

## School FAQ's

### Franklin High School Proposed Building Project Frequently Ask Questions.

We have developed this page to help answer and or maybe clarify FAQ's taxpayers may have regarding the new Franklin High School (Model School) project.

We will be updating this page regularly with answers to frequently asked questions and documents pertaining to the project.

Please forward any questions you might have regarding the FHS project to:

FHS Building Committee  
c/o Municipal Building  
East Central Street  
Franklin, MA 02038  
Or email us at [jnutting@franklin.ma.us](mailto:jnutting@franklin.ma.us)

### Why are we considering a High School Project?

The Town of Franklin has received feedback from a variety of sources regarding the existing conditions of the Franklin High School. In 2005, the school was placed on *Warning Status* for Accreditation by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC). The report by the Commission cited the standard "Community Resources for Learning", including the condition of the high school, as a major factor in its decision. Specifically, the visiting committee noted, "*The school site, plant and equipment do not support and enhance all aspects of the educational program.*" The report made 19 facilities-related recommendations to the district that required action. The town has made progress in multiple areas, but some recommendations made by the Commission exceed what is feasible outside of a major renovation of the facility. Because of this factor, the school remains on *Warning Status* pending the outcome of a proposed building project. Specific recommendations that fall into this category include:

- Improve ventilation
- Improve lighting
- 5 recommendations relating to compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).
- Install required safety equipment in science labs

In October 2005, and in response to the NEASC report, the Town of Franklin commissioned Kaestle Boos Associates (KBA), of Foxboro, Massachusetts to conduct a feasibility study in order to provide an "*analysis of existing conditions and an assessment of the space needs for a modern high school educational program.*" The study was completed in the fall of 2006, but the report was not published until 2008 because there was a moratorium on the submission of school building projects by the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA). The 2008 report stated, "majority of high school facility is structurally sound, inadequacies exist" and "these inadequacies are best addressed as part of a comprehensive renovation/addition program." The report also cited 14 "*deficiencies of most concern*" including:

- The majority of classrooms...are at lowest recommended sizes
- Available area for conferencing and PE lockers is insufficient
- Structure and roof at field house are in poor condition
- Science laboratories and classrooms are poorly equipped, outdated and in poor physical condition
- Technology wiring has been installed in ad-hoc fashion...appropriate technology is not available in all instructional spaces
- Handicap access to the different levels of the academic wings...should be installed
- Wooden structures adjacent to the building are not code-compliant
- Accessibility for assembly spaces (cafeteria, server, gymnasium,...lecture hall) is inadequate...The entire layout of these locations...should be reconsidered
- Inadequate parking and access to the building
- Entire building has numerous instances of handicap accessibility non-conformance including doors that are too narrow, insufficient clearances around doors/alcoves, non-accessible lab benches, teacher podiums, sinks and toilet facilities.
- Congestion at corridors due to lack of connection at the upper academic wings...
- Current administrative office location does not provide adequate oversight of the entry
- Structural bracing is missing from many existing interior masonry walls.

In 2007, upon receiving preliminary feedback from KBA about the existing conditions at Franklin High School, the Town submitted a Statement of Interest to the MSBA for consideration to replace or renovate the school, and in 2008, the Town Council formed the current School Building Committee to study the issue and make a recommendation to the Town Council.

The Committee hired the architectural firm of Kaestle-Boos Associates and after submitting a feasibility study in April 2011 to the Massachusetts School Building Authority that analyzed multiple renovations options, a new custom construction option and an option for a new 'Model School', the Committee recommended to the Town Council that the best solution was to construct a 'Model School' to replace the existing structure.

### **What options did the Building Committee Explore?**

The MSBA requires building committees to explore a minimum of three options. The Committee originally explored three options: two renovation options and one new school option.

Renovation Option #1 was a limited renovation with an 8,400 square foot addition. This was a very basic plan but after further review of what it did not include, the scope was increased to provide the proper repairs and renovations that would have a life span of 40 years.

Renovation Option #2 proposed a "gut" renovation that had more expansive changes with a 14,000 square foot addition. A concern of the renovation options was the length of time

it would take (approximately 3 ½ years) and that students and staff would be in the building during renovations.

Option #3 was a custom new high school with a renovation of the existing field house. The new custom school option would be constructed faster and there would be no disruption of school during the construction; however, it came with a higher price tag.

The three original options had an estimated cost as follows (all numbers rounded to nearest million);

Renovation #1	\$86,000,000
Renovation #2	\$96,000,000
New Custom School	\$98,000,000

The great news about the school project is that the MSBA will pay a large share of the cost depending on which option the Town chooses. The final cost of the school and the exact reimbursement amount cannot be determined until the proposed school is approved by the MSBA and the town has received bids. However for planning purposes the following estimates were used based on assumed reimbursement from the MSBA for eligible costs.

If we look at the same three options after the estimated MSBA reimbursement amount the cost to the town would be approximately as follows:

Renovations #1	\$38,000,000
Renovation #2	\$43,000,000
New Custom School	\$47,000,000

### **Why would it cost so much to renovate the school?**

It was the original plan of the committee to recommend a renovation project to the Town Council. However, after seeing the extensive repairs and renovations needed to meet building code regulations and educational requirements, the time line and the disruption to students and staff, the Building Committee voted that a model school was the best option for the Town to pursue. The project would require a “gut renovation.” Most of the cost of renovation would be spent bringing the school into compliance with ADA requirements, updating the mechanical, electrical, and plumbing (MEP) systems and providing for adequate circulation of the student body throughout the facility. Additionally, history has shown us that renovations lead to unknown conditions during construction.

Accordingly, after weighing all the factors (higher reimbursement, shorter construction period, no disruption of students, and fewer change orders) the committee requested the MSBA allow the Town to consider a new “Model High School”. The Executive Director of the MSBA personally visited the School and upon review of the options agreed to support the Committee’s request to pursue a Model School.

### **Why would such a high portion of renovation costs be spent on structural and mechanical improvements?**

Modern construction most often begins with a steel frame structure. This type of frame allows future renovations to occur more easily and at less cost. The existing Franklin High School was built without a steel frame, but instead employs load bearing masonry block walls to support the roof structure. The roof supports for the 19 different roof levels span only the distance between two walls, thus making it more difficult and costly to reconfigure the school for a modern educational program.

The existing MEP systems, including HVAC are 36 years old and are in what is to be considered “*poor but usable condition*” and have “*exceeded its recommended useful life.*” These systems are buried within the concrete slab foundation or are buried inside the masonry cinder block walls. This means that in order to update these systems, substantial demolition must occur.

### **Why did the Building Committee pursue and choose the “Model School” Option?**

A Model School is a school that has already been designed and built in at least one other community. The concept is “why reinvent the wheel” when it has already been built. The Architectural firm the Committee chose Ai3 has already built the Whitman–Hanson High and Norwood High Schools while Plymouth North and Natick High schools are under construction and expected to be completed in 2012.

The MSBA encourages Model Schools by providing communities an additional 5% of reimbursement towards the cost versus a custom built new school. Franklin will get the benefit of higher reimbursement, a shorter construction timeline, fewer change orders, lower architect fees and a building that will meet all of the educational requirements for generations to come.

Accordingly, the estimated cost of the Model school at the time of the study was \$104,000,000 with Franklin’s share approximately \$47,000,000. The final amount will not be known until the project is approved by the MSBA and bids are received.

### **What is the impact on students between a renovation and new model school (new construction) project?**

Throughout the approximately 36-42 months to complete a proposed renovation, students would continue to go to school and learn adjacent to an active construction zone. This would cause substantial, ongoing disruption to the education environment as students classrooms would be moved regularly as the phases of construction progress. Additionally, parts of the building would be inaccessible and student circulation throughout the campus would be re-routed through temporary structures. Because whole wings of the building would be closed for significant periods of time, the town would be spending money on building temporary classrooms as part of the construction costs as opposed to putting that same money into the quality of the final building.

While the financial and logistical considerations are significant to a renovation, we believe that the quality of education for students “living” at FHS throughout the project is an equally important consideration. In a model school, the current learning environment will remain intact throughout the project and students will transition into the new building within approximately 24 months from groundbreaking. If the community votes to fund this project, groundbreaking is scheduled to occur in fall 2012 and the current freshman class would spend their senior year in the new school.

### **Where will the New School be built?**

The New Model School will be built between the tennis courts and the football field. The football field will not be disturbed. We will fence off from the access road to the football field as to not interrupt the current school and educational process. There will be a separate construction entrance, so there will be NO construction vehicles using any of the same access roads that the students and parents would use. Once the new school is completed, we will then abate and demolish the existing school and field house and replace the fields that were taken by the new school in that location. THE COST OF THE DEMOLITION AS WELL AS THE COST TO REPLACE THE FIELDS IS INCLUDED IN THE COST OF THE MODEL SCHOOL.

### **How big is the existing school and how big will the new one be?**

	Current School	Proposed Model School
Gross square feet -	312,571	306,543 *
Number of Classrooms	52	58
Total Classroom Space	69,085	82,770
Larger Science Labs	1,270	1,440
Auditorium	NONE	9,400

\* Final gross feet determined by MSBA

### **What about the Field House?**

The field house holds sentimental and historical value for many citizens in Franklin, but what is the impact on students if we do not keep it? In reality, the Hockmock League voted last year to move all Varsity Track meets to alternate venues as the current track cannot provide our athletes with a competitive surface that rivals athletes in other leagues. The scope of renovation to the field house, had we selected that option would not have addressed the quality of the running surface to such an extent that this would have changed. Additionally, the Field House is large, but not configured in such a way as to maximize the usable space for athletic competitions due to the arched roofline. Modern gymnasiums, such as the one included in the model school, are designed to maximize space and provide greater flexibility for usage. For example, the space in the model school provides two full size competition basketball courts side by side and can be subdivided into four to five separate small gyms for practices. Bleachers retract into the walls so there is less damage to the playing surfaces and the seating increases significantly over what is currently available to our school.

In discussion with the MSBA, it was made clear to us that field houses are not a reimbursable expense by MSBA, even under a renovation option. Because the MSBA will not reimburse this expense, the town would assume 100% financial responsibility for correcting the structural issues as well as renovating/refurbishing the field house. They also indicated that if we were invited to participate in the Model School program, the current field house would have to be torn down.

### **Why don't we wait a few years until the economy is better?**

We have been studying the possibility of renovating the Franklin High School since 2005 (almost 8 years). Franklin is finally in the MSBA pipeline, has been invited into the Model School program, has selected an architect that has consistently come in ahead of schedule and under cost, and a model that has received numerous awards for the quality of construction. The Architect is completing the schematic design of the building and once complete, this design will be submitted to the MSBA for final approval. Once MSBA has approved our project (expected in January of 2012) the voters will have 120 days to approve a Debt Exclusion to fund the project. We must fund the entire project and the protected MSBA reimbursement to the town will be 59.52% of eligible costs. During the current economic climate, construction costs are highly competitive and interest rates are at historic lows. The full impact on residents' tax bills will not occur until 2015.

### **What is the cost to the average taxpayer?**

The High School Building Committee submitted a proposed plan for the new High School with an estimated cost of \$104,500,000+/- . Once the plan is approved by the MSBA in January, the Committee will request the Council hold a special election and place a question on the ballot to fund the project with a target date for the election the last week in March 2012. If approved, it is anticipated the construction will commence in the fall of 2012 and the school will be ready for students in the fall of 2014.

The debt exclusion question must be for the entire amount, but based on the current reimbursement rate for eligible costs, the Building Committee anticipates the Town's share to be \$47,000,000.

The final impact on the cost to the taxpayer will be based on the actual cost of the construction, interest rates, and the tax rate and assessed value at the time. The projected cost to the average taxpayer is based on today's tax rate, assessed value, projected construction schedule and interest rate. While we believe this is a good estimate, it may vary a little depending on the above-mentioned factions.

\$47,000,000 borrowed for 25 years on a level debt basis. See attached borrowing schedule.

### **The increase in the "average" annual property tax bill with and assessed value in FY 12 of \$352,700.**

FY 13	\$ 1
FY 14	\$ 45
FY 15	\$ 85

FY 16	\$216
FY 17	\$260
FY 18 – FY 40	\$260 per year.

In FY 17, the cost will equal .74 cents per thousand dollars of valuation. If you take your assessed value, divide it by 1,000 and multiply it by .74 cents you can calculate the cost to you.

### **Examples**

House assessed at \$296,000. Multiply 296 x .74 equals \$220 per year starting in FY 17  
House assessed at \$375,000. Multiply 375 x .74 equals \$278 per year starting in FY 17  
House assessed at \$425,000. Multiply 425 x .74 equals \$315 per year starting in FY 17