

Abington Mariner

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Aiming for awareness about Abington school project

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"We've really been focusing on the schematic design," Testa said of recent efforts on the project, noting that a public forum about the initiative in May was extremely positive. He added about 175 people showed up to the forum.

"Some people wanted clarification as to how students will be separated at the new school but for the most part, people were very positive about the project," Testa said of the meeting. "It was a good, thoughtful dialogue."

He said Sept. 24 will be a big day, as that will be the day the town finds out whether the MSBA (Massachusetts School Building Authority) will approve the project.

He added that will also be the day the town finds out at what rate the project will be reimbursed by the state.

The project entails building a brand new school on land behind the existing high school that would house grades 5-12. Testa said a Special Town Meeting will likely be scheduled in the fall so the initiative can go before voters. The measure would need to pass with a 2/3 vote.

If the measure were to pass on the Town Meeting floor, the school project would be in the hands of residents at a Special Town Election.

Testa said the whole project would cost more than \$90 million but noted the town should get an approximate reimbursement from the state at a rate of 55-60 percent. He explained in that scenario, the town and its residents would be responsible for about \$45 million of the entire cost.

He added once the town finds out the reimbursement rate, "we will have 120 days to secure funding."

It would be then that the Special Town Meeting would be scheduled.

Efforts to get this project going began in 2012 with a feasibility study. Officials initially thought that a renovation of the current high school, complete with a new addition, would be the answer regarding having a new school in town that would house many grades.

But after reviewing 14 different project proposals over the last couple of years, the Abington School Building Committee and Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) both determined the most financially sound plan would be to build a completely new school.

"In fact, we found it would be cheaper to construct a new building, rather than do a renovation," Testa said.

And Abington officials have also taken note of the recent school construction project in neighboring Rockland, which entailed a drastic renovation of the high school and building a new middle school. A long corridor known as "Main Street" connects the two facilities.

"Rockland served as kind of a model for what we want to do in Abington," Testa said, noting he toured that facility, as well as other schools in several neighboring towns.

According to the Abington School Building Committee website, "On March 26, 2014, the MSBA Board of Directors voted to authorize the Town of Abington to move forward into the "preferred schematic design phase" of the project, which requires the town to proceed with the development of schematic building floor plans and detailed site plans for the proposed new school building.

"This MSBA vote also confirms that our building committee has thus far complied with all regulations and deadlines required for the Town of Abington to remain on track to qualify for MSBA school construction grant money."

Several grades would be together in the new school, but according to the Abington School Building Committee website, students would be separated appropriately.

"Both the ASBC and the MSBA recognize the important need to separate the various age groups, given the real differences among 'tweens and teens' relating to physical and emotional development, the desire to create a sense of security and comfort with their peers, and the different educational strategies used as children grow older," the town website on the project states. "The floorplan, entrances and parking areas have been designed to utilize two very separate areas of the new school building for the middle school and the high school.

"The middle school wing will contain classroom space for the 5th and 6th grades on the first floor, and 7th and 8th grade classrooms will be located on the second floor. The high school wing (east side of building) will also have a first and second floor and will contain all classrooms for grades 9-12. The middle school and the high school will have its own separate entrances, separate offices, separate nurse/first aid offices, separate physical education locker rooms, and separate school start/end times.

“Currently, if a visitor enters the main entrance of any of our school buildings, that visitor is able to access multiple stairways and corridors with little or no difficulty,” states the building committee website. “Current-day school designs incorporate safety, security, control, technology, energy-efficiency and educational needs into future building plans.”

The website also describes the history of school building projects in Abington.

“It has been more than 50 years since any new school building or substantial renovation work has occurred in Abington,” states the website. “Our ‘newest’ school, Abington High School, was opened in 1962; Woodsdale in 1958; the Frolio opened in 1937. The science labs, classrooms, technology and wiring in our schools are outdated and are not adequate to meet the educational needs of today. Some of our school buildings have limited gymnasium space; our best auditorium and theatrical stage area is a shared gym space at the Frolio School; some of our 70-plus-year-old classrooms are simply too small for today’s school needs.”

He added if the project were to move ahead in the fall, it would take about two years for the building to be built, “from shovel in the ground to completion,” Testa said.

“Our main goal right now is to educate the community,” he said. “We want people to have all the information, whether they are for or against the project. That way, people can make an informed decision. People need all the facts. [People need all the facts. And one of the facts is that Abington is the only one of 36 communities on the South Shore which has not constructed a new school or invested in a major renovation/upgrade during the last 20 years.](#)”

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