

District: Berlin-Boylston Regional School District
School Name: Tahanto Regional Middle/High School
Category: Preferred Schematic

Recommendation:

That the Executive Director is authorized to approve the Berlin-Boylston Regional School District, as part of its Invitation for Feasibility Study, to proceed into schematic design for the replacement of the existing Tahanto Regional Middle/High School. MSBA staff has reviewed the designer's options for the Tahanto Regional Middle/High School and accept the District's preferred solution to replace the existing building with a new facility as the most cost-effective and educationally sound option.

Background:

Berlin and Boylston, with a combined population of approximately 6,700 residents, comprise a regional school district that consists of the Boylston Elementary School, the Berlin Memorial Elementary School, and the Tahanto Regional Middle/High School. The Berlin and Boylston Elementary Schools each provide a pre-K to 6th grade curriculum, with 2008-2009 enrollments of 380 and 239, respectively. The majority of Berlin and Boylston students move on to Tahanto Regional Middle/High School for the 7th to 12th grade curriculum. The Tahanto Regional Middle/High School has a current enrollment of 466 students.

The existing Tahanto Regional Middle/High School was constructed in 1961 on a 20-acre site adjacent to the Wachusett Reservoir. Site constraints provide limited space and siting options for the school, its athletic facilities and parking due to the proximity of protected watershed and wetlands. The existing facility is a two-story building, approximately 94,766 square feet.

In 2000, the Berlin-Boylston Regional School District performed a feasibility study of the Tahanto Regional Middle/High School and found that, due mostly to the age of the building, the systems have deteriorated and have reached the end of their useful life and that the facility is unable to meet the educational program and the demands of technological advancements.

The facility was constructed with a reinforced frame in-filled with concrete block and brick typical of the time period during which it was erected. Despite replacement of the original roof in the mid 1980's and numerous repairs, the flat roof is leaky and failing. The HVAC system has reached the end of its useful life, making heating and ventilation ineffective and costly. The windows are original, single pane. There are numerous safety issues that have been identified as well, including but not limited to non-compliant electrical systems, lighting, stairway access, inadequacies of the science labs, and health related issues regarding burner emissions and the presence of asbestos. In addition, the facility has many space-related issues due to its layout, including but not limited to inadequate science and technology lab space, inadequate library and media center space and undersized classrooms.

On November 28, 2007 the MSBA Board of Directors voted to issue an invitation to the Owner to conduct a feasibility study for the Tahanto Regional Middle/High School to identify and study possible solutions and, through a collaborative process with the MSBA, reach a mutually-agreed upon solution.

Discussion

In conjunction with the Feasibility Study, the school administration and the Berlin-Boylston Regional School Committee have investigated the proposed restructuring of the 6th grade within the Regional School District. The Regional School District Committee has indicated that small and limited spaces within their existing elementary schools have limited their educational and programmatic capabilities. The Regional School District believes that restructuring the sixth grade will help to create the necessary space required to provide a complete program for all of its students. The Regional School District Committee voted in July 2009 to move the 6th grade from the elementary schools into the Tahanto Regional Middle/High School and to create a “school within a school” approach for the future Tahanto Program. In accordance with the regional school agreement, the proposed grade restructuring is contingent upon both towns voting to approve the proposed restructuring. The necessary town votes are scheduled for October 2009.

The feasibility study included an evaluation of a renovation/addition option and two new construction options. Based upon the review of the site conditions and the surrounding wetlands, the renovation/addition options were limited. The feasibility study also included an updated cost estimate for a renovation/code update option based on information from the previous study. In addition, as noted above, the proposed grade restructuring creates two possible enrollment scenarios:

- An agreed-upon enrollment of 560 assuming the 6th grade is added to the middle/high school; and
- An agreed-upon enrollment of 480 assuming the 6th grade remains in the elementary schools.

As part of the feasibility study, the District and its consultant team evaluated each option utilizing both enrollments in order to fully understand the impact on the proposed solutions.

Summary of Preliminary Design Pricing

| Option | Enrollment (Grade Structure) | Gross SF | Estimated Cost |
|-------------------------------|---|-----------------|-----------------------|
| Renovation/Code Update Option | 480 (7-12) | 94,766 | \$35,423,898 |
| Renovation/Addition | 480 (7-12) | 136,428 | \$42,923,624 |
| Renovation/Addition | 560 (6-12) | 139,131 | \$44,147,503 |
| New Construction | 480 (7-12) | 116,429 | \$39,400,044 |
| New Construction | 560 (6-12) | 125,620 | \$40,997,018 |

Based upon the estimated costs, the District and its consultant team have determined that the most cost-effective solution is for new construction as it provides for the lowest square footage, most energy-efficient facility and lowest total project cost to meet the

educational program. The District and its consultant team by means of comparison provided an updated cost estimate to the previous study which had outlined the necessary repairs and code updates. This comparison illustrates that the condition of the building warrants such extensive repairs and updates that it becomes a cost-ineffective solution and does not address the programmatic needs of the facility.

Based on the items listed above and given the existing condition of the building, MSBA accepts the District's determination that a renovation/addition would not be cost-effective. A renovation option of this scope would trigger compliance with the lateral/seismic structural code resulting in major foundation and reframing work, accessibility compliance, energy code updates and extensive removal of water damaged materials and mold. Nearly all finishes and every system within the building are in need of replacement.

MSBA has reviewed the conclusions of the Feasibility Study and the enrollment data with the District and found:

- 1) All initial paperwork required has been processed including an executed Initial Certificate of Compliance, the composition of the School Building Committee and the enrollment questionnaire.
- 2) MSBA has completed an enrollment projection and supports the two enrollment scenarios with and without grade restructuring of 560 students and 480 students, respectively. Upon the vote of the towns in October 2009, MSBA staff will commence work with the District and its consultant team to come to a final agreement on the size of the facility and the educational program.
- 3) MSBA reviewed the feasibility study and finds that alternatives investigated were sufficiently comprehensive in their scope and that the District's preferred option is reasonable.
- 4) MSBA will require the District to produce an operational maintenance budget that will include a capital budget to assure that there is a complete maintenance and capital improvement program for a new facility.
- 5) MSBA staff will continue to work with the District and its consultant team to produce a schematic design that satisfies and meets the MSBA space guidelines. The final design program and the size of the proposed new facility is contingent upon the town fall votes on grade restructuring.

Based on the review outlined above, staff recommends that the Berlin-Boylston Regional School District be approved to proceed into schematic design to replace the existing Tahanto Regional Middle/High School with a new facility. The final design program will be based on the final student enrollment contingent upon the results of the October town votes of Berlin and Boylston on whether to include the Grade 6 students into the Tahanto Regional Middle/High School.