

# **Town of Willington School Building Committee Frequently Asked Questions**

**Updated: January 4, 2023**

Updated: May 4, 2022

Updated: October 6, 2021

Edition 1: July 3, 2021

## **January 5, 2023**

### **Are federal infrastructure funds available to support the construction?**

We believe these funds go directly to States, which in CT are deployed through the grant system. Willington would apply for State grant funding with an alteration/extension project or a new building on a new site.

### **The types of rooms/spaces described, are they required or available for funding?**

The educational specifications contain the programs that are currently offered in the Willington Public Schools. The only new space is an auditorium (Hall School and Center School currently use their gym as the auditorium). Grant funding is provided based on a square footage calculation that takes into account student population projections.

### **State reimbursements, does the state choose the least amount option to fund?**

The State takes the grant application from the town and determines the reimbursement eligibility. The State does not simply fund the least expensive option. Many factors are included in determining reimbursement eligibility and a brief explanation can be viewed at the 1-4-23 SBC meeting on [YouTube](#).

### **With an alteration/extension option, what's the potential for asbestos and/or PCB remediation? Has it been accounted for?**

Based on the age of the building and known contaminants (currently contained), the potential for remediation is high, which is not uncommon. A general anticipated cost is factored into the estimated cost of the project.

### **Is the cost of three-phase power to a new site in the cost of the project?**

Yes, each of the projects being considered has contingency costs built into the budget.

### **Is the contingency a certain percentage of the budget, and if so, which line item cost is this based on? Is there only a single contingency amount in the planned budget to be used for any/all unanticipated costs and/or work not previously outlined that is to be performed offsite of the parcel (and thus not eligible for state reimbursement)?**

Owner's Construction Contingency – Typically 5% to 7.5% of the total construction budget depending on the type of project to cover project-related issues and changes.

Owners Soft Cost Contingency – Typically 2.5% to 5% of the soft cost budget (all non-construction costs) to address issues including but not limited to added design and management services, additional furniture and equipment, additional legal fees, insurance, etc.

### **Will the survey be sent to registered Willington voters or taxpayers or to everyone in town?**

The survey can be completed online using the QR code or survey link, or by completing a paper copy located in the senior center, library, or Town Office Building. A postcard with the survey code was sent to all Willington

residents. The survey data is one piece of information to help the SBC determine which project to bring before the voters.

**What will prevent a lot of (for example) 10-year-olds from responding to an online survey?**

The SBC will need to review the results of the survey, including trying to decipher repeat submissions from community members.

**What is the percentage of resident or taxpayer responses that you hopefully are seeking? Is it a 10% response rate? 30%?**

The SBC did not identify a percentage goal for responses. Several informational meetings have been held to inform community members so they can knowledgeably complete the survey.

**How will the final option choice for the referendum be decided?**

The SBC will utilize all the information that has been collected, including feedback from community members, to determine at their February 1, 2023 meeting which project to send to referendum. Community feedback received by mail or e-mail, on *Present to Speak* at the SBC meetings, and at the January 26 Forum will all be considered.

**Why does the community not get to vote on the different options at the referendum?**

The State has the town vote on one option for the grant process. If you were to vote on four options at one time, it would be possible for the item with the most votes to pass with only 26% of the vote.

**How are you going to review the survey results?**

The SBC will receive a copy of all submissions and an overview of the data will be provided at the February 1 meeting. The survey is not the only deciding factor in determining which project to recommend for a referendum. The SBC intends to submit one project to referendum.

**At the proposed site for the new school on Glass Factory Road, will there be blasting?**

As with any construction project, especially in Willington, there is the possibility of blasting as part of the land preparation process. Similar to local quarries blasting in the same area, construction permits would need to be pulled and regulations would be followed.

**Are the costs, such as the entrance driveway/road access, as well as any demolition or a new parcel of land needed, included in the project?**

The cost estimates provided have soft costs to account for the entire project. However, the estimates do not include funding for the demolition of a secondary location. The cost estimate does include the cost to purchase the land if a new school is built. At this time, portable classrooms are not being pursued due to cost and security issues.

**Can you cover all languages in one classroom?**

Yes, that is the current model being used. The middle school level uses one classroom and students at the elementary school participate in a world language within the general classroom (not in one specific classroom).

**If we build a new school, how would we maintain the history of Hall School and carry traditions into the new building?**

The school district would continue many of the meaningful traditions should a new school be built. Traditions such as the promotion ceremony banners would remain part of the school community. The district would work with students and community members to identify traditions to move forward.

**In January 2021 there were 14 million noted for upgrades. The renovation has more space, why?**

There are inefficiencies in the existing building design that takes up more area.

**Consolidation with different age groups, will they have separate entrances?**

This could be considered, but typically at a significant cost. The school district has several strategies that could be implemented to bring efficiencies to the arrival and dismissal process.

**Would classes start at the same time?**

Yes, a number of PK-8 schools were visited and that is common practice. The district is looking at starting at approximately 8:00 am.

**Adamec and Glass Factory have tough site lines, how will that be addressed?**

A traffic study will be performed and the State will walk the site as part of the Grant Approval process.

**Would the new renovated building or new building be able to accommodate universal preschool?**

The ed spec has two preschool classrooms. Currently, there is only one preschool classroom.

**What is the effect of windowless classrooms and their effect on learning?**

Research shows positive effects on learning when natural light is provided. Windowless classrooms do not provide the same learning environment.

**If HMS is renovated, could more than one field be used simultaneously?**

No, there are no outfield fence lines for the softball and baseball fields. There will be three separate fields at a new school, which could be used simultaneously, because of available space.

**Would an auditorium be usable for town events and meetings?**

The ed spec lists community uses for the auditorium and gym. The town could use the auditorium for meetings and events, and the Board of Education could consider renting the auditorium for events.

**Is technology included.?**

Yes, Furniture, Fixtures, and Equipment (FF&E), which includes technology, are in the budget.

**What is the cost of maintaining the new building?**

That number has yet to be determined, however, it would be documented through the district's preventative maintenance plan. It would be less expensive to maintain one building compared to two buildings.

**What would happen to Center School? Cost to demo or sell it? Will this be determined prior to the referendum?**

There is a plan to look at what can be done at Center School. Many options have been discussed including demolition. The selectmen are reviewing this to see what the Town would like to do with the building. There is not a solid dollar amount at this time. The referendum will address the cost of the school project, not additional projects such as changes to Center School.

**The Town owns Hall school for use as a school, but could the Hall foundation pull the agreement back?**

There have been conversations with representatives of the Hall Foundation. The Hall Foundation is open to ideas as to what would happen to the building if it is no longer used as a school. The quick claim deed is online for review. The committee had it reviewed by an attorney and it's still valid.

**Would the proposed new facility have access to public water and sewer?**

Currently, there is no public water or sewer at the site. HMS has no public sewer.

**What is the usable area, what area would be clear-cut to build a new school on the proposed site?**

There are well over 20 acres necessary for a new school. The site is level enough and provides for expansion. Existing undeveloped areas would remain woods, however, there could be passive recreation.

**Can you create a double entry in the renovation design options 2 and 2a? What about bus safety, is it tight the way it's drawn?**

Yes, a security entry vestibule would be included. This is just a concept plan, you want to have a solution that provides separate bus and parent drop-off areas.

**May 4, 2022****Why did the committee hire an Owner's Project Manager and how will they support the process?**

Knowing that the SBC would need to hire an Owner Project manager to assist in the process, a regional search was conducted, and requests for proposals were solicited and ultimately, the SBC hired Colliers Project Leaders as their Owner's Project Manager (OPM) to facilitate the work of the committee. Scott Pellman, Senior Project Manager at Collier's, has extensive experience in the programming, design, and management of educational facilities and was identified as the OPM. Mr. Pellman has prepared a draft timeline that would result in construction, whether new or renovation, possibly starting as early as July 2024.

**What was the result of the student enrollment study that was presented in January 2022?**

The School Building Committee hired Dr. Peter Prowda to complete an [enrollment study](#) which was presented at the [January 2022 SBC meeting](#). Dr. Prowda projected the district would have between 400 and 419 students over the next ten years. The enrollment study is an important step in determining the appropriate size (reimbursable square footage) for a school building, and also for preparing the information for the State grant reimbursement application for a school project, (renovation or new school).

**What are educational specifications? Who creates them and how are they utilized?**

The Board of Education, in consultation with the Owner's Project Manager, is writing educational specifications (ed specs) for a consolidated preschool through grade 8 building, for a new or renovated school. Ed specs serve as the connection between the educational program and the facilities. They provide clear descriptions of the various learning activities and spatial requirements needed within a building/site. School staff provide input during the process to ensure they meet the needs of our school community. Community members are able to provide input by emailing the Superintendent of Schools at [pstevens@willingtonct.org](mailto:pstevens@willingtonct.org) or by attending a Board of Education meeting and sharing their thoughts during the *Present to Speak* portion of the meeting. The educational specifications will be used as the driving force behind developing a preschool through grade 8 building concept.

**October 6, 2021****How did we get here?**

Hall School is going to be 100 hundred years old and Center School will be 70 years old in 2022. The cost of maintaining these aged schools is burdening the town financially, and the buildings do not provide a 21st-century learning environment. With declining enrollment, which appears to have plateaued, there is a duplication of personnel and services with the two buildings that adds additional costs. The Board of Education had a professional facilities study (Friar) completed and requested a school building committee be formed after significant data collection and public presentations. The Board of Selectmen, following a town meeting

vote to do so, appointed a Town School Building Committee and charged the members with the following responsibilities:

1. Defining a Pre-k-grade 8 school to meet Willington's educational needs in cooperation with the Board of Education.
2. Recommending competent architectural and engineering and other appropriate services for the preparation of plans and specifications for constructing, furnishing, and equipping the school.
3. Developing a building proposal with associated financial commitments for Town approval and developing a strategy for obtaining approval of that proposal.
4. Cooperating in the securing of state funding to support the building program.
5. Finding and recommending a site, if necessary, to meet school construction and Town needs.
6. Reviewing architectural plans, specifications, and proposed construction contracts.
7. Working with the Treasurer and Board of Finance and other officials to secure funding/bonding for the projects.
8. Adhering to state statute at all stages of the project.
9. Obtaining the approval of the town legislative body for all obligations incurred throughout the building process.
10. Identifying potential future uses of the two current school buildings, if necessary.
11. Overseeing construction and completion of the project.

The recommendation for Willington to construct a new school, renovate existing, or maintain current facilities will be the responsibility of the Town School Building Committee. Final action on any recommended project will be subject to town meeting and a referendum vote.

### **Where can I find information about the School Building Committee?**

The SBC continues to hold [regular meetings](#) via Zoom on the first and third Wednesday of each month and [agendas](#) and [minutes](#) can be found on the town website. We encourage our townspeople to [subscribe to e-Alerts](#) found on the front page of the town website to receive notifications of meetings. Meetings are recorded and can be accessed via the town's [YouTube page](#). Official information and documents are available on the [SBC webpage](#).

### **Where can the community go to find information about the Friar facilities study?**

The official facilities study report commissioned by the BOE in 2017 can be viewed by utilizing the credentials below.

Electronic Access: [www.friar.com/clients](http://www.friar.com/clients), Username: WilingtonPS@friar.com, Password: 1234.

### **Does the Town of Willington own Hall Memorial School?**

A quitclaim deed, which can be viewed on the [SBC website](#), highlights the details of the agreement. In essence, Hall School is owned by the Town of Willington as long as it is utilized as a school. If Hall School is no longer utilized as a school the building reverts to the Hall Foundation. Also, the Hall School property is broken into four parcels of land. Two parcels are part of the quitclaim deed (the main building and field, and parking lot across the street from the building) and two parcels are owned by the Town (the lower soccer field, and the driveway to the back of the building). The SBC is investigating the flexibility of this deed and potential education and non-educational uses of Hall School with the Hall Foundation.

### **How does student enrollment impact the decision for a renovation project or new school building?**

Student enrollment is important when considering a building renovation or new building as it is directly tied to the reimbursement funding provided by the State of Connecticut. If Hall School were renovated to be a

preschool through grade 8 building, the Town would be penalized on its reimbursement as the building is oversized per the Office of School Construction Grants and Review (OSCGR) square footage to student enrollment calculation. Also, the Office of School Construction Grants and Review does not support renovating buildings with fewer than 400 students. If a new building were to be built, OSCGR would dictate the size of the building that could be built based on the student enrollment projections. If Willington built a larger building than allowed by OSCGR, the town would be required to pay 100% of the overages. Current enrollment projections must be provided with grant applications for a renovation or new building. Potential new or renovated school building projects or a combination thereof not directly funded by OSCGR are not subject to these limitations.

### **How would students continue to be educated if an existing school were to be renovated?**

The best option for continuing their education is to provide portable classrooms. While it is not impossible to remain in the building during construction and maintain educational programming, it is not recommended for many reasons. Access to school entrances/exits, logistics, noise, environmental hazards, accessibility, unstable utilities, and unexpected interruptions will all impact students/teachers during an occupied construction renovation. Portable classrooms provide the best option for maximum progress to continue educating students. However, portable classrooms are not reimbursable by the OSCGR.

### **Does the town own any land that could be used to build a new school?**

The SBC is reviewing available land for sale, potential parcels that are not for sale, and land already owned by the Town of Willington. The estimated minimum usable acreage needed to build a new school is 19 acres and is directly tied to student enrollment projections.

### **What is the process if a private owner or entity wants to identify their land as a potential school site?**

The landowner could contact the SBC committee via email at [sbc@willingtonct.org](mailto:sbc@willingtonct.org) or contact a committee member. The expected usable minimum acreage necessary to build a new school is 19 acres.

### **Will landowners be approached if their land has been identified as a potential site for a new school?**

The SBC will privately contact landowners if a parcel of land is identified as a potential site for a new school. If the landowner is interested in selling, the SBC would request a site walkthrough and complete a basic survey of the property. The expected usable minimum acreage necessary to build a new school is 19 acres.

### **Can a new facility be built on the Youngerman Property on Route 320 by the bus lot?**

The 1992 School Building Committee report concluded, after analysis, that this property is not feasible for a school and that a better site must be found. The current SBC is researching additional details as to why this piece of property was not suitable for a new school.

### **Why don't we simply continue educating our students in the current buildings?**

A new or renovated building would provide proper ventilation, including heating and cooling, and would be significantly more efficient. All current codes would be met including fire and ADA compliance. Improved security measures would also be implemented. The town would see savings in the Board of Education operating budget. The town could choose to continue utilizing the two buildings as schools, but would need to complete several significant Capital Improvement Projects that are not reimbursable by the state (see Friar facilities study, option 1). Projects would include ventilation, heating and cooling, ADA compliance, and asbestos abatement. Only certain Capital Improvement Projects are eligible for reimbursement.

### **What is the current process to repair our schools?**

The Board of Education submits a 5-year plan to the Capital Improvement Committee (CIP) each year. The CIP then reviews all townwide requests, prioritizes all the requests, and creates a Willington 5-year master plan.

The current plan includes significant upgrades necessary for both buildings to address ventilation, air conditioning, heating, and other various projects. The CIP typically spends approximately \$600,000 annually townwide. All town CIP projects are approved by the BOS, BOF, town meeting, and budget referendum vote. In 2017, the Friar facilities study report identified an estimated cost of \$14,000,000 for both schools to complete capital improvements, the majority of projects which are not eligible for reimbursement. The Capital Improvement Plan does not include funding for emergencies that occur, and the Board of Education would need to request the Board of Finance for emergency funds if the issue could not be resolved with Board of Education funds.

### **Why don't we regionalize our schools?**

The Board of Education had discussions regarding regionalization with Mansfield and Ashford in 2009/2010 and again in 2016. During the first consideration, it was determined that the additional cost to Willington residents would be excessive (approximately \$1,000,000 more per year at the time). The second discussion was halted as other districts were willing to accept Willington students, but not interested in providing Willington taxpayers a voice on their Board of Education. Also, if students were sent to a different district, the host district would require taxpayers to pay tuition, transportation, and special education costs. Lastly, the host district would only need to provide one year's notice if they no longer wanted to provide educational services to Willington students. Mansfield is in the process of building a new preschool through grade 4 school and combining all three of their elementary schools.