

To: Somerville School Committee, Superintendent's Office
From: Laura Pitone, Ward 5 Somerville School Committee Representative
Regarding: Considerations for possible MSBA Submission 2023, Brown and WHCIS
Date: January 22, 2023

The Somerville Public Schools district has two school buildings that are being considered for future rehabilitation or rebuilding due to age, capacity, accessibility and/or fitness for educational programming: the Brown School and the Winter Hill Community Innovation School (WHCIS). This document outlines some potential pathways for the School Committee, in collaboration with the city, to consider to move forward in resolving the current facilities challenges.

The district initiated an enrollment study in August 2022 which will provide 10-year enrollment projections for SPS. The city initiated a feasibility analysis in Fall 2022 which will provide an analysis of the existing space usage in the Brown and Winter Hill. The findings of these studies and a future community process are key steps in determining the best path forward. To support these processes and help secure state funding for future building solutions, the district can submit documentation now or in the future. Planning for these solutions will allow us to vastly improve the ways we serve the more than 630 students across both schools.

The Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) is the state body that partners with communities to support and fund the design and construction of school facilities. Submitting a Statement of Interest (SOI) is the first step in being considered for MSBA funding. The open submittal period for SOIs is open now through Friday, April 14, 2023. A SOI does not commit us to details of a particular project or projects or secure state funding, but is a necessary first step should we wish to pursue renovation or rebuilding of any school with state funds.

Although more analysis should be done, in close collaboration with the city staff and the Mayor's office, the School Committee can request that the Superintendent investigate and make a recommendation to the body regarding timing and scope of a SOI submittal to the MSBA.

An individual SOI can be submitted for either building, and both the Brown and WHCIS facilities have compelling reasons to consider them for renovation or rebuilding. The Brown facility is the oldest school building in the district, is not ADA compliant, and although investments and improvements continue to be made, it does not support the type of programming or 21st century education that are present in every other school in the district. The WHCIS facility continues to have system challenges and is currently at risk of exceeding its classroom capacity in the 2023-2024 school year. It is unusual for more than one SOI to be submitted to MSBA, however this is something that can be investigated if it is the will of the body.

Alternatively, a single SOI that combines the challenges and needs of both schools and their students, could be developed. The SOI would be considered a problem statement, focused on the two facilities and their student populations, with the final solution being developed in partnership with the MSBA and the community. The final solution could be a renovation or replacement of one or both of the buildings, exploring different sites or a consolidation of the two into one. The process would explore options that support the needs of the students, educational goals, desires of the community, and create flexible, sustainable and cost-effective public school facilities.

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The MSBA process is highly competitive. Last year ten projects were funded from over 300 SOIs submitted. Some districts forgo state funding, for the freedom that self funding offers, but most state funded projects cover approximately 40% of the expense which is a great incentive to partner with MSBA in addition to the support and oversight they provide to the process.