

District: Southbridge  
School Name: Southbridge High School  
Recommended Category: Preferred Schematic  
Date: September 30, 2009

Recommendation:

That the Executive Director is authorized to approve the Town of Southbridge, as part of its Invitation for Feasibility Study, to proceed into schematic design for the replacement of the existing Southbridge High School. MSBA staff and the District have collaborated on evaluating the options and concluded that the District's preferred solution to replace the existing Southbridge High School and Mary E. Wells Junior High School with a new Middle/High School facility incorporating shared spaces is the most cost effective and educationally sound option.

Background:

Southbridge High School, the District's prioritized Statement of Interest (SOI), is a 117,371 square foot facility built in 1927, with additions in 1961 and 1973. The building also underwent renovations in 1971 and 1991. The High School had a 2008-2009 student enrollment of 407 students. According to the District, after being placed on probation by NEASC in May of 2005 for facilities-related issues, Southbridge lost a significant portion of its students to "school choice" alternative options. The school library had to be removed from the building as a result of its structural integrity. Since 1997, air quality has been an issue in the school because of elevated levels of mold caused by humidity and water. The HVAC system is inadequate and does not provide proper heat and air exchange throughout the building. The roof is 26-years-old and requires constant maintenance. The building is limited by its small site, with access to the school for bus and student drop-off directly on a public street.

The Mary E. Wells Junior High School opened in 1917 and was renovated in 1986. The building is a total of 79,480 square feet, with a 2008-2009 enrollment of 496 students. Like the High School, the physical plant poses a number of issues. The heating in the building cannot be adequately regulated making for uncomfortably hot and cold temperatures for much of the year. The corridors are not large enough to accommodate the volume of students. Roof leaks are frequent, and the electrical system is insufficient and outdated. One of the major issues plaguing the building is its location. Situated on the corner of two main streets, dropoff and dismissal pose significant safety issues for students because of the school's close proximity to traffic. The location also poses programmatic issues, as space is not available for any outside learning or athletics. Other programmatic deficiencies include inadequately equipped science labs, a combination auditorium/cafeteria which poses scheduling problems, and a lack of handicapped accessibility and room to accommodate SPED programs.

On November 28, 2007, the MSBA Board of Directors voted to invite the Owner to conduct a feasibility study for Southbridge High School to identify and study possible solutions and, through a collaborative process with the MSBA, reach a mutually-agreed upon solution.

Discussion:

Due to the present condition of both the Middle and High School facilities, the District asked the MSBA to consider a combined Middle/High School solution. The MSBA agreed to consider, as part of the study, the possibility that a Middle/High School facility utilizing combined core spaces would potentially be the most efficient and fiscally responsible solution.

One of the main concerns posed by the District is that it does not believe that the existing sites of the Mary Wells Middle School and Southbridge High School have the capacity to support the educational programs at each facility. The Feasibility Study supports this assertion, finding that the sites for both facilities are inadequate and cannot be expanded without the acquisition of a number of adjacent parcels.

The Feasibility Study includes an evaluation of a renovation/addition option to the High School; two new construction options for a Middle/High School at the existing High School site; and two new construction options at the Torrey Road site. Based upon the review of the present site conditions and constraints, neither the renovation/addition nor the new construction at the present High School site were preferred options. These options would allow the District to resolve only a limited amount of the issues currently facing each facility. As a result, the District favored the new construction options at the Torrey Road site.

As part of the Feasibility Study, the District and its consultant team evaluated each option utilizing agreed upon enrollment figures in order to fully understand the impact on the proposed solutions. These enrollment figures are as follows:

- An agreed-upon enrollment of 1,050 for a combined Middle/High School
- An agreed-upon enrollment of 550 for the Middle School
- An agreed-upon enrollment of 500 for the High School

	<b>Option</b>	<b>Enrollment (Grade Structure)</b>	<b>Gross SF</b>	<b>Estimated Construction Cost</b>
A2	Renovation/Addition to existing HS w/ new parking structure, demo 1961 building	500 (9-12)	122,500	\$44,217,532
A3	New MS/HS on existing HS site	1050 (6-12)	200,000	\$69,390,866
B1	New MS/HS at the existing HS, parking at the football field, demo HS, develop fields off site	1050 (6-12)	200,000	\$67,406,292
	New MS/HS at Torrey Road Site	1050 (6-12)	200,000	\$65,966,382
	New HS at Torrey Road Site	500 (9-12)	118,000	\$46,392,836

Based upon the estimated costs, the District and its consultant team have determined that the most cost-effective solution is for new construction of a Middle/High School at

Torrey Road. This solution is an energy efficient option which would allow the two facilities to share core spaces. Ample room would be available for parking, as well as the development of a safer, more organized drop-off and pick-up system. Once construction is complete, Southbridge will have the option of selling the Middle School and devoting the High School to another Town use to offset site costs. The road leading to the proposed new school at the Torrey Road site will require some offsite improvements, and utilities will need to be connected to the site.

MSBA staff have reviewed the conclusions of the Feasibility Study and the enrollment and cost estimate data with the District and concluded:

- 1) All initial paperwork required has been processed including an executed Initial Certificate of Compliance; the composition of the School Building Committee for MSBA approval; and the enrollment questionnaire.
- 2) MSBA has completed an enrollment projection utilizing the enrollment questionnaire completed by Southbridge. The MSBA and the District have agreed to a design enrollment of 500 students for a new Southbridge High School which will include grades 9-12. A design enrollment of 550 students for a new middle school brings the MSBA's total MS/HS recommendation to 1,050 students for grades 6-12.
- 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) Site development at Torrey Road as well as the Town infrastructure and road widening needed to support the use of this site will result in approximately \$5.5 million in additional site work costs to the District. The District has acknowledged these additional site costs associated with developing the Torrey Road location, has been notified that these site costs will not be eligible for funding by the MSBA, and has agreed that Southbridge will be solely responsible for funding these site costs.
- 5) MSBA has reviewed the District's current cost data and will continue to work with Southbridge to bring its pricing to a level that is both fiscally responsible and satisfies the District's educational program.

MSBA staff recommends that Southbridge be approved to proceed into schematic design to replace the existing Mary Wells Middle School and Southbridge High School with a new middle/high school facility that incorporates shared spaces. This is the most cost-effective and educationally sound option.