or \$15,000 total.

(10) Internal fire doors and fire alarm panels (\$85,000): Ten fire doors at New Bedford High School are dragging and damaging the terrazzo flooring. The part of the door to which the hinges are attached is irreparable. Many of these doors are loose on the frames and potentially pose a safety hazard. Replacement of these doors would cost \$20,000 total. In addition, five fire alarm panels need to be updated, at a cost of \$13,000 per panel, or \$65,000 total.

In sum, the projects at New Bedford High School would total \$6,211,060. Adding this amount to the \$12,500,000 addition at the Sea Lab building, the plan proposes \$18,711,060 in total projects paid for with the grant conversion money. This leaves a modest cushion of \$237,754 for contingencies that could yet be addressed with grant conversion funds if need arose.

Attachment 1 -- Draft Bond Authorization For Hannigan Feasibility/Schematic Design Study

Attachment 2 -- Floor Plan For Proposed New Taylor School / Addition To Sea Lab Building