



NASHOBA

Regional School District

Science Lab Initiative

What is this and why is it happening now?

In 2007 the district undertook a review of the condition of our physical space as part of the building project study in Stow. This was a requirement to understand how space was used within the entire district. We identified space needs for the high school, specifically needing more science labs, and additional instructional space. Although we had a renovation that began in 1999 only half of the science labs (1962 wing) were addressed and only with furniture. The 1970's wing was left alone. We also identified space needs for the regional offices since Bolton has decided to use Emerson School as their location in the event there is additional space needed for enrollment surges. This would displace the regional offices which are currently in the 1952 and 1922 section of the Emerson School Building. We also identified the needs of our outdoor space, most notably the condition and lack of space at the high school. This feasibility study went on the back shelf in 2008 due to economic circumstances.

Driving this observation were two factors: one was safety with the routine requirement of science teachers to travel among labs with chemicals often during the passing of classes. The second was that science lab space was impacting our ability to schedule other classes making our schedule complex and reducing the number of lab offerings. High schools are considered at capacity with 85% of the rooms being used all of the time. We are higher than this routinely.

In 2011 the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) put out a grant for science lab renovations. We applied for it in January 2012. We learned we were in the queue for acceptance on June 11th. That started an accelerated timeline all controlled by the MSBA including when the Town's voters would have to vote to allow the regional district to bond. The school committee voted on June 19th to enter into contracts with SMMA (architects) and SBS (owner's project manager) for the initial phase of schematic design.

The district has met three times this summer with staff from these firms that included our Director of Facilities, teachers and school administrators. A series (4) of draft proposals was reviewed with MSBA on August 11th. The architect is currently working to finalize plan 3A and to send it to a cost estimator to finalize a recommendation of costs.

In the twelve original grants that were authorized, MSBA set aside up to ten million dollars for possible renovations at NASHOBA Regional High School. They included in this the possibility that we would be putting a new roof over the entire building which we have no plans on doing. They also have included window replacement. There is great interest in doing this since the building is forty (40) years old and has single pane windows currently.

Where are we now?

In our meetings we have focused on the enrollment projections required of us (1016) by MSBA. We have documented our current array of courses that supports 11 lab spaces. We currently use the “shop” classrooms for some of our engineering offerings. The grant specifically limits us to the existing footprint only. There can be no greenhouses added; although window walls can be used for the same effect. We can look at the HVAC feeding these classrooms and we can replace any space impacted by making the lab classrooms meet state safety requirements of 60 sq feet per student. This means all of our labs have to grow to 1440 square feet. Currently only three are close to this size.

Our objective is creating a project that will . . .

1. Get all labs up to standard regarding size, equipment and technology;
2. Provide enough lab space to meet our current enrollment (1032) for safety;
3. Reduce the impact of science schedule on the remaining content scheduling; and,
4. Have an energy efficient building that will save on use and finances in the years to come.

Finances

We don't know the totality of the costs. We are expecting them by August 28th when the architects present to our school committee for the first time. I have directed Mr. King to work with our treasurer and bond company to build scenarios to discuss that night. It would be our hope that with the retirement of the deficit bond, although we have the new debt with the field renovation, we will not be increasing our overall debt capacity by very much.

Conclusion

The timing of this project is not the best. The Commonwealth is here, now, saying if we want they will partner with us at 47% (+/-) and work to construct a state of the art science experience for our students. It makes sense, if we can make the finances work for our communities.