

On the Horizon: A New Medford High School to Truly Meet Our Students' Needs

Mayor Breanna Lungo-Koehn

For as long as I can remember I have been a champion of public education, especially when it comes to Medford Public Schools. Even before my own children were enrolled in the district, I understood the value of quality education, and as a graduate of Medford High School, I know firsthand how much our public schools have to offer.

Just over two decades ago, the City of Medford began an ambitious goal of reimagining our school system and we have opened no fewer than five new school facilities. This visionary plan recognized our residents' commitment to public education, transformed the landscape of our city, and provided the foundation for a modern school system that would meet the needs of all learners in a rapidly changing world. I am grateful to the community leaders who built that foundation, and as the current leader of this city, it is honor and my responsibility to continue that work. To do that, we must confront the most significant infrastructure challenge in our city's history, the state of our flagship school, Medford High School. It's time for our community to reimagine MHS, and I have a vision - and a commitment - to do everything in my power to make that happen.

Since first opening its doors in the early 1970s, Medford High School has proudly served our community and our students, including myself, whether they choose to pursue a path toward higher education or to train for a career through our award-winning technical and vocational programs, which continue to afford students advance training for a wide range of skills and jobs. A lot has changed in 50 years, but the building has remained static and is no longer meeting the needs of a modern educational experience. It is an antiquated facility, built at a time when class sizes were much larger, computers were little more than a research idea, and designers did not have modern concepts of energy efficiency in mind, the current school covers a much larger footprint than necessary, adds to energy consumption and costs, and lacks the proper ventilation, heating, air conditioning, technology and other building amenities that our students and staff not only deserve, but desperately need.

Beyond improving the building deficiencies, a newly envisioned facility would make the school experience safer, control its carbon footprint and mitigate the budgetary strain of rising energy costs. Perhaps most importantly, addressing these challenges will empower our teachers and staff to better serve students. Having a school with less than reliable internet connectivity in today's day and age would be like having a classroom without a chalkboard, desks, pencils in the last century. Without improved technology, we cannot say we are doing right by our students. Our educators talented and skilled, but we need to give them the tools they need to do their job. This would not only provide for *today's* students, but would also provide flexibility, sustainability, and a return on investment that will last for generations of MHS graduates

The need is clear, but for more than a decade of conversation we have seen little progress toward our community's end goal. What do we want in a high school, what do we need, and what do we find feasible? Right now, we need to move forward, and do so decisively.

Last year I laid the groundwork to restart this conversation, which was paused as we turned our immediate focus to students' needs during the pandemic. My administration released a six-year Capital Improvement Plan that established our goals for capital projects and identifies potential costs and funding sources to support those goals. A new or completely renovated Medford High School was originally in our mid-to long-range plans and we are already discussing financial options to make the project a reality. But, like most things worth doing, this will take careful planning – **community strategic planning and vision** – and a solid financial plan to move us forward.

Like most major projects we are undertaking, a vision for a new high school will not be successful or truly representative of the community's needs without a comprehensive community process. To help drive the process, in the coming weeks I will work with Superintendent of Schools Dr. Marice Edouard-Vincent and the MPS Administration to form a new Medford High School Vision Committee – one that is representative and reflective of *all* of Medford's students, families, teachers, and administration. Including a range of voices, ideas, and experiences is essential in making sure we ultimately have a plan and a design that works for everyone in the City of Medford, both now and in the future.

I won't sugar coat this process, now or ever. We will be fully transparent and accountable to the community when it comes to decision making. To be thorough, equitable, and to get this right, we need to be willing to put in the time and energy to make an improved facility the best it can be, within our financial limits. I am up for this challenge and this commitment as I know it is in the best interests of our schools and our students.

While we have yet to officially begin formal plans, we are already taking initial steps to make this vision a reality and to keep the process moving forward. A few weeks ago I joined a member of the MPS Administration to tour a new high school building that is under construction in the City of Attleboro. We spoke with the project team and the Attleboro Schools team to learn about the building and the process, and I personally learned even more about what is involved to help guide our future planning. Our team – including some community volunteers – is also hard at work conducting research and preliminary outreach to help inform a letter of intent to submit to the Massachusetts School Building Authority to help us secure grant funding for a potential project.

Medford is a leader in so many areas, and I am proud of the progress we have made together in moving our city forward. We need a high school that our community can also be proud of. We need to put the resources in place to prepare our children for a successful future, and we will do so in a fiscally responsible manner. We will act with purpose and vision – and soon. Our High School and Vocational students, educators and staff deserve an educationally appropriate, modern facility; designed and constructed in a fiscally responsible manner, right-sized for the community and equipped to provide a safe and sound learning environment that equitably serves the entire community for the next fifty years and beyond.