

Old Greenwich School Building Committee
Background Material for the Representative Town Meeting
December 2023

The Municipal Improvement (MI) application for the Old Greenwich School (OGS) renovation was unanimously supported in 2023 by the Board of Education (March 16), the Board of Selectmen (April 13 and September 28), and the Planning & Zoning Commission (October 3). Three residents appealed the decision and referred it to the RTM. On December 4, one appellant revoked his signature from the appeal; the two remaining appellants are from the same household. The RTM is voting to approve the OGS MI (Yes = Approve).

The following RTM Committees voted unanimously in support of the OGS MI: BOC (11-0-0), Land Use (11-0-0), Education (12-0-0), and Legislative & Rules (10-0-0, on legal order and merits).

Were renovation and rebuild options considered for Old Greenwich School?

Below is a summary of events that led to creation of the OGS Educational Specifications (Ed Specs) and consideration of alternatives. The Greenwich Public Schools Facilities Master Plan (FMP) recommended a renovation of OGS, the Old Greenwich School Feasibility Committee (FC) recommended a renovation of OGS, and the BOE unanimously approved a renovation of OGS. All deliberations were done in public meetings over the past six years, with scores of opportunities for public input.

The decision to renovate OGS (or rebuild the school) rests with the Board of Education (BOE). The BOE determines Ed Specs for schools and the Town Charter directs a school building committee to “adhere strictly to the educational specifications and requirements prepared and filed by the Board of Education” (Code of Ordinances, Ch. 2, Article 9, Section 2-45). In the case of the OGS renovation, the BOE voted unanimously in 2021 and 2023 to support Ed Specs for OGS that call for a phased, occupied renovation.

Creation of the OGS Ed Specs (2017-2021)

The approved FY 2016-2017 budget provided [\\$400,000 for the BOE to create a Facility Master Plan](#). The Greenwich Public Schools [Facilities Master Plan \(FMP\)](#), created in 2017-2019, identified OGS as a top priority for a major capital project, specifying a renovation. The only building the FMP recommends for replacement is Central Middle School. The BOE factored the OGS renovation into its capital plan, among other priorities. This was discussed regularly at public meetings during this time period.

The approved FY 2020-2021 budget provided [\\$110,000 for a feasibility study for the OGS renovation](#). The OGS Feasibility Committee (FC) was formed, hired an architect (KG&D), and ultimately recommended Ed Specs to the BOE. The FC’s meetings were public meetings. The [OGS Ed Specs](#) call for a phased, occupied renovation to address key deficiencies with the building. Occupied, phased renovation is a standard, safe practice for school renovations across the country.

It is the OGSBC’s understanding that the FC considered new construction, but decided to focus on a renovation. The FC’s progress and OGS Ed Specs were discussed at multiple public FC and BOE meetings in 2020-2021 and the BOE unanimously approved the OGS Ed Specs in October 2021. Members of the FC, to include BOE member Karen Kowalski, may be able to provide further detail on the process and options considered.

During that time period, a complaint was filed with the US Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights (OCR) due to the lack of ADA compliance at OGS. In April 2021, the school district entered into a Resolution Agreement requiring compliance with the 2010 ADA standards after the OGS renovation. (On October 30, 2023, the OCR approved the design and schedule for the OGS renovation.)

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Execution on the OGS Ed Specs (2022-Present)

The approved FY 2022-2023 budget provided [\\$1,000,000 in A&E funds](#) for the OGS renovation. The Old Greenwich School Building Committee (OGSBC) was formed to supervise the project in compliance with the Ed Specs. Since October 2022, the OGSBC has had [71 public meetings](#) to plan the OGS renovation.

The approved FY 2023-2024 budget provided an additional [\\$1,086,000 in A&E funds](#) for the OGS renovation after the OGSBC reported significant cost escalations since creation of the Ed Specs. These funds were unanimously requested by the BOE and also supported by the First Selectman.

In June 2023, the OGSBC provided an initial estimate for the cost of the OGS renovation. [The renovation is expected to cost \\$41.8 million if it starts in summer 2024 and \\$45.0 million if it starts in summer 2025.](#) Also in June 2023, the BOE unanimously revised the Ed Specs as recommended by the OGSBC. In October 2023, the OCR approved of the design and project schedule created by the OGSBC.

Revised project estimates are expected in February 2024 (at the conclusion of the Design Development phase) and May/June 2024 (Construction Documents). The BOE is requesting \$43.0 million construction funds in the FY 2024-2025 budget, consistent with the estimates produced by the OGSBC to date.

Consideration of New Construction OGS

The OGSBC is required to follow the Ed Specs. However, in March and June 2023, at the request of the BOE and BET, the OGSBC and its professional team produced a conceptual cost estimate for a new construction OGS. Depending on the size of the school, and based on significant diligence conducted as of June, [a new construction OGS is estimated to cost \\$75-85 million](#), nearly double the cost of the OGS renovation, if construction starts in summer 2025.

This estimate is consistent with recent elementary school projects in the state of Connecticut and cost estimates for the new Central Middle School (CMS). The estimate incorporates significant costs to abate and demolish the old building, raise the entire structure, revamp the site, rent a TBD alternative building for two years (no appropriately sized facility for 400+ students is known to be available), transport students to that alternative location for two years, construct the new building, and ensure appropriate allowances for contingencies and soft costs. Costs would likely be higher if the project starts in the summer of 2026 (rather than 2025 as envisioned in the conceptual estimate).

In 2023, the OGSBC regularly briefed the BOE, BET, BOS, and various RTM committees at public meetings on the relative costs of a new construction school vs. the planned renovation.

In addition to its standing meetings, the OGSBC has hosted eight forums with the community (further detail below). At these forums, the OGSBC repeatedly raised the topic of “new vs renovate” and the plan for a “phased, occupied renovation.” Community feedback has been consistent: people support the Ed Specs and want OGS “fixed, not torn down.” The Greenwich Historical Society and Preservation Network have spoken in favor of renovating OGS rather than a new construction school.

In October 2023, the BOE voted unanimously to support a renovation of OGS rather than a new construction school. In October 2023, the BET unanimously waived the conditions on the \$1,086,000 in A&E funding in the FY 2023-2024 budget to advance the OGS renovation.

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Has the safety of students been transparently addressed with the community?

Yes. As of December 2023, the OGSBC has produced regular written updates to the OGS community, including a [letter](#) and [safety fact sheet](#) that speak to student safety. Additionally, the OGSBC has hosted eight public forums with community stakeholders, to include parents, students, staff, and neighbors:

- [March 24, 2023: Parent/Community Information Forum](#)
- [March 29, 2023: Teacher Engagement Session](#)
- [April 3, 2023: Student Information Forum](#)
- [April 26, 2023: Neighborhood Engagement Session](#)
- [June 13, 2023: Parent Information Forum](#)
- [September 19, 2023: Parent & Community Forum](#)
- [September 20, 2023: Neighbor Forum](#)
- [November 28, 2023: Introduction to Student and Staff Safety & Phasing](#)

At each forum, the importance of safety and construction phasing were discussed. At the recent safety & phasing forum, no questions were left unanswered and the OGSBC project team explained the extensive contingency plans that are being created prior to any abatement or construction activities.

A few RTM members have expressed concern with the hazardous material survey produced for the project Schematic Design. This report has been public since June 2023 and openly discussed at many public meetings. Since the report was published, the OGSBC has conducted additional hazardous material testing which deepened its understanding beyond this report; these reports will be published when the OGSBC completes Design Development in February 2024.

Per the OGSBC's project team, asbestos is standard in buildings like OGS and there are strict state and federal protocols for abatement activities. More than \$3.7 million of the project estimate is earmarked for abatement and phasing costs. The OGSBC project team has extensive experience in safely managing dozens of school renovation projects in Connecticut that required abatement. Per the CT Department of Public Health, there are currently 31 school renovation projects in the state where abatement is being conducted during the school year. For a list of protocols and the project team's experience, please see the [fact sheet](#) and the approved [minutes from the safety & phasing forum](#).

In early 2024, the OGSBC will host another forum with the community to further discuss the construction phasing plan once the Design Development and the construction phasing plan are finalized. The OGSBC will regularly host forums until the renovation is complete.

According to OGSBC records, the two appellants of the OGS MI have attended only one of the above-referenced public meetings. Over the past six years, they did not attend a single public meeting of the FC, the OGSBC, the BOE, the BET, or the P&Z regarding the OGS renovation. One of the appellants attended the RTM Education Committee meeting on December 4, 2023 but failed to show up to the RTM Land Use or Legislative & Rules Committee meetings on the same day. Further, the appellants have not reached out to any member of the OGSBC with questions or concerns.

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What is the impact of the RTM rejecting the Municipal Improvement for OGS?

There would be a number of clear impacts of rejecting the MI for the OGS renovation:

- 1) The RTM would be ignoring the repeated input from scores of members of the community and historic building advocates in support of the OGS renovation, not to mention the 6 years of public meetings of the BOE, FC, and OGSBC where the renovation was discussed regularly.
- 2) By December 2023, the building committee expects to have spent or encumbered nearly \$700,000 of A&E funds on the OGS renovation. These funds have been expended on the planned renovation. Pivoting to a new construction project would be wasteful of these funds.
- 3) The school district, the OGSBC, and the Town Attorney would be required to withdraw its submission to the Department of Education's OCR and revise its schedule for compliance in accordance with the Resolution Agreement. At this point we don't know what their reaction will be to the Town's persistent failure to comply with the 30-year-old ADA law.
- 4) The BOE would need to consider creating new Ed Specs for OGS to potentially focus on new construction. This would likely require a feasibility study and take 6-12 months. The resultant OGS Ed Specs would likely envision a new construction cost of \$75-85 million (or more), which would be added to the town's capital budget. The BOE would need to determine if there is an alternative location to house 400+ OGS students for a minimum of two years.
 - o It is unclear if this will have an impact on the planned renovation of Riverside School, a building with similar challenges as OGS and the next major school capital project.
- 5) The BET and RTM would need to approve additional A&E funds in FY 2024-2025 to commence planning for a new construction school. The OGSBC would need to select and retain a new project team to manage a new construction project, which would likely take an additional 6 months. The pre-construction process for the project would likely take a total of 18-24 months.
- 6) The BET and RTM would need to approve full construction funds in the FY 2025-2026 budget to enable the OGSBC to apply to the state in June 2025 and be listed on the 2026 priority list.
- 7) In a best case scenario, assuming expedited funding, the project could start in summer 2026, with construction expected to last for 18-24 months. The new school could be open by fall 2028.

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List of Sources

- Old Greenwich School Building Committee [website](#)
 - Old Greenwich School Feasibility Committee materials
 - Old Greenwich School [Educational Specifications](#) (2021)
 - Revised Old Greenwich School [Educational Specifications](#) (2023)
 - Meeting Agendas & Minutes
 - Project Estimates
 - Project Updates
 - RTM Quarterly Reports
 - Municipal Improvement materials
 - Design Documents
- Greenwich Public Schools [Facilities Master Plan](#)
- Town of Greenwich [FY 2020-2021 Final Capital Budget](#)
- Town of Greenwich [FY 2022-2023 Final Capital Budget](#)
- Town of Greenwich [FY 2023-2024 Final Capital Budget](#)

Key Points FMP

Executive Summary, p 2:

“The infrastructure of the buildings was reviewed by a large team of professionals including Architects, Landscape Architects, HVAC Engineers, Plumbing and Fire Protection Engineers, Electrical Engineers, Roof Consultants and Construction Inspectors.” These professionals determined that “Overall the buildings are well maintained...” and determined that “[s]ome level of program related improvements are needed at all buildings...” The FMP ultimately determined that, “[g]enerally these improvements can be accomplished through strategic renovations and building additions. The only building that is being recommended for eventual demolition and substantial replacement is Central Middle School.”

Executive Summary, p 3:

Old Greenwich School is “in need of [a] significant addition and renovation to resolve, capacity, accessibility, core common area shortfalls and modernization issues.”