

**Why Retiring the Center School is the Best Option**  
**Hopkinton School Committee**  
**October 2010**

In August of 2010, the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) endorsed votes by the Hopkinton Elementary School Building Committee and the Hopkinton School Committee to retire the Center School and replace it with a new facility on Fruit Street. The MSBA reached its decision after reviewing the results of a comprehensive Feasibility Study that was originally authorized by the MSBA in December of 2007 and supported by the voters at the Annual Town Meeting in May of 2008.

The Feasibility Study was conducted by the architectural firm of Design Partnership of Cambridge (DPC), the same firm that designed and oversaw the construction of Hopkinton High School. DPC primarily focused on three options for the Center School study: renovating the existing Center School, constructing a new school on the Center School site, or building a new school on Fruit Street. After DPC presented its findings, the MSBA concurred that any option involving the renovation or replacement of the Center School on its present site was the least viable and most costly option.

The Center School is an obsolete school building. The original facility was built in 1928. A twelve room classroom addition was built in 1950, and another six classrooms and a gymnasium were added in 1986. Current classroom spaces are grossly undersized and do not meet current MSBA standards. MSBA guidelines recommend, for example, that kindergarten classrooms should range from 1,100 to 1,300 square feet and grade 1 to 5 classrooms should range from 900 to 950 square feet. Classrooms at the Center School, by comparison, generally range from 600 to 700 square feet in the original building and 800 to 900 square feet in the other areas of the school.

These small classroom spaces impede teachers' ability to deliver instruction. Opportunities for center-based instruction, student movement within the room, and the use of space for social skills development are limited. In addition, small classroom spaces make it difficult for specialized staff such as special education teachers and reading specialist to offer small group instruction in a room. Educational services are further compromised by the unavailability of small group spaces for pull-out instruction and a lack of private testing and meeting space. The library is also grossly undersized at 816 square feet versus the MSBA standard for an elementary school of 3100 square feet.

The school also presents a number of safety, health, and accessibility concerns. Primary among them are proper heating, air flow, and ventilation. While the boiler was replaced in 2007, the HVAC distribution system and piping remain outdated. Proper ventilation remains a concern in the seven classrooms in the original building. These rooms have no fresh air circulation since stormed windows were placed inside the metal framed awning windows many years ago. The school similarly has inadequate distribution systems for gas and electricity. The shortage of electrical outlets in the school limits the amount of

technology that can be used in the classrooms and often results in tripped circuits. The entire third floor is also inaccessible to anyone with mobility issues.

Site constraints also interfere with the operation of the school. Site access is limited by narrow passageways on both sides of the building, which interferes with the cueing of busses, restricts the number of parking spaces on site, and allows no separation of bus traffic and students' play spaces. As a result, a high degree of student supervision is needed to ensure student safety. Traffic congestion around the Town Common from bus transportation and parent pick-ups is a well documented problem and has been consistently acknowledged as a safety concern by the town's public safety officials.

While the MSBA prefers school renovation as its first alternative, the Feasibility Study convincingly demonstrated that the estimated \$41 million dollar cost to renovate the Center School was not a viable solution. This cost estimate did not include monies for the temporary relocation of students, which would have been needed as part of a phased school renovation project.

With the MSBA's approval to proceed with a new facility at Fruit Street, Design Partnership of Cambridge is currently working with the Hopkinton Elementary School Building Committee, the School Committee, and other town boards and officials on the schematic design for a new school on the Fruit Street site. In January of 2011, we will be seeking final approval from the MSBA for the design of the new school and intend to bring a request for full design and construction to the voters in March at a Special Town Meeting and election. The timing for this approval has been established by the MSBA.

While the exact cost of the school will not be known for a few weeks, the initial cost estimate for school construction is approximately \$30 million dollars; the initial estimate for the entire project, including fees for architects and owner's project management is approximately \$36 million dollars. We anticipate that the MSBA will fund approximately 50% of the eligible project cost. This funding will lessen the cost to taxpayers who would ultimately bear the full cost of Center School renovations in the absence of an MSBA funded project.

Additional information on the Center School project will be disseminated during the upcoming weeks and months. We anticipate many questions from citizens about the project and its impacts. We look forward to this discussion and thank you in advance for your attention.