SSD Facilities Renovation Plan: Phase II
Frequently Asked Questions - Answered

The following provides responses to questions frequently asked about the Salem School District’s Facilities Master Plan and specifically Phase II. The project addresses significant renovations to Fisk and Soule Schools as well as modest renovations to Haigh School.

Salem School District
2/1/2013
SALEM SCHOOL DISTRICT FACILITIES RENOVATION
PROJECT: Frequently asked questions and corresponding answers

What is the Phase 2 renovation plan all about, and why do we need it?
These forty+ year old facilities lack space to accommodate our new kindergarten program as well as programs introduced within the past generation. The electrical, mechanical, and plumbing systems all need upgrades as do all the interior finishes. A facilities audit completed in 2005 identified renovation needs totaling ten million dollars. We have been unsuccessful in securing more than $1.5 million in funding to begin addressing these deficiencies. In 2008 the Board charged the Superintendent with developing a facilities master plan to address our aging schools’ needs. This plan was completed during the 2009-2010 school year and considers our schools renovation and expansion needs to address current deficiencies that include sub-standard instructional spaces, poor storage, failing systems, inadequate security, and low building code compliance.

Why was the scope of Phase 2 recently changed?
Based on the results of the recent enrollment study conducted by the NH School Administrators Association, the school board believes that enrollment figures are likely to drop significantly in the coming years. Although there are no current plans to close Haigh, there have been discussions surrounding the possibility of closing should the enrollment figures continue to decline. For this reason, the scope of work to be done at Haigh has been scaled back to address only those issues that pertain to maintenance and repair, safety and air quality issues.

What renovations does Article 2 include?
Article 2 includes substantial renovations to Soule and Fisk as well as needed safety improvements and repairs to Haigh School. Renovations to Soule and Fisk include: the creation of classrooms for state mandated kindergarten (eliminating the cost of the leased portables); the addition of multi-purposed spaces and instructional spaces for special education; the installation of fire safety sprinkler systems to bring these buildings up to current code; relocation of the front offices to enhance student safety; asbestos removal; updates to the heating, ventilation and electrical systems to enhance air quality and cost efficiency; and installation and updates to the data networking systems. Renovations and repairs to Haigh Elementary include: the installation of a fire safety sprinkler system; fire alarm and security system, needed repairs to the roof and ceiling and enhanced lighting.

What renovations does Article 3 include?
Article 3 is specifically targeted to Haigh School for the installation of a new heating and ventilation system that will replace the outdated system, improve the current air quality for existing students and help to maintain this property as a viable community asset. Since there are approximately 200 children at Haigh School
presently, and there are no formal plans to close it, these HVAC renovations are necessary to maintain proper heating, ventilation, and air quality.

**Why should I vote to approve this renovation on March 12th?**
Construction costs and interest rates are still very low. We need to accommodate kindergarten and the programs that are currently being taught in storage closets and other poorly ventilated spaces. There will never be a better time. It’s a smart and fiscally conservative plan that will meet the community’s needs for as much as fifty years. If we do nothing now, we will miss a golden opportunity to pay for core improvements, expansions, and safety issues at low interest and construction costs. Doing the smart thing is timeless.

**Who is responsible for the project?**
The School Board, the school administration, and the architectural firm of Lavallee Brensinger have been working with a community facilities committee to investigate and recommend changes. The Budget Committee has endorsed Warrant Articles 2 and 3 by voting to support it with recommendation on the March 12th ballot.

**What’s the schedule of the Facilities Master Plan and Why?**
The elementary schools were targeted first due to the recent state mandated Kindergarten, which prompted the need for temporary classrooms. The Facilities Master Plan includes all Salem Schools. Three elementary schools – Barron, Lancaster, and North Salem – were addressed first because they required extensive work and were the most expensive to renovate and expand. Further, the district eliminated six temporary classroom structures when renovations were completed thereby saving the district tens of thousands of dollars in future lease costs. In July of 2012, the school district and taxpayers began shouldering 100% of the leasing cost associated with the remaining portable classrooms ($40,000/year). Construction costs and interest rates are still extremely low, making it favorable to renovate and repair the remaining elementary schools. Renovation of the High School is slated for 2015, at which time we will be able to take advantage of up to 75% in state reimbursement in conjunction with renovations to the High School’s Career and Technical Education Center. Plans are currently underway. Last, but certainly not least, the Woodbury School is planned to be renovated following the successful completion of the high school in accordance with the Facilities Master Plan.

**What is the renovation timeline?**
If Phase 2 is approved, construction would begin this summer on the three remaining elementary schools – Soule, Fisk, and Haigh. Construction and renovations would be completed by September of 2014.

**How much, in total, is this project going to cost the school district and taxpayers?**
The projected gross total project cost is $17 million. Since communities pay all of the interest, it is a smart decision to act now while interest rates are low.
How are we going to pay for these renovations?
The renovations would be financed through two bonds totaling $17 million. The combined cost to taxpayers would be less than $9/month during the highest year for a homeowner with an assessed home value of $300,000.

Who will be doing the construction work?
The project will be put out to bid, and the work will be supervised by Lavallee/Brensinger Architects and Trident Advantage Group, the district’s Owners Project Manager.

Will the work be subject to a public bid by qualified bidders?
Yes.

How will the construction impact my children’s education and school experience?
Unquestionably, during the one school year of construction there will be some inconveniences. However the architects and contractors do this type of work all the time and do their best to mitigate any difficulties by building noise reduction walls, installing air filtering equipment, and ensuring that construction areas are inaccessible to anyone but authorized personnel.

What do the temporary classrooms cost us, including the lease, electricity, maintenance, etc.?
The lease cost of the temporary classrooms is approximately $40,000 per year for the remaining elementary school temporary classrooms. The electricity cost is significantly more expensive on a square foot basis than a permanent structure heated with oil.

Why do it now, in a recession economy?
Interest rates and construction costs are still extremely low. When the economy improves, this project will likely cost as much as 20% over the current estimate of $17 million.

Can we use some of the storage space within the schools for extra classrooms or kindergarten classrooms?
There is limited to no existing storage space as many of these rooms have been captured to serve as instruction areas. Right now, hallways and multi-purpose rooms are doubling as instruction and storage spaces. A renovation project will eliminate the lack of storage and will put all students in appropriate spaces.

What is the tax impact on the average family?
The first year of the bond will be funded through the district’s unreserved fund balance, and through interest earned on the investment of bond proceeds. Therefore there will be no tax impact in year one. Thereafter, the cost of Articles 2 & 3 is projected to be less than $9 a month for a home with an assessed value of $300,000.
If this renovation project does not get approved, how much are we paying for the temporary classrooms? Taxpayers are responsible for 100% of the cost associated with the temporary classrooms, currently $40,000 annually.

How does Salem’s school district rank with all other NH districts?
From an academic viewpoint, Salem is a competitive and highly regarded school district. From a financial viewpoint, our cost per pupil is below the state average and below all surrounding school districts except Hudson. Our student/teacher ratios are not unreasonably low, and in fact are above state averages as well as above all surrounding districts.

Is there ongoing expense involved with the school expansions, such as increased custodial staff, heating, electricity, etc.?
We estimate the current utility expenses for the temporary classrooms will be an approximate equivalent cost for heating and maintaining the renovated and expanded spaces. Therefore, we’re not calculating the utility cost savings in our anticipated overall project costs.

How will the expansion impact the school budget on an ongoing basis?
The bond will have no direct impact on the budget. The school district budget will continue to increase or decrease as necessary. We will continue to operate in a fiscally sound manner.

Is the school district planning any energy savings improvements that might help offset other costs?
The school district will work with Lavallee/Brensinger to qualify for electric company rebates for installing energy efficient lighting, and mechanical units that are designed to use substantially less energy than the existing units. Phase I of our facilities plan resulted in tens of thousands of dollars in savings.

Is there any federal aid available for this expansion project?
No, Salem does not meet the demographic standards for federal assistance.

Are there any federal tax credits that homeowners can take as a result of the property tax impact of the school renovation?
We are not aware of any federal tax credits available with project approval.

Will the planned renovation give us enough space to accommodate full-day Kindergarten at each elementary school?
Not unless there is a drop in enrollment. Currently, the renovation plans show where full day kindergarten classrooms can be built without interfering with the planned renovations or the existing structure, but without an existing full-day program, the renovation plans do not include the required space.

Is public preschool in the plans for the foreseeable future?
There is no immediate plan designed for pre-school, although we do have room for typical three and four year olds in our special needs program at Fisk School.
Is there any redistricting planned as part of this project? If so, when, and for how long?
No. There are no immediate needs to change our school assignment map.

What is the longer term plan for renovating the Woodbury School, and Salem High School?
Following the completion of the elementary schools, our attention will turn to the high school. The condition of the school, and the fact that our Career and Technical Education Center (CTE) will qualify for 75% state reimbursement for renovations in 2015, makes this an obvious next project after the elementary schools. Sometime thereafter, efforts will be made to address issues at our middle school.

Why was SHS left off the master plan?
The Board and administrators believe we have a good proposal for a high school renovation. It will have to be revisited and reviewed, but we believe the work that was completed for the proposed renovation in 2008 can continue to serve as a basis for planned improvements. Therefore, the high school is part of our master plan.

Aren’t the kindergarten classrooms in these elementary schools already renovated to accommodate kids this year, so aren’t we really talking about renovations for other purposes?
For the most part, the rooms used for kindergarten are all original to their schools, but they are not renovated. No renovations were done to accommodate kindergarten and the temporary classrooms housing upper grade students and special services are just that – temporary.

How much was spent to upgrade each elementary for kindergarten space and is that going to go to waste?
No upgrades or improvements were made to the space currently used for kindergarten. We used state funding to purchase materials and equipment for the classrooms, and those materials will remain in use.

I understand the 30% for state aid is not forthcoming, but what about the 75% in kindergarten construction aid?
There is a chance that Salem will qualify for some part of the kindergarten construction aid. The project was supposed to have already been completed. Nevertheless some funds might be available, but at this time we’re not sure at what level.

If the cost of the project comes in below the amount projected, as with state subsidies, what happens with the extra money?
The money will be returned to the taxpayers or used to offset costs associated with the renovations/additions to other schools.
What are the safety issues with the Phase 2 schools?
Our schools do not have fire alarms or sprinkler systems. There is still asbestos present in walls and floor tiles. Multi-purpose rooms and hallways are doubling as storage areas because there is no other storage available. Student pick-up/drop-off and busing at some schools is hazardous and needs to be reconfigured. There are no security systems.

Why do we need additional multi-purpose rooms?
The existing multi-purpose rooms, built long before current standards, are overscheduled and limit programming options in our elementary schools. Currently the multi-purpose rooms double as storage areas for cafeteria and gym equipment, forcing children to function around them. The fact that the multi-purpose rooms are directly connected to kitchens creates potentially hazardous situations. The multi-purpose rooms also cannot fully accommodate competing activities for these rooms.

How confident are we that LBA and Trident have provided an accurate project cost and schedule? What is their track record for delivering on time and within budget?
With the completion of the recent renovations at North Salem, Barron, and Lancaster, LBA and Trident have a demonstrated track record of being on time and within budget. Additionally, in their 30+ years of designing public school, they have never failed to meet a budget. The company has designed nearly one billion dollars worth of public school construction and is very sensitive to the importance of meeting budget requirements. Coupled with the use of Building Information Modeling, which has been used for the estimate, as well as our work on the feasibility study, the estimate has a very high degree of accuracy.