

To: Board of Selectman & School Committee
From: Jeffrey Hull, Town Manager; Glenn Brand, Superintendent of Schools
Date: November 20, 2019
Re: Massachusetts School Building Authority Prospective Application

Through recent discussions, one possible pathway that has emerged regarding attending to our school facility needs has been pursuing a future partnership with the *Massachusetts School Building Authority* (MSBA) grant program to help offset costs associated with future school building and construction. The Wilmington community recently benefited from engagement in this program with the construction of the Wilmington High School.

There are two grant programs with MSBA; however the Core Program would, for us, be the most logical program as it deals exclusively with school building, renovation and new construction.

Please find below information pertaining to the application process as well as our joint recommendation.

Overview of the Core Program

The MSBA grant program is a non-entitlement, competitive program that provides financial support to communities based on need and urgency. As noted in the information available on the organization's website, the MSBA completes an extensive review of available information for districts that submit a Statement of Interest ("SOI") for the Core Program each year with the goals of the review as follows:

- *To determine those schools that are the most urgent and needy relative to the pool of SOI submittals filed in that year. The MSBA considers many factors when looking at the totality of the SOIs including, but not limited to, the age of the building, the amount of space per student, the current and projected enrollment, the condition of the major systems of the school, the general environment of the building and the appropriateness of the building to the educational mission;*
- *To collaborate with districts on the potential project that they have identified as the priority SOI if they are filing more than one SOI for that given year;*
- *To understand if the MSBA is currently partnering with the district on another Core Program project already underway;*
- *To understand the range of options each district faces when planning for district-wide educational facilities.*

Statement of Interest

The SOI is a tool that school districts use to identify the building deficiencies and/or programmatic issues with their school facilities.

Some noteworthy facts to point out:

- The MSBA receives approximately 100 – 125 SOIs annually for the Core Program. Last year there were a total of approximately 13 projects that were approved from 111 applications. As a result, it can take communities multiple attempts to be invited into a program as it is competitive.
- Generally speaking, MSBA only partners with a community for one (1) building project at a time.
- There are many factors that can impact MSBA's assessment of the urgency and need of an application including enrollment, building conditions, general environment and program deficiencies. As a result, MSBA points out that it is important for districts to assemble as much data as possible.
- Districts should submit one SOI per school for each that they believe requires a project (i.e. either renovation and/or new construction).
- An SOI should only be filed for a facility where a district has the ability to fund a project in the next two years.
- There is only one 'window' opened each calendar year to submit an SOI for a core program application which would involve building renovation and/or new building construction. The next deadline to submit an SOI for a core program is April, 2020.
- The submission of an SOI requires a vote by both the School Committee and the Selectman of a town to authorize the Superintendent to submit the application.

Recommendation

It is quite clear that the town/district currently has a number of infrastructure needs that span multiple school buildings. Additionally, as has been pointed out in the recent master plan study, the concept of school facility consolidation seems to hold numerous benefits for the community and stakeholders as identified by members of the *Facilities Master Planning Committee*. In short, our school buildings needs are expansive and far exceed only that of the Wildwood School.

In recognition of the need to begin to explore not only addressing the Wildwood School, but potential consolidation and grade realignment, a number of town and school representatives recently convened to engage in a conference call with representatives from the firm Dore & Whittier to better understand the current MSBA application process and the benefits for us as a community consider as we explore the prospect of submitting an application.

Given the expansiveness of these needs, as well as the interest that seems to be prevalent around building consolidation, it is our joint recommendation that Wilmington prepare to submit SOIs

for each of our six (6) elementary school buildings in the spring of 2020 and, through the application process, identify the Wildwood School as our priority building.

This recommendation is based upon the following considerations:

1. Submitting multiple applications will help in demonstrating our collective needs to the MSBA.
2. Submitting multiple SOIs while identifying the Wildwood School as the priority does not limit the town to only targeting that school should the Town be invited into the process. What it does do is leave open the possibility of building consolidation and future grade reconfigurations.
3. If we were only to submit one application for the Wildwood that would effectively eliminate the possibility of building consolidation. The project eligible for MSBA reimbursement would be confined to replacement or rehabilitation of the Wildwood School for educating kindergarten students.

Perhaps most importantly, the MSBA application process is set-up in such a way that a community does not need to have established a specific plan at the time that an application is submitted. In fact, it appears to be the case that MSBA welcomes the opportunity to partner with communities to explore viable options together. In Wilmington's case this could mean establishing a comprehensive approach to dealing with all of our elementary schools. This would be through a feasibility study that, ultimately, the MSBA would reimburse at the same percentage as that of a future building project.

Finally, while we know that this application process will require considerable time and work from key members of our joint staff at the town and school level, we both believe that the time is upon us to begin to explore whether future financial support is available from the state's grant program to help offset mid and longer term costs to the community for the upgrade and/or replacement of our elementary schools.