

RESPONSES TO THE MOST FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE BHS RENOVATION

Presented to the Biddeford School Committee by Principal Britton Wolfe
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I am very pleased that we have been receiving questions from citizens about details of the renovation plan that will be on next Tuesday's ballot. The following are responses to the most frequently asked questions I have received.

1. Why are we renovating a nearly fifty year old building instead of going with new construction?

We need to remember that this project is going to be 100% locally funded. The Building Committee studied this matter in great depth including visits to three schools that have had major renovation projects (Scarborough HS, Windham HS, and Greely HS). All of these schools are roughly the same age as BHS. These projects are called "renovate to new". If you go in any of them, it looks like a brand new school. Besides the cost factor (which was estimated at \$60 million exclusive of land costs and/or demolition costs of the present building) we also considered the amount of square footage we have in this building, the fact that we benefit from having two gymnasiums (which we would definitely NOT get in a new construction project) and the in-town location which is very important because it is within walking distance for many of our students. The building committee settled on the option that we felt had a good likelihood of passing and will meet our needs for the next 30+ years. We did not feel that the taxpayers would be able to bear the cost of a locally funded brand new school.

2. Why can't we just wait a few years and the state will pay for us to build a new school?

The Building Committee had a meeting last year with a representative from the Bureau of General Services, which supervises and funds school construction for the Maine Dept. of Education. He was very clear that Biddeford would in all likelihood have to wait for "a decade or more" to get funding for a high school construction project. There are three major factors here:

- 1. The state's financial crisis, which has caused suspension of construction rounds.
- 2. The fact that Biddeford just received 80% funding on the BMS project in 2005 and there are many other school districts that also have great need who have not received any funding.
- 3. There are school districts who had project proposals approved by BGS back in 2005 who didn't receive funding and are still waiting. Those districts are bound to be "first in line" for project funding.

3. How are you going to address the foundation? Can it be repaired and rehabilitated so that it will support the new construction and not leak?

I spoke with architect Jeff Larimer and Project Manager Pete Pelletier at LedgeWood Construction about these questions. The plan is to replace the curtain walls with steel frame construction and a mixture of exterior paneling, thin brick, and windows. This will keep the wall weights within the limits of what the current foundation can support. As far as the cracks in the foundation that have seeped water: they will excavate and inspect these; they will be repaired from the outside and not just from the inside, and a rubber waterproof layer will be added. So they will be able to address these issues.

4. Why is the new addition necessary? Is it necessary?

The Building Committee investigated three options for renovating the high school. Option 1 was basic code improvements, windows, handicapped accessibility. Option 3 was new construction. Option 2, which we voted to go with, calls for a two storey addition to be extended from the south end of the building. This addition is essential for the following reasons:

- 1. The facility needs a secure entrance with the administrative offices adjacent to it.
- 2. The addition is necessary to provide the space so that we can move the girls locker room complex which is not handicap accessible. It will go where the office is now.
- 3. The space in the ground floor where the girls locker room is presently will become storage space for maintenance and for records. We have a critical shortage of both.
- 4. The new media center is needed to provide a more useful and versatile learning environment for the types of tasks students are doing today-- more collaborative, involving more use of technology. We also need a more media center storage capacity.
- 5. Moving the media center will allow us to reconfigure classrooms so that all departments have an area; right now the Fine Arts Dept and the Math Dept are spread across the building.

5. Is the High School really at risk of losing its accreditation, or is this a "scare tactic" to get people to support the renovation?

The high school is at risk of being put on probation if we do not completely address the recommendations that were made in the 2006 NEASC report. There were 21 recommendations under standard 7, Community Resources for Learning, which deals with infrastructure and facilities. We have so far addressed 11 of those recommendations, which were the ones involving minor construction, signage, safety procedures, etc. The ten that remain are major construction issues such as handicapped accessibility, window wall leakage, roof

concerns, and increased storage.

All of these recommendations will be addressed if the building is renovated as planned. If the renovation bond is not passed, NEASC will want to know what our plans are to fully address all of these recommendations "in a timely fashion".

What is certain is that Biddeford High School will not be removed from warning status with NEASC until all of the recommendations have been addressed. I think that all members of the community can agree that it is not good for the high school to remain on warning status. While we are fully accredited, it creates a lot of confusion and concern about the quality of education in the school. It impacts our enrollment and choices that parents and homebuyers make. We want to get the high school off the warning list as quickly as we can.

6. Is the electrical system a major problem?

The inadequacy of the electrical system is one of the most pressing and difficult problems we face, and is one that can only be addressed as part of a building renovation project. Our 1200 amp service, which was installed in 1961, is divided into circuits which were never intended to provide the amounts of electricity that we require today for computer stations, photocopiers, air conditioners, laptop carts, LCD projectors, etc. We frequently have tripped circuit breakers and "brownouts" in the building as a result of overload. This overload also creates an increased risk of fire, especially with wire insulation that is 50 years old. And we also need to remember that the building does not have a sprinkler system in the event of fire, which is a safety code violation and a tremendous hazard.

7. Where can I find out greater details about the project and budget plans?

Citizens may go to the Biddeford School Department at www.bidschools.org. There is a tab on the left toolbar called "BHS Renovation". All of the project documents are listed there in PDF format, including project narrative and rationale, proposed floor plans, and project budget breakdown.

For a more in-depth explanation of these issues, people may go to the BHS Renovation tab on the school district's homepage (bidschools.org) and click on the "Narrative Plan" document.