



HAMILTON-WENHAM REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

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Michael M. Harvey, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

Dear Friends,

In addition to requesting an FY19 HWRSD Operating Budget, the School Committee has also approved two “projects” which require the District to incur debt to complete. These “projects” are a part of the HWRSD’s Five-Year Capital Plan, which has been developed in order to address identified deficiencies in the facilities of the HWRSD.

Funding the 5-Year Capital Plan

As we begin to discuss the capital needs of the HWRSD, the question of how to pay for any improvements always comes to the forefront. We are however, currently in a position to take advantage of one very favorable factor that will allow us to complete these projects without incrementally increasing the HWRSD’s Debt Service Expense as compared to the current year. In May of 2019, the HWRSD will be making the last annual payment of \$711,000 on the debt incurred in 2000 to build the Miles River Middle School and renovate HWRHS. The School Committee has voted to present approximately \$3.45 million in projects at Town Meeting in April of 2018. At current interest rates, the annual payment on the debt needed to complete the newly proposed projects will be approximately \$254,000 annually. Through taking advantage of our expiring debt, we will be able to enhance our facilities and without significantly impacting the assessments to our member Towns.

The Winthrop School Sprinkler Project

The first of these projects, the installation of an automatic sprinkler system at the Winthrop Elementary School, has been mandated by the Hamilton Fire Chief in order to comply with Massachusetts General Law Chapter 148, Section 26G. We estimate this project will cost approximately \$850,000. MGL Chapter 148, Section 26G went into effect on January 1, 2010 in response to a fire in Newton, MA in 2000, which claimed five lives. The law states “Every building or structure, including any additions or major alterations thereto, which totals, in the aggregate, more than 7,500 gross square feet in floor area shall be protected throughout with an adequate system of automatic sprinklers in accordance with the provisions of the state building code.” The State Fire Marshall’s Office has determined that “major renovations” constitute work done that totals over 33% of the assessed value of the building as of the date of permit application. The State Fire Marshall has also determined that a series of projects completed within a five-year time period that add up to 33% of the assessed value of the building meets the definition of “major renovation.”

Over the past five years, the HWRSB has completed several projects to address severe deficiencies at the Winthrop Elementary School. In 2013, the District replaced the roof of the school and made structural repairs at an approximate cost of \$587,000. In 2015, the District replaced the exterior walls of the Winthrop School and installed new boilers at a total cost of \$1.96 million. The Hamilton Fire Chief determined in April of 2014 that the total combined amount of these projects, approximately \$2.54 million, was more than 33% of the assessed value of the building at the time the first project (roof replacement) was permitted.

MGL Ch. 148, Section 26G does allow for an appeal of the Fire Chief's ruling to the State Sprinkler Appeals Board within 45 days of notice from the local fire chief, which the District decided not to pursue for the following reasons. The intent of MGL Ch. 148, Section 26G is for **every** building in Massachusetts over 7,500 square feet to have sprinklers. MGL Ch. 148, Section 26G only provides exemptions from this requirement for cases where "sufficient water and water pressure does not exist." Therefore, questions of appeal are limited to the specific requirements outlined in the law; i. e., Is the building over 7,500 square feet? Did the renovations meet the 33% assessed value threshold? Is there sufficient water and water pressure available for sprinklers? In the case of the Winthrop School, it is very clear that the Hamilton Fire Chief is following the requirements outlined in the law and an appeal would not prevail.

Safety, Accessibility and Critical Infrastructure Projects

The School Committee has also proposed the remaining "project," which totals \$2.6 million in items designed to address identified needs in the areas of "student and staff safety and security," "handicap accessibility," and "critical infrastructure" that are critical to the operations of our schools. School safety is always a top priority. Items on the list of projects that deal with staff and student safety include installing keyless entry "swipe card" systems in all buildings, installing exterior security cameras at all schools, upgrading our main entryway and school office security cameras in all school buildings and replacing recalled sprinkler heads in the middle and high schools. The list of projects also includes upgrading our school intercom systems to ensure these systems are fully functioning and can be heard by all building occupants in case of emergency and installing an emergency generator at the Buker School. Completing these projects will make all of our schools safer for students and staff.

Projects identified as "Accessibility" improvements are designed to improve access to our facilities for everyone. These projects include the installation of wheelchair lifts to allow access to the stages at both the Winthrop and Buker Schools, replacement of the handicap entryway ramp at the Buker School, and repair of the sidewalks outside the Miles River and School Administration Buildings. Completing these enhancements and repairs will allow us to improve the ability of those with mobility issues to access our facilities.

The projects that make up the "Critical Infrastructure" portion of the list include items that are vital to the daily operations of our schools. Many of the items are related to replacing and upgrading our technology infrastructure. Operations central to the School District, such as

student attendance, grade books, and even telephone communications are entirely dependent on our IT infrastructure. Our current servers and other components of our infrastructure have reached the end of their lifespan and need to be replaced. Other “Critical Infrastructure” items include replacing the currently inoperable sound system in the MS/HS gymnasium, replacement of outdated classroom furniture in all schools, replacement of the electrical system and lighting console in the Ferrini Auditorium, and replacement of kitchen equipment that has reached the end of its operational life. Completing these projects will allow us to continue to operate our schools at the level the community has come to expect.

Next Steps in the Approval Process

These two debt authorization questions will be placed before Hamilton and Wenham Town Meeting on April 7. The School Committee and I humbly request your support for these projects at your Town Meeting. Your vote for the School District at Town Meeting will ensure we continue to provide the educational services our community has come to expect and sees as a source of pride. I look forward to seeing you on April 7th.

Sincerely,

Michael M. Harvey, Ed.D.
Superintendent
Hamilton-Wenham Regional School District