

TO: School Committee

FROM: Tim Piwowar, Superintendent

DATE: October 6, 2023

RE: Comprehensive Facilities Planning

In our 2023-2024 district strategic priorities, one of four key areas is “Infrastructure for the Future”. In particular, Priority 4.1 states, “Develop a long-range capital plan for the District and engage the community in the planning process.” We discussed this at our September School Committee meeting in general terms, and this memo serves to outline recommended next steps in meeting this priority.

For context around this priority, the district last conducted a capital needs assessment in 2014-2015. A review of that study shows that it clearly laid the foundation for what eventually became the Pine Hill Elementary School project. In particular, the following were identified as “Next Steps following the Study”:

- *Appropriate funds for further study of the Hanlon site for a potential new elementary school option*
- *Develop a strategy for preparing the SOIs (Statement of Interests) to request eligibility into the MSBA (Massachusetts School Building Authority) grant program.*

These steps were followed, and it shows the benefit that a strong master planning process has in guiding the direction of the district and the community in addressing the educational and facility needs of our schools.

That being said, the 2014-2015 study is nearly ten years old at this point, and it is time to re-engage in the planning process. This is true not only to ensure consistency with best practice for planning, but because we are facing pressing needs with some of our older buildings - particularly Sheehan and Thurston - and it is educationally and financially responsible to address those needs in the context of a larger plan and not as isolated issues.

Furthermore, the 2014-2015 study did not discuss any needs at Westwood High School as the building was still new enough at that point to sit outside of the scope of the study’s review. Given that we are currently facing the need to do work at WHS consistent with the current age of the building (e.g., roofing), it is important that an assessment of the high school be included as part of a new plan.

In addition to a review of the physical needs of our school buildings’ systems, it is critically important to ensure that there is a robust educational component in the development of the

plan. Ultimately, our school buildings are about the physical environments that they create for teaching and learning, and it is essential that we explore and make recommendations for how our schools can support (and not inhibit) the educational opportunities that our students are able to access.

Finally, the plan needs to include an updated demographic study to understand projected patterns of enrollment across grade spans. In particular, consideration needs to be given to planning for future trends in preschool enrollment, given the increasing needs that we are seeing both locally and across Massachusetts.

Recommended Immediate Next Steps:

Given that the annual timeline for submission of capital requests occurs early each fall, we want to be positioned to begin this work as rapidly as possible to be ready for the results of the study to impact the district's capital requests next September. The first step in this process is to determine the scope of the proposed plan and to develop an RFP that would allow us to move quickly to procurement once a funding source is identified.

The School Committee's Capital Projects Subcommittee should be the appropriate forum for these discussions and I would recommend that the full Committee charge the Subcommittee with developing the goals and scope of the planning process, as well as reviewing any RFP that is created. I would also recommend that the Subcommittee meet as soon as is practicable in order to be prepared should a funding opportunity arise.

I thank the Committee for your willingness to engage in this process, and welcome any additional feedback from you at our upcoming meeting on October 12.