



Massachusetts School Building Authority

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December 23, 2020

Mr. Paul Bockelman, Town Manager
Town of Amherst
Amherst Town Hall
4 Boltwood Avenue
Amherst, MA 01002

Re: Town of Amherst, Fort River Elementary School

Dear Mr. Bockelman:

I would like to thank you and representatives of the Town of Amherst (the “District”) for meeting with Massachusetts School Building Authority (the “MSBA”) staff on October 8, 2020 and for the subsequent conference calls held on November 10, 2020 and December 3, 2020 to review enrollment projections and methodologies for the Fort River Elementary School project. As discussed, the next critical step is for the MSBA and the District to agree on a study enrollment for the Fort River Elementary School.

The MSBA works with local communities to create affordable, sustainable, and energy efficient schools across Massachusetts. A critical early component in achieving these objectives begins with an appropriate design enrollment that positions the District to efficiently meet space capacity needs throughout potential future enrollment variations.

The MSBA uses a data driven enrollment projection methodology based on the widely accepted modified grade-to-grade cohort survival methodology (the “enrollment methodology”). The MSBA’s enrollment methodology generates a baseline enrollment projection as discussed during the October 8, 2020 enrollment meeting, and as further described on the MSBA’s website found under the ‘Building With Us’, ‘MSBA Enrollment Methodology’ section. For specifics on how the MSBA’s methodology impacts the Fort River Elementary School project, please refer to the District’s Enrollment Projection package, provided to the District on October 7, 2020.

Based on information supplied by the District, data from sources such as the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (“DESE”) and Department of Public Health, and discussion with the District, the MSBA has been able to create an enrollment projection for the Fort River Elementary School project, as follows.

The Fort River Elementary School is an elementary school that presently serves a portion of the District's grade K-6 enrollment. The MSBA understands that the District would like its feasibility study to also examine the consolidation of the Fort River Elementary School with the Wildwood Elementary School combined with the reconfiguration of grade 6 from the elementary schools to the Amherst Regional Middle School. The MSBA is confirming as discussed with the District during the enrollment meeting that any issues associated with renovation, reconfiguration, or closure of either the Wildwood Elementary School or Amherst Regional Middle School will be addressed outside of the Fort River Elementary School project. This analysis will be focused on the enrollment projections for grades K-6.

The table below illustrates the District's K-6 enrollment during the most recent ten-year period, including enrollment through the 2019-2020 school year as reported by DESE.

Fiscal Year	K-6
2011	1,186
2012	1,152
2013	1,141
2014	1,145
2015	1,139
2016	1,118
2017	1,082
2018	1,081
2019	1,083
2020	1,040

A version of the above table with more detail regarding the District's historic enrollment may also be found on page 5 of the District's Enrollment Projection package.

The total grade K-6 enrollment in the Town of Amherst as reported by DESE for the 2019-2020 school year was 1,040 students, which reflects a decrease of 146 students (-14%) from the grade K-6 enrollment reported in 2011, which was the maximum grade K-6 enrollment reported in the preceding ten years. Additionally, the 2019-2020 grade K-6 enrollment reflects a decrease of 77 students (-7%) from the average grade K-6 enrollment reported during the preceding ten-year period.

The MSBA understands that the District is proposing an enrollment to accommodate approximately 600 students in grades K-5 at a consolidated Fort River and Wildwood Elementary School. The total enrollment in grades K-5 reported to DESE for the 2019-2020 school year was 872 students.

With respect to future enrollments, the MSBA's base enrollment projection indicates the District's grade K-6 enrollment will continue to experience a declining trend through the 2020-21 school year then stabilize through the 2023-2024 school year when enrollment is then projected to increase, as illustrated on page 6 of the Enrollment Projection package. In accordance with the MSBA's Enrollment Methodology, the baseline enrollment is calculated using the ten-year average of projected enrollments. As such, the average base enrollment projections for the Fort River Elementary School project through the 2029-2030 school year is as follows:

- The average grade K-6 base enrollment projection is 1,075 students.
- The average grade K-5 base enrollment projection is 925 students.

As a result of a sensitivity analysis performed by the MSBA on this base enrollment projection and further discussion with the District, the following adjustment has been made to the base enrollment projections:

- Out-of-District Enrollment
 - o In order to adjust for fluctuations to the out-of-district enrollment patterns of the District's residents over time, the MSBA has made an additional adjustment to the base enrollment projection.
 - o In order to make this adjustment, the MSBA adjusted the grade-to-grade survival ratios for grades K-6 by a total of 3.3% throughout a four-year period in the projection.
 - o This adjustment added the following totals to the projected averages for the District's proposed grade configurations as compared to the base enrollment projection:
 - For grades K-6, the adjustment added 30 students.
 - For grades K-5, the adjustment added 25 students.

In order to recommend an enrollment for an appropriately sized Fort River Elementary School project, the MSBA performed a capacity analysis of the District’s K-6 schools using the 2016 School Survey data and ‘proposed use’ plans as provided by the District, with consideration to consolidation and reconfiguration as described above.

The following non-project schools were included in the MSBA’s capacity analysis as they serve the same grade range of the District’s students as the Fort River Elementary School: the Crocker Farm Elementary School and the Wildwood Elementary School. A tally of general classrooms, not including Special Education, Art, Music, or “other” spaces, in each school was made, and the total number of Kindergarten classrooms was multiplied by 18 and total grade 1-6 classrooms by 23, which is what the MSBA designs classrooms around, respectively. This calculation resulted in a total capacity of 872 students in the two non-project schools identified above. The exercise was then repeated, this time accounting for the consolidation of two of the three elementary schools and a reconfiguration of the District’s entire grade 6 to the Amherst-Pelham Regional School District. This calculation resulted in a total capacity of 417 students in the Crocker Farm Elementary School.

The MSBA understands that there may be a possibility for any school district to have fluctuations in their future enrollment. Therefore, a 10% buffer has been included in the calculation to account for this. The District’s adjusted capacity at the Crocker Farm and Wildwood Elementary Schools of 785 students was then subtracted from the District’s total projected grade K-6 enrollment of 1,105 students, and the adjusted capacity at the Crocker Farm Elementary School of 375 students was subtracted from the District’s total projected grade K-5 enrollment of 950 students, as follows:

Crocker Farm and Wildwood Elementary Schools:

Total classrooms, K	5
Total classrooms, 1-6	34
MSBA standard students per classroom, K	18
MSBA standard students per classroom, 1-6	23
Available seats outside of the project school	872
Assumed efficiency in non-project schools	90%
Assumed enrollment in non-project schools	785
Total ten-year projected average enrollment	1,075

Total ten-year projected, adjusted average enrollment	1,105
Assumed enrollment in non-project schools	785
Difference between total, adjusted average enrollment and enrollment at non-project schools	320

Crocker Farm Elementary School:

Total classrooms, K	4
Total classrooms, 1-5	15
MSBA standard students per classroom, K	18
MSBA standard students per classroom, 1-5	23
Available seats outside of the project school	417
Assumed efficiency in non-project schools	90%
Assumed enrollment in non-project schools	375
Total ten-year projected average enrollment	925
Total ten-year projected, adjusted average enrollment	950
Assumed enrollment in non-project schools	375
Difference between total, adjusted average enrollment and enrollment at non-project schools	575

As a result of the analysis on the base enrollment forecast, the historical enrollment trends of the District, the adjustment described above, and the analysis of capacity, the MSBA recommends study enrollments for the Fort River Elementary School project as follows:

- Fort River Elementary School: 320 students, grades K-6
- Consolidated Fort River and Wildwood Elementary Schools: 575 students, grades K-5

Please note that these recommendations for multiple study enrollments do not represent an affirmation by the MSBA for approval and/or funding of any of these options and are intended

only to provide a framework to inform the feasibility study to be conducted as a means of determining the most cost effective and educationally sound solution to be agreed upon by the District and the MSBA. The MSBA's study enrollment recommendations assume full utilization of all remaining school facilities. Accordingly, as part of the Feasibility Study, the District will be required to determine the enrollment capacity of each existing facility anticipated to remain in service and how the spaces within each existing facility are anticipated to be used once the Fort River Elementary School project opens.

Please note that all other potential work beyond the cost of the preliminary analysis associated with estimating potential work required to prepare the Amherst Regional Middle School facility for grade 6 such as planning, design, fit-out, construction, etc. beyond the Preferred Schematic design phase of the MSBA grant program would be considered separate from the Fort River Elementary School project, and therefore would require a separate procurement, separate contracts, and separate funding and authorization.

If the grade K-5 configuration is determined to be the Preferred Solution, the District will be required to establish in the Preferred Schematic Report the proposed future use or disposition of any existing spaces vacated or otherwise reprogrammed by this potential project and that the Preferred Solution has been approved by the School Committee and necessary District officials. Further, the MSBA will require a written plan from the District describing the process for determining local support for potential grade reconfiguration and/or consolidation. Upon approval of the District's Preferred Solution, the MSBA will forward a design enrollment certification that is specific to the grade configuration associated with the approved Preferred Solution.

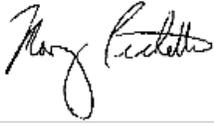
As part of the Feasibility Study, the District will be required to submit additional information regarding its proposed school redistricting strategy, how it will be implemented, and a locally approved draft plan that evaluates if the existing zones will be adequate to increase enrollment at the Fort River Elementary School project upon completion of the project, or if additional redistricting will be required.

The MSBA believes that this study enrollment recommendation will position the District to efficiently meet space capacity needs throughout future enrollment variations. Please sign and return the attached certification within 14 calendar days to confirm agreement on this study enrollment. If the District feels that this study enrollment does not meet the needs of the District, please respond to this letter via e-mail to Brittany Gomes and propose three meeting/conference call times for which the District can be available to discuss enrollment.

If you have any questions regarding this matter, please do not hesitate to contact me or Brittany Gomes (Brittany.Gomes@massschoolbuildings.org) at 617-720-4466.

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Fort River Elementary School Enrollment Letter

Sincerely,



Mary Pichetti
Director of Capital Planning

Cc: Legislative Delegation
Lynn Griesemer, President, Amherst Town Council
Allison McDonald, Chair, Amherst School Committee
Dr. Michael Morris, Superintendent, Amherst Public Schools
File: 10.2 Letters (Region 1)