

OFFICIAL UPDATE: OLD GREENWICH SCHOOL RENOVATION

October 19, 2023

Dear Greenwich Community,

The Old Greenwich School Building Committee (OGSBC) has worked for the past year planning for the renovation of Old Greenwich School (OGS). The OGSBC is a collaborative group of volunteers, representing all political perspectives and with extensive construction experience. We are committed to doing this project correctly and staying on time and on budget. The OGSBC was created to execute on the Educational Specifications (Ed Specs) unanimously approved by the Board of Education (BOE) in October 2021 and revised in June 2023.

Over the past year, the project has received unanimous support on multiple occasions from the BOE, the Board of Selectmen, and the Planning & Zoning Commission (P&Z), and extensive support and feedback from the OGS and GPS community. We thank everyone who has engaged with us during the past year and offered excellent input.

As of October 2023:

- The OGSBC has spent \$411,000 (20%) in design funds, with \$1.67 million (80%) remaining to complete the planning process. Detailed planning is underway but won't be complete for six months.
- The project has reached Municipal Improvement status; a final site plan will be submitted in 2024.
- The renovation will commence in Summer 2025 because of the April, June, and October 2023 decisions of the Board of Estimate & Taxation (BET) to reject construction funds.
- The renovation is now expected to cost \$45 million. The OGSBC will receive two additional estimates in 2024. All estimates are an "opinion of cost" from construction professionals based on our design and recent market data, and may be higher or lower when the project is taken to bid prior to the start of construction.

In recent days, disinformation has circulated about the safety of children during construction. We can unequivocally say that **we will not allow this project to proceed unless the OGSBC and its project team can guarantee that all children will be safe.** We have no higher priority than safety. The OGSBC will follow all local, state, and federal laws and has hired a project team that has safely and successfully completed 21 similar school renovations. When funded, the project will not proceed until all planning is complete, with safety sign offs received from the Connecticut Department of Public Health, the local fire marshal, and the BOE. We will share details on this early in 2024, when the design and construction phasing plans are complete. We want your feedback and engagement.

The OGSBC has rigorously analyzed project costs with input from construction professionals. Sadly, disinformation has been shared by one BET member, citing demonstrably incorrect, outdated, and discredited information on construction costs, proposing to reduce OGS program space by 35% and contradict the Ed Specs unanimously passed by the BOE. The OGSBC has seen no appetite for eliminating programs at OGS and is legally bound to execute the Ed Specs approved by the bipartisan BOE.

We look forward to your engagement in the months and years to come. The OGSBC has significant planning to complete and will continue to be transparent with the community. In the coming weeks, we will hold a public forum with our construction professionals to discuss construction phasing and safety. Please stay tuned for details.

As we diligently work on this for you and your children - and future generations of OGS Dolphins - please see the attached FAQ and contact us if you have additional questions.

The Old Greenwich School Building Committee

Voting Members	Ex Officio Members
James Waters, Chairman*	Jennifer Bencivengo (OGS Principal)*
Jackie Welsh, Vice Chair**	Peter Lowe (P&Z)*
Barbara O'Neill, Secretary	Peter Robinson (DPW)
Jason Brown**	Molly Saleeby (RTM)
Cristina Dawson**	Janet Stone McGuigan (BOS)**
Leigh Erin Izzo**	
Leander Krueger**	Liaisons
Michael-Joseph Mercanti-Anthony (BOE)**	Alan Gunzburg (FSAC4PWD)
Stephen Selbst (BET)**	Peter Schweinfurth (EMAC)

** Denotes current or former OGS parent

* Denotes current or former Greenwich Public Schools parent

Old Greenwich School Renovation FAQ - October 2023

What concerns will be addressed in the OGS renovation?

Many design features are still in process and we are working with Town agencies to incorporate feedback, but the [Educational Specifications](#) (Ed Specs) and [draft renovation design](#) tackle four main deficiencies in the building:

- **ACCESSIBILITY:** The OGS renovation will ensure the school complies with 2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design, providing children and adults with disabilities with equal and dignified access to all areas of the school.
- **AIR QUALITY:** A building-wide HVAC system will be installed. This will improve air quality (and) temperature control and eliminate the need for window air conditioning units and open windows in the winter to circulate air.
- **SAFETY & SECURITY:** OGS will have a new, secure front entrance vestibule with direct sightlines to the main office, ballistic glass and a new building-wide sprinkler system. OGS will finally be equipped with top line safety tools that are standard best practices recommended by law enforcement and fire code.
- **DRAINAGE:** The toilet/sewer issues at the ground floor toilets will be resolved by replacing two century old sewer pipes which connect the school to the town sewer system. Several low areas within the building will be raised and better drainage solutions constructed on the property and around the building to address stormwater and ensure the project doesn't negatively impact neighbors.

Will my child be safe during the renovation?

YES. All members of the OGSBC are parents and consider the safety of all children and teachers as paramount. There will be no greater priority during construction than the safety of our kids and school employees. The entire purpose of this renovation is to create a safer and healthier school for our community. To ensure that, the OGSBC has hired a project team with specific expertise and successful track records in this type of school renovation.

We have been disappointed to hear fear-mongering about child safety and **can definitively assure all parents that all children will be safe.** If there is ever any doubt, all work on the project will stop.

Is there asbestos in the building? How will that be handled?

The OGSBC has conducted extensive sampling and testing in multiple areas of the building to determine the presence of hazardous materials and where remediation would need to take place. We have reported at multiple public forums that portions of the building contain asbestos, as is the case in many older buildings. Despite this, the OGSBC, OGS, and school district leadership can assure the community that the building is in compliance with the school district's strict policy on hazardous materials, as well as state and federal regulations, and **no children are at risk.** If that ever becomes an issue, the school will be closed immediately.

The project team is currently working on finalizing the renovation design, upon which a phasing plan for remediation and construction will be created. This plan will require approval from the CT Department of Public Health and the BOE and will be thoroughly communicated to the OGS community when completed. As is standard with older buildings and homes across the state, any required abatement activities would strictly adhere to all state and local safety standards with regular monitoring and testing. The OGSBC has allocated \$4.5 million for phasing, safety, and hazardous material remediation. These estimates have been public since June 2023.

We will ask the chosen building contractor to complete most heavy construction and hazardous material remediation in the summer. Any work during the school year will be done in sealed-off sections of the building and only after thorough review and approval by all authorities having jurisdiction, including but not limited to the CT Department of Public Health. A state-licensed hygienist will be onsite every day that abatement occurs, monitoring the work, continuously taking air samples, and monitoring the approved program by the contractor to ensure school safety. Work areas will be inspected and cleared by the end of each shift and the hygienist will issue daily reports.

The phasing plan will be refined over the next 18 months to ensure it has the required approvals and is communicated and understood in the community months before construction begins.

**Old Greenwich School Renovation
FAQ - October 2023**

How much will the renovation cost?

Construction costs have escalated dramatically in recent years for all types of construction, and renovations are no exception. The [project estimates](#) for the OGS renovation are \$42 million if the project starts in June 2024 and \$45 million if the project starts in June 2025. Based on the recent decision of the BET to not provide construction funding, the OGSBC now expects the project will cost \$45 million and start in June 2025. This increased cost and updated timeline was thoroughly communicated to the BOE and BET in June and October 2023. An update on project estimates is expected early in 2024 and will be communicated to the public.

Did we consider new construction? Was a cost comparison done between new build and renovation?

YES, on multiple occasions. In 2020, the Board of Education (BOE) formed the Old Greenwich School Feasibility Committee (FC) to determine the scope of a project at OGS. The FC considered three options - new construction, a targeted renovation, and a 'renovation as new' - and determined that the best path forward was a renovation focused on correcting deficiencies in the building, with a four classroom addition. These recommendations became the [Education Specifications \(EdSpecs\)](#), unanimously approved by the BOE in October 2021 and revised in June 2023.

In October 2022, the Old Greenwich School Building Committee (OGSBC) was formed to execute on the EdSpecs. In March 2023, after the OGSBC reported the dramatic construction cost increases, the BOE and BET asked the OGSBC to explore the cost of a new building. The OGSBC and its professional team conducted an analysis of new construction costs given their knowledge of the building, the program at OGS, and construction market pricing. That analysis was delivered to the BOE and BET and posted on the OGSBC website in June 2023.

[The analysis](#) shows an expected cost of \$75-85 million for a new construction OGS, almost twice the cost of the planned renovation. These figures are in line with construction estimates for the new Central Middle School. In April, the BET said it would spend \$15,000 on its own estimate but has not found a qualified professional to do so.

One BET member produced an old, unvetted list of new construction projects in CT, but much of the data is demonstrably incorrect (some projects were canceled or had dramatically different costs) and inconsistent with current market pricing. Claims that a new school could be constructed for slightly more than the proposed renovation cost are not forthright: they depend on poor data and reducing OGS programming space by 35%. Given strong OGS enrollment, the OGSBC has seen zero support for a reduced-size OGS, which would make the school overcrowded and result in an inferior program offering to every other elementary school in Greenwich.

Finally, the OGSBC has heard repeatedly from the OGS community and local historic building advocates that they strongly prefer a renovation to a new construction project.

Why have the BOE and the OGSBC asked the BET for construction funding so many times this year?

Preparing for a school construction project requires meticulous planning and approvals from multiple authorities. The town is expected to receive \$6.5 million in reimbursement from the State of CT for the OGS renovation. That application process takes a minimum of six months and requires that the town approve construction funding before an application is considered. Most towns in CT approve construction funding and submit their applications much earlier than Greenwich, before having invested significant taxpayer dollars in design funding.

Given the urgent deficiencies with the OGS building and continued construction cost escalations, the bipartisan BOE and OGSBC have aimed to start the OGS renovation as soon as possible. BET leadership said during the year that the BET would consider construction funding first when the OGSBC had professional estimates (completed in June) and then Municipal Improvement status (completed in October). The OGSBC and BOE went back to the BET after each milestone but construction funds were rejected each time. Most recently, the BET has said it wants additional estimates and expressed skepticism on the urgency of approving construction funds for the OGS renovation.

**Old Greenwich School Renovation
FAQ - October 2023**

When will the renovation begin, and how long will it last?

The project will likely not start until June 2025. The OGSBC project team - including an architect, owner's representative and construction manager - are working diligently to complete Construction Documents by Spring 2024. The Planning & Zoning Commission [approved the project as a Municipal Improvement](#) and the OGSBC will work to submit a Final Site Plan to P&Z early in 2024. The OGSBC and BOE were aiming to start construction in June 2024, but the BET decision not to provide construction funds has delayed the start until at least June 2025.

Once construction does begin, the renovation is estimated to take 30-36 months, with significant portions of the work taking place over two or three summer holidays.

Will my child be bussed to another location during the renovation?

NO. OGS parents have made it clear that they do not want their children bussed during construction to another (or several other) school(s). The EdSpecs call for a "phased, occupied renovation." This is standard for school renovation projects across the state and the nation. These projects are safe and the OGSBC has specifically hired a project team with extensive experience on phased, occupied renovations. The project architect ([Silver Petrucelli](#)), owner's representative ([Morganti Group](#)), and construction manager ([Downes Construction](#)) have safely and successfully completed more than 21 phased, occupied school renovations throughout Connecticut without incident.

Will my child be in a portable classroom or trailer?

NO. We do not believe portable classrooms or trailers will be needed during the renovation. The new addition plays a key role in this plan as the four classroom addition will be built first and then used as "swing space" to enable the phased, occupied renovation to proceed safely and with minimal impact to learning.

Will my child's learning be disrupted during the renovation?

AS MINIMALLY AS POSSIBLE. The OGSBC and project team are working together to create a construction schedule that protects the learning environment. As parents, educators, and administrators, this is imperative to us. Additionally, the project team and teachers will build in STEM learning enrichment opportunities for the children related to the construction.

How can I get more information about the project?

The OGSBC has a [website](#) with extensive information, including quarterly progress reports. You are also welcome to attend building committee meetings, which are public meetings held on alternating Tuesdays at OGS and via Zoom at 7:00 am. In the coming weeks we will have a forum specifically focused on construction phasing and safety and we hope you will attend, provide feedback, and ask questions. We have held seven public forums to date and will continue to update the community on a regular basis at key points in the planning timeline.

If you have any additional questions, our contact information is below. Building committee members are eager to hear from you and welcome all perspectives.

**Old Greenwich School Renovation
FAQ - October 2023**

OLD GREENWICH SCHOOL BUILDING COMMITTEE MEMBERS & CONTACT INFORMATION

Voting Members

James Waters, Chairman*	james.waters.ogsbc@gmail.com
Jackie Welsh, Vice Chair**	jackieogsbc@gmail.com
Barbara O'Neill, Secretary	barbaraoneillogsbc@gmail.com
Jason Brown**	jbrown@jklr6.com
Cristina Dawson**	cristina.dawson.ogsbc@gmail.com
Leigh Erin Izzo**	leigherin.izzo.ogsbc@gmail.com
Leander Krueger**	leanderkruegerogsbc@gmail.com
Michael-Joseph Mercanti-Anthony (BOE Rep)**	MJ_Mercanti-Anthony@greenwich.k12.ct.us
Stephen Selbst (BET Rep)**	Stephen.Selbst@greenwichct.org

Ex-Officio Members

Jennifer Bencivengo (OGS Principal)*	Jennifer_Bencivengo@greenwich.k12.ct.us
Peter Lowe (P&Z Rep)*	Peter.Lowe@greenwichct.org
Peter Robinson (DPW Rep)	Peter.Robinson@greenwichct.org
Molly Saleeby (RTM Rep)	msaleebyogsbc@gmail.com
Janet Stone McGuigan (BOS Rep)**	janet.stonemcguigan@greenwichct.org

Liaisons

Alan Gunzburg (FSA4PWD)	24fado@optonline.net
Peter Schweinfurth (EMAC)	peter.schweinfurth@greenwichct.org

**** Denotes current or former OGS parent**

*** Denotes current or former Greenwich Public Schools parent**