

New SAU Building UPDATED REPORT January 2015

Introduction

In 2010, the Committee presented a report to the School Board in response to a charge asking the Committee to research the feasibility of consolidating the Superintendent's and Special Services' offices. The 2010 report recommended the most efficient and cost effective method to consolidate both offices was the construction of a new Superintendent's Office (SAU) and the Special Education Services Office on the one-acre piece of school district owned property, adjacent to both the High School parking lot and the Masticola Elementary School athletic field.

This report is an update to the 2010 report reflecting current financial and real estate information as well as a response to the NESDEC report recently presented to the School Board.

Since the original report,

- In March 2013, a warrant article to build a new SAU office received a majority vote, but not the required super majority.
- Last spring, the School Board requested a report from NESDEC (New England School Development Council) on the current and potential future utilization of school district buildings, including the current Superintendent's and Special Services' offices.
- In October 2014, the School Board asked the Committee update its original report with current information and a response to suggestions in the NESDEC report.

Background

The private residences that became the Superintendent's office (aka Green Building) and the Special Education office (aka Blue Building) were built in 1963. The District purchased the Green Building in 1973 for \$32,000 and the Blue Building in 1979 for \$57,250. The Green Building originally housed the administration of the combined Merrimack and Bedford School District until the SAU split July 1, 1989. The Blue Building has been used for Special Education and other SAU staff offices since the District purchased it. The federal and state requirements placed on the SAU function have dramatically increased in the last two decades. These expanded roles have resulted in the Green Building not being able to accommodate all the SAU staff and the functions they perform. Upgrading the Superintendent's office has been a line item in the Capital Improvement Program (C.I.P.) since 1999.

2015 status of each building:

The Green Building has offices for the Superintendent, the Assistant Superintendent, the Director of Human Resources and three Administrative Assistants on the first floor. The offices for the Business Administrator, Payroll, Accounts Payable, Title 1 Administrator, the District Computer Systems Manager and one Administrative Assistant are in the basement. The basement is not handicapped accessible. A semi-secure building entrance has been created inside the building,

impacting the reception area space. The SAU “vault”, which is a sub-terrain cement closet in the basement, has proved itself to be environmentally inappropriate for statutory records retention.

The Blue Building has offices for the Special Education Director, two Administrative Assistants, the Out of District Placement Coordinator and space for consultants and psychologists, as well as an unheated “meeting” room on the first floor. In October 2012, the Special Services building sustained severe damage during Tropical Storm Sandy. The roof was punctured which resulted in flooding the building. While the roof and first floor have been repaired, the basement is still un-usable and at risk for more water damage, until cracks in the foundation are fixed. Pre-school testing and services are now provided at various locations throughout the district.

The kitchens in each building serve as photocopy room, meeting room, interview area, break room and secondary emergency exit. The waiting/reception areas of both building are contained in the open office areas. This office configuration results in inadequate security and safety of the staff and district records. In addition, there is compromised confidentiality when dealing with the public. Due to current lack of space in the SAU building, several department heads are scattered in other buildings throughout the district.

2015 needs

- Building security for staff and records (SAU and Special Education)
- Meeting space (SAU)
- Conference space (SAU and Special Education)
- Office Equipment/Work Area (SAU and Special Education)
- Air quality controlled Vault (SAU)
- Handicapped Accessibility (SAU and Special Education)
- Energy Efficiency (SAU and Special Education)
- All staff located in one location for a more cohesive and efficient environment (SAU)
- Confidentiality within offices and testing area (SAU and Special Education)
- Sufficient parking for staff and visitors (SAU and Special Education)
- Secure reception/waiting areas (SAU and Special Education)

In its original report, the Committee identified the following criteria that had to be considered for any new building options that were considered:

- Central location & proximity to schools
- Utility availability and/or cost to provide utilities to the site.
- Site development costs
- Size of parcel: big enough for a single story 9,000 sq ft building & 36 parking spaces for staff and visitors
- Topography of the parcel – is it flat?
- Traffic and other accessibility considerations.

2015 review of options

Leasing space –

A local licensed realtor recently offered the Committee an updated overview of rental properties that the District might consider renting. He told the Committee that the rental cost for each space would include gross rent, “triple net (NNN)” (taxes, insurance and maintenance) and other normal rental costs like utilities. The average rent per square foot is \$10. The properties discussed included:

- Shaw’s Plaza (DW Highway, near East Ridge condos): The land is owned by one entity and the building is owned by another. The property is 80,000 square feet.
- Silver Building (316 DW Highway, formerly ASD Charter School): There is approximately 16,000 square feet of available space. At \$8 per square foot, that would be an annual lease payment of \$96,000. This would be in addition to the charges to fit the vacant space into the proper office configuration, either up front or as part of the payment depending on the arrangement of the landlord.
- Continental Boulevard: This area is zoned industrial. There is available second floor space. Prices were common at \$8 to \$10 per square foot.

The realtor concluded there were no viable options that would cost less than \$10,000 per month to lease or over \$120,000 per year. In addition, “fit-up” costs (for example, HVAC renovations) could be \$100,000. Further the district would not own this facility, which makes this not a Capital investment. And every lease has an expiration date, typically between 5 and 10 year for a Commercial lease. This would cause this option to not be a long-term solution.

Purchasing a facility –

There are many commercial and retail buildings that are for sale in Merrimack. However, there are only a few that exceed 10,000 square feet and none that are centrally located. All of the buildings that we investigated required extensive renovation in order to meet the District needs and these costs would be over and above the cost of purchasing the facility. Average renovation costs are \$180 per square foot. In most cases, the initial square foot cost estimates for renovation of this new facility exceed the cost of purchasing the facility. *In order to purchase any property, the voters would have to approve a warrant article, which would purchase price plus renovations costs. The property would also have to be written on a first refusal basis by the owner and the realtor and there is the probability that the building would be sold before voting.*

Renovating other space in the district

The goal of this project is the consolidation of all the SAU Administrative functions. A review of the space utilization shows that there is not sufficient space available in any school that could accommodate all the SAU functions.

Regardless, the Committee discussed the possibility of temporarily relocating some or all the SAU or Special Education offices but agreed that this would not be a permanent long-term solution.

- a. Renovations to current school space would have to conform to more restrictive and costly school building codes.
- b. Renovating current school space eliminates nearly all classrooms that may be needed due to the school population fluctuations.

c. Average renovation costs are \$180 per square foot. Additionally, renovating any space for use as Special Service or SAU functions would require a redesign of existing utility systems such as

- Sprinkler/Fire Alarm systems
- HVAC
- Lighting/Electrical
- Internet & Telephone Systems

In its original report, the Committee stated that it had considered using some classrooms at the middle school for some, but not all, of the SAU staff. However, the classrooms that would be used were not situated in a convenient and easily accessible location had concerns about the lack of sufficient parking to accommodate SAU needs and about building safety and security. The NESDEC report suggests that the District might consider moving the entire Special Services department to the middle school. Even though this could mean locating all the Special Services staff together, the Committee has the same concerns having this department in the middle school that it had when it considered locating some SAU staff there:

- i. The classrooms that would be utilized are not easily accessible or convenient.
- ii. Segregating this department from middle school operations would be disruptive to middle school internal operations.
- iii. There is not sufficient readily available parking.
- iv. Building security might be at risk.
- v. This does not consolidate SAU functions.
- vi. This is not a permanent long-term solution.

The Committee consulted with Marinace Associates, an architectural design firm, and put together options to renovate the space at the upper elementary school to meet the Special Education department needs which include a separate entrance, parking, quiet testing areas, administrative offices, service spaces, waiting areas and storage. Each alternative resulted in significant potentially negative impact on internal traffic patterns as well as building safety and security concerns. Further, the area in question is the oldest school space within the district and was not included as part of the Honeywell energy upgrades. As a result, the minimal cost of renovating the area would be at least \$509,000. Potential additional costs, such as an energy upgrade and installation of one-way soundproofed windows, could bring the cost to over \$770,000. While the Committee specified renovating this space for Special Services, the NESDEC report suggested that the space might be used for SAU offices instead. The cost to renovate the space would actually be greater since a larger space would be needed. More parking spaces would be needed and possibly, the JMUES playground would have to be re-located. Renovating space at JMUES for SAU offices would also have significant potentially negative impacts on JMUES internal traffic patterns and building security.

- b. The Committee also reviewed the use of trailers as a short-term alternative to alleviate overcrowding at the SAU building, for use if either the SAU or Special Education building was being renovated or as an alternative to building a new facility for the combined SAU/Special Education offices.

- i. Estimates were obtained from the Schiavi Leasing Corporation and the Committee learned that each trailer has 1,450 square feet and costs \$2,700 per month to rent. The trailers would be similar in shape and size of the type used at Masticola Middle School several years ago. The Committee calculated that 5 trailers (7,280 square feet) would be needed in order to provide sufficient staff office space for a combined SAU, but that there would no meeting space available. Thus the annual rental fee would be approximately \$160,000. There would be additional installation costs: stairs/ramps, the electrical hook ups, the sewerage hook ups, and an HVAC system. The Committee learned that the cost of four staircase/ramps would be approximately \$24,000 alone.
- ii. In addition to cost, the Committee considered where the trailers could be located. If the trailers are placed anywhere around the high school, a minimum of 70 parking spaces would be lost which would impact parking for both the high school and the SAU offices.

The two maps attached show the area and classrooms that would no longer be used for school use rather be changed into what NESDEC proposed for office space.

Building a facility

The Committee recommends that a one-story building comprising approximately 10,800 square feet be built on the one-acre site adjacent to the high school. This building would be large enough to house all the SAU and Special Education personnel, have a large meeting space for 40± people and small conference rooms for confidential meetings. To address security issues, there would be limited access to office areas. Construction time will be approximately five to six months after obtaining complete architectural plans which will take roughly four months to finalize. Even though it requires a larger footprint, a one-story building is less expensive to build – a two-story building requires an elevator and two stairwells. Since this is not a facility that will be used for student education, it does not have to be built to the same building standards that a new school building would require. A steel frame building is considerably less expensive than the masonry construction that would be required for a school building. Average cost of new construction is \$140 per square foot. The cost of furnishing the new conference spaces and consolidated offices is estimated to be \$10,000 - \$14,000. The Administration intends to use as much of its current furnishing as possible.

Build Smaller Building + renovate some school space

The Committee also considered the possibility of renovating space at JMUES to locate the Special Education department there and building a new, but smaller, SAU building. Mr. Farkas estimated the cost to include the Special Education department in the new SAU building would be slightly less than the cost to renovate space at JMUES for it.

Future Use of Existing Buildings

The Committee recommends that the two existing office/house structures should be demolished. Both buildings are over 50 years old and each has significant internal issues. The Committee believes the space resulting from demolishing both buildings could be used for much needed additional parking at the high school. The Green Building space could be more utilized for additional handicapped, visitor and main office staff parking. The space from the Blue Building

could be additional faculty or student parking as there will be some loss of student parking spaces with the location of the new SAU office. The Cost of demolition is approximately \$30,000 to \$40,000 per building. This includes the demolition of the building, the hazardous waste removal (oil tanks, etc.) and removal and fill in of the area. The Committee suggests working with the town for some help with removal of demolition debris. Be advised: since these buildings are over 50 years old, there is a possibility of asbestos in either or both buildings. If so, asbestos mitigation will add to the cost of demolition.

2015 Conclusion & Recommendation

The Committee feels strongly that while this project has been put off for many reasons, it can wait no longer. The data supports that additional space is necessary and relevant for the safety and the improved functionality of the SAU staff to better conduct business. The most economical, long-term solution to meet the need for additional space is the construction of a new facility.

The School District Planning and Building Committee unanimously recommends that a new consolidated SAU/Special Education office building be built on the one-acre parcel of land adjacent to the High School parking lot and Mastricola Elementary School Athletic Field