



Report  
on the  
Consolidation  
of  
SAU/Special Education  
Offices

Approved:  
October 25, 2010

PLANNING & BUILDING COMMITTEE  
Merrimack School District  
<http://www.merrimack.k12.nh.us/PBC/>

## **Original Charge**

On November 3, 2008, the School Board presented the Committee with the following formal charge:

*Work in conjunction with the Superintendent, Business Administrator, Director of Special Services, and Director of Maintenance to determine the feasibility of consolidating the Superintendent's Office and the Special Services Office.*

*The investigation will include but not be limited to the following:*

- a) Requirements that need to be met based on federal and state regulations and/or standard practices.*
- b) Inventory of current sites to determine if existing functions could be performed elsewhere in the district and/or equipment moved to other sites.*
- c) Space utilization profile for each school and enrollment trends for the next five to ten years.*
- d) Consideration of four options, their associated costs and pros and cons for each alternative.*
  - a. Building a new facility*
  - b. Purchasing a facility*
  - c. Leasing space*
  - d. Renovating existing space within a school that the district already owns.*
- e) Impact of the new court house on the configuration of the area around the town offices, the church parking lot and the Masticola Complex relative to the proposed project.*

## **Summary**

The Committee has thoroughly reviewed all the options suggested in the charge, as well as suggesting and researching others. It is the Committee's recommendation that the most efficient and cost effective solution is the construction of a new consolidated 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.

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.

Upgrading the Superintendent's office has been a line item in the Capital Improvement Program (C.I.P.) since 1999. It has always been the wish of the Administration that the needs of the students, in terms of facilities, space, staff and instructional materials, be met before addressing office deficiencies. However, 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. In addition, the Blue Building now fails to adequately meet the needs of the Special Education Department in critical areas such as confidentiality and accessibility.

## **Issues A, B, C & E raised in the charge:**

### ***A. Requirements that need to be met based on federal and state regulations and/or standard practices.***

Space for SAU or Special Education offices should comply with state and local building codes as well as be ADA compliant, but it would not have to meet the specialized school building codes unless it was located within a school.

### ***B. Inventory of current sites***

There are five parcels of land owned by the school District:

- a. Land on Continental Boulevard across from Thorntons Ferry School (adjacent to the land the District has agreed to give to the town for a fire station.)
- b. One acre parcel adjacent to the high school.
- c. Land behind the middle school fields.
- d. Timmins site (Baboosic and S. Baboosic Lake Road.)
- e. PTA Kindergarten (Depot Street.)

The Committee rated each site on the following criteria:

- a. Central location & proximity to schools
- b. Utility availability and/or cost to provide utilities to the site.
- c. Site development costs
- d. Size of parcel
- e. Topography of the parcel – is it flat?
- f. Traffic and other accessibility considerations.

The site with the best rating was the one-acre site adjacent to the high school.

### ***C. Space utilization profile for each school and enrollment trends for the next 5 to 10 years***

While all rooms in our schools are used daily, the space utilization profile of each school indicates that all have some space that could be considered as “under-utilized.” The schools with the most such space are the middle school (the four classrooms that were used for the fourth 7<sup>th</sup> grade cluster) and the upper elementary school (some classrooms in the oldest section of the building.)

A review of enrollment projections indicates that the overall population of the District exhibits a slight decline over the next few years. However, the population at both the upper elementary and the middle school is projected to remain static for the next few years before showing an increase.

### ***E. Impact of the new court house on the configuration of the area around the town offices, the church parking lot and the Mastricola Complex relative to the proposed project.***

The new court building opened in Spring 2010. Data shows no significant increase in traffic. No additional impact is expected when the Merrimack Family Division Court opens in December, either. However, there would be additional traffic if the Milford District Court closes and the expected Milford Family Division Court does not come to fruition.

## **Current 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. Also in the basement, is the SAU vault, which is a sub-terrain cement closet that 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 Homeless Liaison, the Transportation Coordinator/Truant Officer, and the Out of District Placement Coordinator. There are testing and service provision areas in the basement. Also, the building has an unheated “meeting” room on the first floor.

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 potential for compromised confidentiality when dealing with the public. Neither building has been updated to meet current building codes. The basement in each building is not handicapped accessible. Due to current lack of space in the SAU building, several department heads are scattered in other buildings throughout the district.

## **Current 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)
- Storage Space (SAU and Special Education )
- 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 (SAU and Special Education)
- Secure reception/waiting areas (SAU and Special Education)

## **Four Options for new office**

When considering the options for consolidated SAU/Special Education offices, the committee used the same criteria for location by which it rated District owned parcels of land:

- 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 10,000 sq ft building & 36 parking spaces
- Topography of the parcel – is it flat?
- Traffic and other accessibility considerations.

### **1. Leasing space**

The Committee met with local realtor Mr. Bill Barry. Mr. Barry gave the Committee an overview of rental properties that might be considered. The rental cost for each space would include gross rent plus “triple net” (taxes, insurance and utilities.) The properties discussed included:

- Thornton Place: The space available is less than 10,000 square feet. It is not handicapped accessible. Traffic accessibility would be an issue as there is no traffic light. The cost to rent is \$12 per square foot plus triple net.
- Merrimack Commons: The space available is less than 10,000 square feet.
- Shaw’s Plaza (DW Highway, near East Ridge condos): The land is owned by one entity and the building is owned by another, who leases it to Shaw’s. There are 25 years left on the Shaw’s lease and Shaw’s is planning to retain the lease. The cost to rent other spaces is \$16 per square foot plus triple net.
- Shaw’s Plaza (Continental Blvd): The space available is less than 10,000 square feet.
- Silver Building (DW Highway, near Thornton Cemetery): A charter school rents the second floor. There is approximately 16,000 square feet of available space. The cost to rent is \$10 per square foot plus triple net (or \$14.75 per square foot)
- Continental Boulevard: This area is zoned industrial. The old Texas Instruments building is approximately 22,000 square feet. Rent is about \$10.55 per square foot plus triple net, and the current lease expires in 2011. There is available second floor space, but there is no elevator. It would cost \$116,000 per year to lease.
- Old Madden’s site. (DW Highway) This site is no longer available.

Mr. Barry told the Committee that basically there were no viable options that would cost less than \$10,000 per month to lease. In addition, he felt the “fit-up” costs (for example, HVAC renovations) would be expensive.

Recently, Dennis Dancoes II contacted the District about a space for lease at Heron Cove Office Park. A tour showed that the space needs substantial renovation and retrofitting in order to meet the District needs. Initial cost estimates for rent were \$16 per square foot.

- **The Committee does not recommend leasing a facility as an option.**

## **2. Purchasing a facility**

There is no question that there are many buildings – commercial, retail and residential – that are for sale in Merrimack. However, there are only a few that exceed 10,000 square feet and none that are centrally located. Further, all would require extensive renovation in order to meet the District needs and these costs would be over and above the cost of purchasing the facility. In most cases, the initial square foot cost estimates for renovation exceed the cost of purchasing the facility.

- **The Committee does not recommend purchasing a facility as an option.**

## **3. Renovating other available space in district**

- a. 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. 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.
- b. The Committee researched the possibility of using classrooms at the middle school to alleviate some of the SAU staff space needs. The Committee concluded that the classrooms were not situated in a location that was convenient or easily accessible. Additionally, the Committee had concerns for the lack of sufficient parking to accommodate SAU needs and for building safety and security.
- c. The Committee investigated the possibility of renovating some space at the upper elementary school to house the Special Education department, which would allow some staff from the SAU building to be moved to the current Special Education building.

The Committee consulted with Marinace Associates and put together a couple of design 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, an energy upgrade and installation of one way soundproofed windows, could bring the cost to over \$700,000. (See attached report.)

While this would alleviate the overcrowding at the current SAU office, it would not meet the goal of consolidating the SAU and Special Education Administrative offices. In addition to the cost of renovating the upper elementary school, there would be additional costs for renovations to both the SAU and Special Education Buildings to address ADA accessibility, environmental issues, building safety and security concerns.

- d. 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.

Estimates were obtained from the Schiavi Leasing Corporation and the Committee learned that each trailer has 1,450 square feet and costs \$2,466 per month to rent. The trailers would be similar in shape and size of the type used at Masticola Middle School a few 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 \$147,960. 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.

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 Committee does not recommend renovating other available spaces in the district or utilizing trailers as an option.**

#### **4. Building a new facility**

The Committee met with Frank Marinace and Tybor Farkas of Marinace Architects who specializes in educational facilities. Marinace Associates has successfully worked with the Merrimack School District on past projects.

In 2007, Marinace Associates provided sample building plans to help the Committee begin preliminary discussions. The Committee developed a questionnaire/survey of needs, which each staff member in both buildings completed. The Committee determined that issues of major concern for this consolidated office space included ADA accessibility, HVAC, storage, building safety and security, meeting space, confidentiality, and sufficient parking.

After funding for an architectural and engineering study was passed at the 2010 School District meeting, the Committee met with Mr. Farkas to discuss the parameters of the project. Mr. Farkas also met with District's administrative staff to review what they perceived as their needs and toured the current SAU and Special Education office buildings as well as the one-acre site of land adjacent to the high parking lot and Masticola Elementary School athletic field.

At the suggestion of the Committee, Mr. Farkas presented the Committee with two options for a consolidated SAU/Special Education building.

The first option utilized the current Special Education building space. Two designs were considered:

- Renovations to the current Special Education building to include a new wing.
- Raze the current building and build a new structure in that space.

Both design plans utilized the existing basement for storage and called for demolishing the SAU building for parking spaces. However, Mr. Farkas did not recommend either option as the best plan for the District because in both cases, the resulting building would overwhelm the site, the Special Education department offices would have to temporarily relocated somewhere else which would increase the overall costs of the project and construction would have a potentially severe impact on

available parking at the high school.

- **The Committee does not recommend using the current Blue Building site for a consolidated SAU/Special Education building.**

The second option was a one-story building comprising approximately 10,800 square feet to 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. Wood frame construction is considerably less expensive than the masonry construction that would be required for a school building. The Committee also researched the cost and possible benefits of steel building construction. While the Committee has researched construction types, the actual construction cost will depend on the final building design and specifications.

- **The Committee recommends building a one story building on the one-acre parcel of land adjacent to the high school. (See attached proposed building plan.)**

### **Combination Build**

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.

### **Funding**

The Committee explored state aid. Due to budgetary cutbacks, it does not appear that state aid is available for this project. The Committee suggests continued efforts to search for other funding sources to supplement regular sources. For example, there could be grants available for the use of “green” or energy efficient construction materials should the District decide to use “green” construction methods.

### **Future Use of Existing Buildings**

The Committee is also of the opinion that any new building plan should include a plan for the current 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 Committee’s suggestion is that the fire and/or police departments might be able to use these buildings for a training exercise before or as part of demolition. This would give the buildings one last final and important use for our community.



## **Conclusion & Recommendation**

The Planning and Building Committee believes the citizens of Merrimack and the School District would be well served with the consolidation and relocation of the SAU and Special Education offices.

This project was first introduced into the Town's Capital Improvement Plan in 1999. Due to other more pressing School District needs over the past ten years, this project has been repeatedly postponed. With due diligence, the Committee researched many options and met with administrators and various professionals to support our conclusion to bring forth the option of building a new combined SAU/Special Education office building. After years of building tours, consultations with professionals and hard work at Committee meetings, the Committee has finalized this report. The Committee feels strongly that while this project has been put off for many reasons, it can wait no longer. The data supports that the building is necessary and relevant for the safety and the improved functionality of the SAU staff to better conduct business.

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.

The Committee is confident that the School Board and the citizens share our vision and are willing to consider a new SAU/Special Education building. This Committee stands ready to help in any way it can to promote the project.

### **Members of the Committee**

Richard Hendricks, Chair  
Gage Perry, Vice Chair  
Stanley R. Heinrich  
Davis Powell  
Finlay Rothhaus  
Laurie Rothhaus