Jasper-Troupsburg Community Update

FEMA Building Project: Where We Stand and What Comes Next

At our recent FEMA town hall meeting, we shared an update on the process of rebuilding our school and the work that remains ahead. We have committed to keeping our community informed every step of the way, and we want to continue doing that.

We recognize that this process has been long, complicated, and at times frustrating. There are many moving parts, and some of the decisions we face are not entirely within the district's control. Our responsibility is to keep moving forward, ask the right questions, and make sure we have a viable plan before asking our community to authorize the borrowing needed to begin construction.

Here is where things stand today.

1. FEMA Has Approved Funding for the Building Project

In early June, we received confirmation that FEMA had obligated approximately $67 million for our rebuilding project. This was an important milestone after years of work to move the project forward.

The obligated funding includes the demolition of our former school building, construction of the new school, site work, utilities, parking, sidewalks, and the track.

The funding breakdown is approximately:

- FEMA: $60 million, covering 90% of the obligated amount
- New York State Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services (DHSES): $7 million, covering the remaining 10%

It is important to understand that FEMA does not provide the entire amount of funding upfront. The district must move through the design, approval, construction, and reimbursement processes. We also need voter authorization to borrow the funds necessary to finance the project as work moves forward.

Following the June announcement, we began preparing for a public referendum. At that time, we were targeting November 10 as a potential voting date.

2. The First Construction Estimate Came in Higher Than Expected

In early July, LaBella Associates, our architectural and engineering firm, provided the project design and related information to Campus Construction Management, our construction management partner. Campus spent much of July developing a detailed construction cost estimate.

The estimate came back at approximately $130 million.

The major components of that estimate were:

Project component	Estimated cost
New building and associated elements	$109,822,221
Site work, utilities, and parking	$11,576,317
Track	$2,747,282
Demolition of the former building	$5,792,789
Track storage building	$402,112
Land	$350,000
Total	$130,690,721

This estimate was significantly higher than anticipated and well above the $67 million FEMA obligation.

We knew the total construction cost would likely exceed the original obligation. However, the size of the difference was concerning.

Several factors contribute to construction costs in New York State, including prevailing wage requirements, rapidly increasing material costs, annual cost escalation, insurance, and other expenses associated with public construction. FEMA and DHSES confirmed that because this is a large project, funding will be paid on actual expenses rather than limited to the original estimate. We moved forward under this understanding to capture all final costs.

However, when we shared the estimate with DHSES and FEMA, it became clear that we needed to revisit the design and demonstrate that the project could be delivered as efficiently as possible.

3. We Met with State and Federal Officials

Once we received the construction estimate, we brought the information to our state and federal partners.

On August 21, we met with DHSES leadership and presented the building plans and cost estimate. Campus also prepared information explaining why actual construction costs in New York State are substantially higher than some of the estimates used in the original FEMA calculation.

The following month, on September 2, we presented the project to FEMA leadership, including senior decision makers. We also invited our elected representatives to participate.

FEMA subsequently advised us that the difference between the original obligation and the construction estimate was too significant to move forward without further review. We were asked to examine the design and identify opportunities to reduce costs.

This was disappointing news, but it also made clear that we needed to take another look at the project before moving forward.

On September 3, we held a special Board of Education meeting with presentations from LaBella, Campus, and our financial planning team. The Board had been preparing to take the next steps toward a public vote, including consideration of the required environmental review and a resolution to authorize the referendum.

With the new information from FEMA, we determined that we were not yet ready to ask the community to authorize the borrowing needed for the project.

We believe it is important to have a realistic construction plan and a clearer understanding of the project's financial requirements before asking residents to make that commitment.

4. We Are Redesigning the Project to Reduce Costs

Since the second week of September, we have been working closely with LaBella to identify ways to reduce construction costs while preserving the spaces and features our students and community need.

One of the biggest challenges with the original design was the slope of the property. The terrain required significant site work and a design that separated portions of the building to accommodate the elevation changes. That approach added complexity and expense.

We asked FEMA for permission to relocate the track to the district's existing sports complex property. Initially, FEMA expressed concerns because the track was part of the overall campus project and because of questions about potential future floodplain considerations.

After additional discussion and review, FEMA approved the track relocation last week.

This is an important development because moving the track allows us to reconsider where the school will sit on the property. By locating the building on a flatter portion of the site, we may be able to combine what had been designed as two separate building sections into one more efficient structure.

The revised design is expected to:

- Eliminate the courtyard between the two building sections.
- Reduce the amount of site work required.
- Potentially eliminate costly retaining walls.
- Reduce the building's overall size by approximately 12,000 square feet.

The goal is to retain the spaces that existed in our former school while developing a more efficient design. The revised building would be slightly smaller than the former school's total square footage, but it would continue to provide the spaces needed to support our educational programs.

LaBella is working through the revised design now. Once it is sufficiently developed, Campus will prepare a new construction cost estimate.

Our target is to then present the revised design and cost information to FEMA and then work with our state and federal partners to determine the next steps.

5. What Does This Mean for a Public Vote?

We know that many residents want to understand when they will have the opportunity to vote on the project.

At this point, we do not have a confirmed referendum date.

Before moving forward, we need to reach agreement with FEMA and DHSES on a viable project scope and a realistic path to funding and reimbursement. We believe this coordination is essential to reducing the risk of future disagreements over what work is eligible for reimbursement and what costs the district may ultimately be responsible for covering.

Once we have a clearer understanding of the project scope and cost, we will work with our attorneys and financial advisors to determine the appropriate borrowing authorization and schedule a public vote as soon as possible.

We recognize that this process has taken longer than anyone hoped. However, we believe it is better to take the time needed now to resolve these issues than to move forward with a plan that could create greater financial uncertainty later.

6. The Bigger Picture

Our goal has not changed. We need to rebuild a school that provides our students with the facilities they deserve and gives our community a place to call home again.

Since the flooding in 2021, our students, staff, and families have had to adjust to circumstances that no school community should have to experience for this long. We know that people are ready to see progress, and we share that feeling.

The recent challenges have been frustrating, but we are continuing to work through them. The approval to relocate the track gives us another opportunity to make the design more efficient, reduce costs, and develop a project that can move forward.

We cannot provide a firm timeline for the public vote today. We can commit to continuing our work with LaBella, Campus, FEMA, DHSES, and our financial advisors to reach a plan that is financially responsible and capable of moving forward.

We will continue to share updates as we receive new information. Thank you for your patience, your questions, and your continued support of our students and the Jasper-Troupsburg community.