

Purpose Statement

New Hartford Public Schools

School Facility Utilization Task Force

Revised February 3, 2026

Purpose Statement

The New Hartford Public Schools Facilities Utilization Task Force serves as a collaborative body representing the Board of Education, Board of Selectmen, Board of Finance, and the broader New Hartford community. To help shape the future of education in New Hartford, the Task Force will partner Silver Petrucci & Associates (SPA) to conduct a comprehensive facilities utilization study as well as gather and review data, conduct analysis, and provide recommendations. Considering factors such as the resources needed, educational programming and quality, and fiscal sustainability, the Task Force will recommend to the Board of Education potential paths forward for our school district's use of facilities: maintaining our existing school structure and use, any desired renovations or expansion, and/or construction of new facilities.

The Role of the Task Force & the Role of SPA

Our role as the Task Force:

- Review and analyze all information, options, and data provided by SPA
- Facilitate community engagement throughout the process
- Examine educational, municipal and financial implications of all potential scenarios
- Ask critical questions and identify gaps to ensure comprehensive evaluation
- Provide clear, data-driven recommendations to support informed decision-making by elected boards and the community

Recommendations will be developed by the Task Force, informed by—but not dictated by—consultant analysis.

The Task Force is:

- Advisory
- Focused on analysis and implications
- Committed to transparency and public input
- Composed of community members and representatives who serve on a volunteer basis

The Task Force is not:

- A decision-making body
- Advocating for a predetermined outcome
- Replacing the role of elected boards or voters

Our Approach

- Conduct the process with transparency and integrity
- Evaluate all options through due diligence without bias and without predetermined assumptions about community member preferences
- Ensure each representative task force member from each Board contributes their expertise: educational needs and quality, synergies analyses as well as grant funding opportunities (Board of Ed), facility reuse options and both repurposing and maintenance costs (Board of Selectmen), and financial implications, funding approaches/sources and constraints (Board of Finance); and together providing responsible, forward-looking leadership for our Town

- Encourage our community representatives to raise questions on behalf of all town residents, particularly the constituents they were appointed to represent: residents with children in the schools, and those without. Where possible, be a continuing voice at the table for concerns raised by these community members to ensure there is a robust understanding and path forward for the task force and appropriate town Boards to reasonably address community questions or concerns.
- Maintain focus on objective, factual analysis; on fiscal responsibility and long-term community benefit; and on fulfillment of the mission the New Hartford Public Schools¹

How We Work

The School Facility Utilization Task Force is committed to conducting its work through a structured, transparent, and disciplined process. The integrity of the process is essential to ensuring that recommendations are credible, balanced, and serve the long-term interests of New Hartford's students and taxpayers. To that end, the Task Force will operate according to the following principles:

- **Process before outcomes:** The Task Force does not begin with predetermined solutions. Our role is to examine data, explore options, understand tradeoffs, and ensure that all reasonable scenarios are evaluated thoroughly before recommendations are formed.
- **Evidence-based analysis:** Discussion and recommendations will be grounded in data, professional analysis, and clearly articulated assumptions. Where judgment or interpretation is required, it will be identified as such.
- **Multiple perspectives:** Each participating Board contributes its expertise—educational, municipal, and financial—while remaining focused on the overall best interest of the community rather than any single institutional outcome.
- **Transparency and accountability:** Meetings, materials, and summaries will be shared publicly whenever possible. Areas of agreement, disagreement, and uncertainty will be documented to provide a clear record of the Task Force's work; when consensus cannot be reached, differing perspectives and the rationale behind them will be documented.
- **Respectful, good-faith dialogue:** Members will challenge ideas rigorously while maintaining respect for differing viewpoints, recognizing that complex decisions benefit from thoughtful debate.
- **Balance of thoroughness and timeliness:** The Task Force recognizes that meaningful analysis and engagement take time and is committed to balancing thoroughness with the need for timely recommendations.

The Role of the Chair

- Develop meeting agendas with input from Silver Petrucelli & Associates
- Facilitate proceedings and discussions during task force meetings
- Ensure that documentation that can be made publicly available is done so in a timely fashion
- Liaise with other Boards in town on behalf of task force business

Community Engagement & Input

Community engagement is a critical component of the Task Force's work. The Task Force seeks to ensure that community perspectives inform its analysis while maintaining a clear distinction between input-gathering and decision-making.

¹ For reference, the mission of the New Hartford Public Schools in partnership with families and the community is to inspire and prepare all children to become independent and enthusiastic learners who achieve excellence by providing a challenging and exemplary education program that is differentiated, inclusive, and dynamic.

The Task Force will:

- Provide multiple opportunities for public input, including structured public comment periods as part of Task Force meetings and written (email) submissions
- Encourage questions, feedback, and perspectives related to educational quality, fiscal impact, facilities, and community use
- Collect, document, and review community input as part of the overall analysis process

To support clarity and fairness:

- Community questions and comments will be reviewed and grouped by topic to identify common themes and concerns
- Responses will be addressed through public discussion, meeting follow-ups, or written FAQs when appropriate
- Not all questions may have immediate or definitive answers, particularly early in the process; however, all input will be acknowledged, considered and responded to as best as reasonably possible

The Task Force seeks to ensure that community perspectives will be taken into consideration when developing any recommendations.

Our Commitment

We, along with the Boards of Education, Finance and Selectmen, as well as the broader community, believe it is both timely and essential that we collaboratively work together to thoughtfully examine the future of our school district.

- The Task Force will deliver comprehensive recommendations based on thorough analysis of all options, associated costs/benefits, and both educational and community input and needs
- Final decisions rest with the respective elected Boards and any applicable town referendum process(es) and/or Town Meetings, with the Task Force's role being to ensure all decision-makers have accurate, comprehensive information to serve the best interests of New Hartford's students and taxpayers

Process

New Hartford Public Schools Facilities Utilization Task Force Process

Original draft: February 3, 2026

Last revised: February 27, 2026

Project Phases

Note: Timelines reflect best current estimates and may be adjusted to ensure thorough analysis and meaningful engagement.

Phase 1: Foundation & Fact-Finding (January - March 2026)

Consultant Deliverables:

- Facility conditions assessment with OSHA walkthrough
- Enrollment projections (8-year window with town development data)
- Programming and capacity analysis against state standards
- Deferred maintenance documentation and costs

Task Force Activities:

- Monthly meetings rotating between school buildings
- Building tours during school hours (currently scheduled for February 5, 6 and 9, limit 3 Task Force members per tour)
- Review and analyze all consultant findings
- Identify information gaps requiring additional analysis

Phase 2: Options Development & Analysis (March - May 2026)

Consultant Deliverables:

- Master planning concepts for all scenarios
- Cost analysis for retaining current facilities vs. consolidation options
- Basic square footage/cost estimates for new construction (if applicable)
- Alternative building uses for any closed facilities

Task Force Activities:

- Bi-weekly meetings as process intensifies
- Deep-dive analysis of each option's educational and financial implications
- Coordination with individual boards on their specific responsibilities:
 - Board of Ed: Calculate savings, consolidation costs
 - Board of Selectmen: Building reuse costs, maintenance expenses

- Board of Finance: Financial impact evaluation

Phase 3: Community Input & Final Recommendations (May - June* 2026)

Task Force Deliverables:

- Comprehensive booklet with recommendations, data, and meeting minutes
- Public presentations of findings and options
- Final recommendation to Board of Education (shared beyond the Board of Education)

*Timeline may extend

Phase 4: Formal Decision Process (Fall 2026)

- Board of Education review and action
- Board of Finance and Board Selectmen review and action
- Town referendum (if required), may be non-binding or binding

Meeting Structure

Meeting Leadership & Structure

- **Chair:** Board of Education member
- **Meeting Format:** Robert's Rules framework using Board of Education policies as a backstop where appropriate
- **Seating:** Task Force members at table only. Superintendent Sousa is not part of the Task Force. SPA will present
- **Agenda Management:** Chair maintains order and brings discussions back to agenda when needed

Meeting Schedule & Logistics

- **Frequency:** Monthly January-June, bi-weekly as needed during intensive phases
- **Rotation:** Meetings rotate between all three school buildings initially then held at Antolini
- **Duration:** Plan for 90-120 minutes with hard stop
- **Materials:** Reports distributed 2-3 days before meetings

Public Participation

- **Public Comment:**
 - In-person attendance required
 - Email submissions accepted as alternative to in-person
 - Comments limited to Task Force only and during public comment period of agenda
 - Sign-up for a slot during the meeting

- Standard 3-minute individual limit
- **Meeting Access:** Live streaming and recording for transparency. Recordings can be posted to the NHBOE YouTube channel.
- **Technology:** Consider OWL camera system

Documentation & Communications

- **Minutes:** Elizabeth Domas as designated minute-taker
- **Distribution:** Task Force email: nhtaskforce@newhtfd.org
- **Notifications:**
 - Town email distribution lists
 - Board of Education website page
 - Social media via New Hartford Board of Education Facebook page. (information only, no comments). All comments should be directed to the Task Force email address for visibility.
- **Records:** All materials posted on dedicated webpage

Communication Protocols

- **External Communications:** All media/public statements through Task Force chair only
- **Board Updates:** Regular reports to respective boards through Task Force representatives
- **Emergency Communications:** Chair coordinates with all three board chairs for urgent matters

Identified Process Gaps That Should Be Addressed:

Stakeholder Coordination

- **Gap:** Timeline for individual board deliverables not specified
- **Recommendation:** Each board will identify a point person and anticipated delivery date for its analyses

Post-Recommendation Process

- **Gap:** Task Force role after delivering recommendations will need to be defined
- **Recommendation:** Define how Task Force continues through formal decision process; at minimum, available to answer clarifying questions and explain analysis