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Foster Frequently Asked Questions

Why is Foster School considered the highest priority capital project for Hingham?

Although the building has been very well maintained over time, it contains structural deficiencies and aged electrical and heating systems that no longer adequately support 21st Century learning. In 2005 the Hingham Public School's Ten Year Master Plan identified the need to renovate or replace Foster. The 1951 school was renovated in 1957. An addition was built in 1974. In 2008 the town allocated \$3.5 million to renovate Foster with the goal of sustaining the life of the building for another 10 years. Significant steam pipe leaks, temperature swings, roof leaks and boiler breakdowns are extremely disruptive to the learning environment; teachers, students, and maintenance staff contend with disruptions on a regular basis. In December 2018, a boiler failure required evacuation of all students to the high school. The building includes 1974 classroom modifications, which compromise the educational quality of 12 classrooms, 6 of which have no natural daylighting, a very unusual condition for a modern elementary school classroom. In addition, the only large assembly space, the cafeteria, is significantly undersized. This means that the only time the entire school population can meet together is outside on the playground if there is good weather. In addition, Foster school is inefficiently organized in three stories which could not be resolved without a comprehensive renovation.

What actions are the School Committee taking to address the problems?

In 2017 and 2018, the School Committee and the Board of Selectmen voted to submit a Statement of Interest (SOI) to the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) to request their assistance in finding a solution for Foster School. Hingham successfully worked with the MSBA to address East School and the Middle School projects in the past. The MSBA's grant program is a non-entitlement, competitive program. Grants are distributed by the MSBA Board of Directors based on need and urgency, as expressed by the district and validated by the MSBA.

The MSBA did not accept Hingham's two Statements of Interest (SOI) submitted in 2017 and 2018. The School Committee and Board of Selectmen will submit a third SOI in April of 2019. The School Committee has submitted Warrant Article 24 for Town Meeting 2019 to provide extraordinary capital maintenance funds to ensure that Foster is adequately maintained until the town determines a permanent solution for the building.

What is the role of the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA)?

The Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) is a state organization that funds and administers a grant program for Massachusetts school capital projects. The MSBA receives one penny of each dollar of the state's sales tax. Grants are determined by need and urgency. Once a district is selected to receive a grant and accepts it, the district is required to follow the MSBA rigorous, multi-step study and building process.

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For more information about the MSBA go to: <http://www.massschoolbuildings.org>.

What are the advantages of working with the MSBA?

There is a financial advantage to working with the MSBA. Hingham successfully worked with the MSBA in the recent past to complete two of our schools: MSBA contributed 40% of the construction cost of East and 43.87% of the construction cost of HMS.

What is a Statement of Interest (SOI)?

An SOI is a form completed by a school district seeking funding from the MSBA. Submitting the form is the first step in the MSBA process for school building renovation and repair grants. The form, filled out by the district, states all of the deficiencies in a school building and how those deficiencies fit the priorities established under Massachusetts law.

What happens if the MSBA approves the SOI?

Once a district is invited into the MSBA process, the next step is the Eligibility Period. The Eligibility Period is up to a 270-day period for the District to complete certain preliminary requirements. Districts that successfully complete the preliminary requirements to the satisfaction of the MSBA are eligible to receive an invitation to the Feasibility Study phase. While an important step, acceptance into Feasibility Study does not guarantee an invitation to the MSBA's capital pipeline.

What is the Feasibility Study Phase?

This phase involves the District utilizing MSBA-specific procurement processes and standard Request for Services ("RFS") templates and contracts to procure a team of professionals as a proposed project advances through the MSBA grant process. Working together, the town and the MSBA investigate the condition of the building and the site, and develop a cost effective, educationally appropriate solution for the aging building. A solution could involve repair and renovation or replacement, depending on the information determined through the study. The process is rigorous, transparent, and designed to examine all possible solutions.

Why renovate or replace Foster?

Foster retains the original 1951 boilers and electrical panels. Although it has been very well maintained, the building is aging and is no longer compatible with 21st century learning needs. Many of the rooms are smaller than classrooms in other Hingham schools, and many lack natural light and modern day ventilation.

The age and infrastructure of the boilers, pipes, and electrical panels presents multiple problems including numerous leaks, significant corrosion, obsolete parts, cement encased wiring, and hard to access pipes. Steam leaks and basement moisture compromise the original electrical panels, alarm wiring, wastewater pipes, and water pipes in the building. Over the past several years, the cost to repair each unanticipated leak has ranged between \$2,000 - \$15,000. With each passing year, there is an increasing risk of improper functioning of the boiler and electrical system. Frequently, extreme temperatures disrupt learning because students must be moved to another area of the building. The aging structure impacts teaching and learning, repair costs are extremely expensive, and an evacuation could impact the entire community.

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What is Article 24?

The School Committee submitted Warrant Article 24 for the April 22, 2019 Town Meeting to appropriate \$350,000 for the purpose of funding extraordinary maintenance capital needs of Foster Elementary School. The \$350,000 is to be expended under the direction of the School Committee, upon recommendations by the 2017 Foster School Building Committee. A 'yes' vote will provide a ready source of funds to perform major expected and unexpected extraordinary maintenance until such time as the building is replaced, renovated, or otherwise remodeled and repaired.

Why is the School Committee proposing this article?

Article 24 allows us to ensure that Foster is adequately maintained until the town determines a permanent solution for the building. Repairs are expensive and would devastate the annual Capital Budget and its ability to properly maintain the other school buildings.

I do not have a student at Foster. Why should I care?

Equity of access to educational programs and practices is a high priority in our town, irrespective of where students reside. Preventing disruptions in one building helps ensure the smooth operation and oversight of all of the buildings. East School was built in 2008 due to an extreme overcrowding in Hingham's elementary schools. The elementary school population has maintained the enrollment numbers since all four schools have been in operation. However, without Foster School, Hingham would face the same over-enrollment problems as it did 10 years ago. The reputation of our excellent school district helps support our high property values.

What is the School District plan for emergency situations?

The school department has developed multiple contingency plans in the event that there is an emergency maintenance or other disruptive issue at any of our six school buildings. For more information on the district-wide Evacuation Contingency Plans for Continuity of Education go to: <https://hinghamschools.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Continuity-of-Education-HSC-11.18.19.pdf?fbclid=IwAR35czxQqSqjuz6QhO2vn57Zjn6WA4ptWR4UK3spyX2opBevsKfFS0NQS6Ij>

Is the Foster building safe?

Yes. Despite the inadequacies of the building, Foster School is well maintained. A system is in place to track work orders and preventative maintenance, and multiple capital projects have been completed to ensure that the school is safe and functioning to the best of its capability. Funding from Article 24 will further this effort and ensure that funds are appropriated to keep the building functional and safe without draining resources from other schools.

What is the role of the 2017 Foster School Building Committee?

The 2017 Foster School Building Committee was created under a 2017 Town Meeting Warrant Article to consider a possible remodel or rebuild of Foster School, contingent upon the town's acceptance into the MSBA grant program. The seven member board was appointed jointly by the School Committee, Board of Selectmen, and Town Moderator. This committee has taken a number of preliminary steps, including

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supporting the School Committee and Administration as they prepare to submit an updated SOI, completing preliminary site investigation work to confirm suitability for future development, assisting school officials to select a consultant to perform a new enrollment study and helping to revise the final enrollment study report.

To view the August 2018 Enrollment Study: <https://hinghamschools.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/HINGHAM-MA-Demog-2018-8-9-Rev-2.pdf>

What can I do?

While we await the MSBAs decision about whether or not to accept Hingham's third application, the highest priority is to obtain extraordinary maintenance funds through passage of Article 24 at Town Meeting on April 22, 2019. To pass, the article requires a majority vote, so every vote is crucial. You can learn more about Town Meeting and how to participate here:

https://my.lwv.org/sites/default/files/leagues/wysiwyg/%5Bcurrent-user%3Aog-user-node%3A1%3Atitle%5D/citizens_guide_to_hingham_open_town_meeting_-_lwv_vol.4.pdf

<https://my.lwv.org/massachusetts/hingham/town-meeting/annual-warrant-review>

<https://www.hingham-ma.gov/241/Town-Meeting>