

MEETING THE MSBA CHALLENGE: A PROPOSAL FOR CONSENSUS



AMHERST TOWN COUNCIL
JANUARY 28, 2019



OUTLINE

- **The Problem:** A clear and urgent need to renovate or replace Fort River and Wildwood
- **The Opportunity:** The recent MSBA feedback regarding consensus
- **The Challenge:** Achieving consensus in a short timeframe
- **The Proposal:** A framework that meets this challenge
- **The Process:** Gathering feedback on this proposal to determine public support

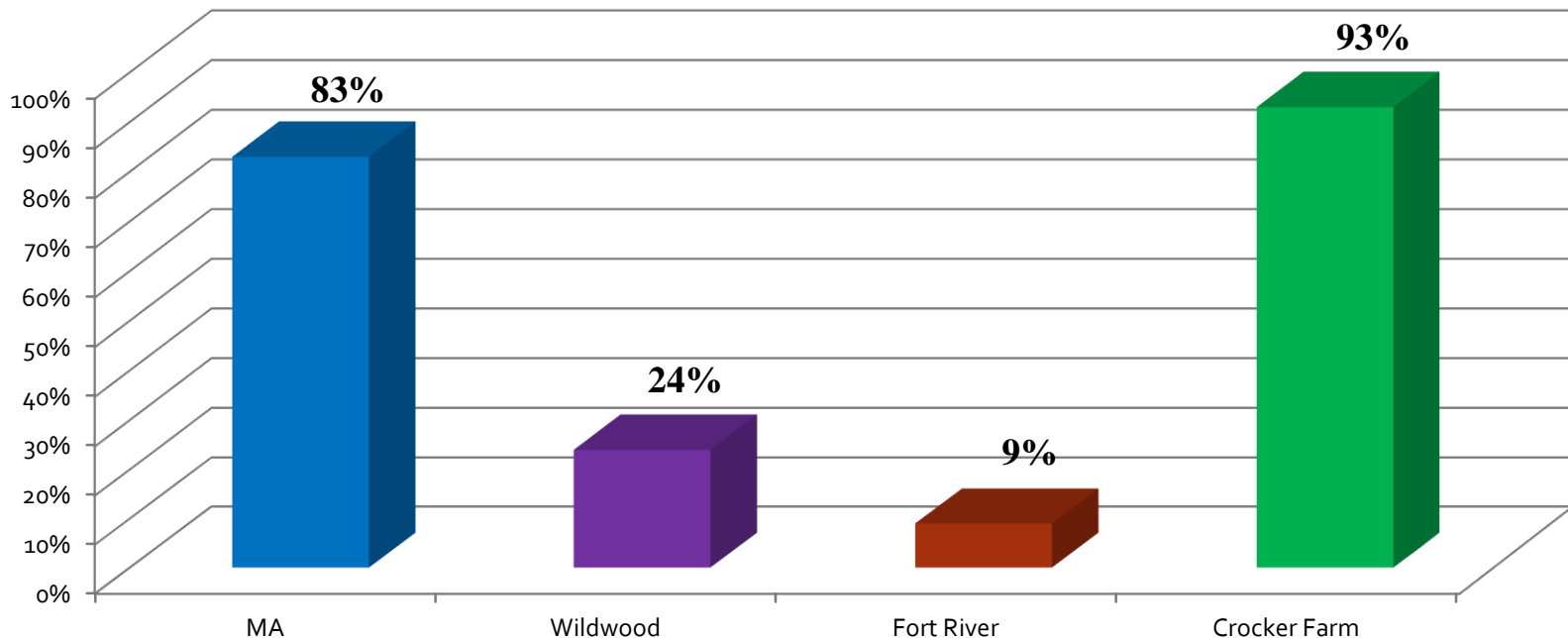
THE PROBLEM: WILDWOOD'S AND FORT RIVER'S INFRASTRUCTURE

- **Building Conditions:** The buildings need significant financial investment to continue to be used as school buildings; nearing the end of expected lifespan of school buildings that have not undergone significant renovation (MSBA building life estimate: 50 years)
- **Safety:** The buildings do not meet current expectations for safety; standards and planning around this were very different in 1970 (compared to 2019)
- **Educational Challenges:** Open classrooms impinge on our ability to provide a high quality education; many accessibility problems that impact vulnerable students, staff and visitors

With each passing year, challenges are increasing and are becoming barriers to learning

THE PROBLEM: TEACHERS' VIEWS OF WILDWOOD AND FORT RIVER

**Percent of teachers who agree that:
"The physical environment of classrooms in this school
supports teaching and learning."**



Source: 2014 TELL Survey that was completed by teachers in all districts in the Commonwealth

THE PROBLEM: WHICH CONCERNS CAN BE ADDRESSED VIA SHORT-TERM CAPITAL INVESTMENT?

Concerns that can be addressed *(with significant capital funding)*

- Roofs
- Exterior doors (safety)
- Univents/HVAC (mostly)
- ADA/Access (somewhat)
- Cooling (somewhat)

Concerns that cannot be addressed *(even with significant capital funding)*

- Open Classroom Design
- Classroom Size
- High-cost and Inefficient Energy Use
- Safety of Main Entry
- ADA/Access
(because of Open Classroom design)
- Lack of Natural Light in Many Classrooms
- Cooling (fully)

THE PROBLEM: FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

- Town officials have indicated that MSBA funding is needed to complete any school building project, given the other needs of the town (roads, bridges, Fire Station, Libraries, DPW, etc)
- Two sequential building projects would face escalating construction costs (approximately 20-30% higher cost in 2nd project), delay annual operating savings from improved energy efficiency, and would cost more than one building project based on building duplicate HVAC systems, etc.
- If both schools are either replaced or fully renovated as part of an MSBA process in the next 6 years, the town will save roughly \$6-7 million dollars in proposed capital costs (roofs, parking lots, etc)

MSBA acceptance is competitive, and addresses one building at a time

THE PROBLEM: MSBA NEED; MSBA ACCEPTANCE

- 2007-2012: Multiple Statements of Interest (SOI's) submitted for Fort River and Wildwood Schools; none accepted
- 2013: MSBA accepted Amherst's SOI for Wildwood School
- 2013-2017: Building project developed; failed to receive all required local approvals to proceed to construction
- 2018: SOI's submitted for both Fort River and Wildwood. Neither SOI accepted

MSBA acceptance is competitive, and addresses one building at a time

THE OPPORTUNITY: MSBA FEEDBACK AFTER 2018 REJECTION

The MSBA shared that for future Amherst SOI's to be accepted, they would be looking for consensus* from the community on what the Town wants to do (and not do), to be included formally in the Statement of Interest.

Doing so would significantly increase our chances for acceptance.

****Consensus: Consensus may be defined professionally as an acceptable resolution, one that can be supported, even if not the "favorite" of each individual. Consensus does not equal unanimity.***

THE OPPORTUNITY: THE 2019 MSBA STATEMENT OF INTEREST

- New SOI's are accepted by the MSBA until April 12, 2019
- SOI's need to be formally voted by the Amherst School Committee and the Amherst Town Council
- Statements of Interest should not include decisions/desires about several items (which are part of the structured MSBA process after acceptance):
 - Whether new construction or an addition/renovation is preferred
 - A defined site that would be the best for the school
 - Who the architects should be
 - Detailed building specifications, or a complete educational plan

THE OPPORTUNITY: PROPOSED VISION STATEMENT

A commitment to a solution for both Fort River and Wildwood that:

- provides a high quality learning environment for all students, in ADA accessible rooms with walls and natural light;
- provides reasonably maintainable buildings;
- addresses both buildings before our Kindergarten students leave elementary school (within the next six years);
- is fiscally responsible to the Town of Amherst.

The goal is to have our April 12, 2019 MSBA Statement of Interest submitted and accepted with a formal declaration of community consensus

THE PROPOSAL: FIVE AGREEMENTS

- One MSBA project
- One warm, child-centered building
- Approximately 600 students
- K-5 or K-6
- Community survey(s) will be completed during the Feasibility Process prior to binding decisions

This is would go into an SOI Consensus Statement.

All other decisions (add/reno, site, etc) would be part of a future MSBA-required Feasibility Study and Building Committee

THE PROPOSAL: VALUING SMALL SCHOOLS / COHORTS AND SOCIAL EQUITY

- Because of the nature of the Dual Language Program, cohort sizes in a 600 student school would be smaller than expected
- There are multiple ways to get to approximately 600 students. Some examples:
 - Move 6th grade to the Middle School (study ongoing); Build addition at Crocker Farm; 7-12th grades consolidate at High School, one elementary school moves to the Middle School, some students attend Pelham Elementary, if regionalization occurs (study ongoing)
- Social equity benefits, including to specialized special education programs and socioeconomic equity/busing, can be improved
 - Reducing to two enrollment zones would decrease the number of students bussed to specialized special education programs and to achieve balanced school populations by reducing the divisions of East Hadley Road zoning

Whatever the approach, we can be committed now to approximately 600 students that improves our equity commitments

THE PROCESS: ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY FOR SOI CONSENSUS

What we're asking

Can you support:

- One MSBA project
- One building
- Approximately 600 students
- K-5 or K-6

How we'll ask it

- Listening Sessions for staff, families, and the larger community
- Outreach via Amherst Media segment
- Feedback requested electronically to increase access
- Outreach to PGOs
- Weekly ARPS Update

The alternative to consensus now is an extended engagement process, restarting from a base level, and waiting until April 2020 to resubmit a Statement of Interest

THE PROCESS: AFTER MSBA ACCEPTANCE

- The feasibility stage of the MSBA Process—it's actually required!
- We would look at all of the various options (examples listed on prior slides) and gather more as part of the process, and then make a decision, via the Educational Plan, on the best way to move forward
- That process can include gathering more information about potential options so that the decision is informed by the work of the professional team of Project Managers and Architects who will be hired
- Project Managers and Architects will facilitate thorough engagement strategies, including survey(s), to guide decision-making in the feasibility process, once more detailed data and information is available
 - *It will also be informed by other information that will become available over the next few months such as the final Fort River Feasibility Report, Secondary Facility Use Study (grades 6-12), and Regional School District Planning Board report*

THE PROCESS: PROPOSED SOI VOTING SCHEDULE FOR 2019

- February 26: School Committee discussion
- March 4: School Committee discussion
- March 11: School Committee discussion & potential vote
- March 18: *Proposed* Town Council review
- April 1: *Proposed* Town Council vote
- April 12: SOI submitted to the MSBA
- December 11: MSBA Board votes on which districts who have submitted SOIs are invited to enter the Core Program