



Advisory Committee
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TOWN OF WELLESLEY



**ADVISORY COMMITTEE LETTER
Special Town Meeting — Tuesday, October 2, 2018, 7:00 pm
Wellesley Middle School Auditorium**

TERM ENDS 2019

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Tom Skelly, Chair
Andrea Ward, Secretary

TERM ENDS 2020

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TERM ENDS 2021

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To the Citizens of the Town of Wellesley:

September 14, 2018

A Special Town Meeting (STM) will convene on Tuesday, October 2, 2018, at 7:00 pm in the Wellesley Middle School Auditorium. All residents are welcome to attend. The proceedings may be followed on Wellesley Media Corporation's Government Channel (Comcast Channel 8, Verizon Channel 40). The STM will also be live streamed at www.wellesleyma.org/live-streaming.

I am writing on behalf of the Advisory Committee to provide you with an overview of the matters that the STM will address. The *STM Advisory Report*, mailed to all Town Meeting Members, provides background information and discusses, in detail, Advisory considerations and recommendations on the articles and related motions coming before this meeting. The report is available at the Wellesley Free Library, the Town Clerk's Office and online at <http://www.wellesleyma.gov/284/Town-Meeting>.

Request for funding to conduct a feasibility study and schematic design for an elementary school project in partnership with the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA)

This STM is to convene for the purpose of authorizing up to \$2.5 million in funding to conduct in partnership with the MSBA—the state entity that helps cities and towns fund school projects—a feasibility study of possible solutions to address the physical and educational deficiencies of the Ernest F. Upham School at 35 Wynnewood Road, followed by schematic design of the preferred solution. The preferred solution to address the needs of the Upham School—the school invited by the MSBA into its process—may be the renovation or rebuilding of the Upham School, the renovation or rebuilding of the John D. Hardy School at 293 Weston Road, or construction of a new school at another site. Following completion of the feasibility study and schematic design of the preferred solution, the Town will seek Town Meeting approval to fund detailed design and construction for the project. The construction costs, very roughly estimated at \$58 million, may be eligible for MSBA reimbursement of approximately 31% (or approximately \$18 million) and would require a Town-wide debt exclusion vote.

The Town has embarked on major upgrades to its schools over the last two decades. Sprague was rebuilt and Bates was extensively renovated in 2002 and 2004, respectively. The Middle School underwent a series of upgrades between 2006 and 2008, and last year's Annual Town Meeting approved design funding for steam pipe replacement and feasibility funding for projects that, when completed, will leave the Town with a "25-year middle school." The new High School was completed in 2012, and Fiske and Schofield were extensively renovated in 2015 and 2016. This

leaves the Hardy, Hunnewell and Upham (HHU) elementary schools as the remaining schools in need of extensive repairs, renovations and/or replacement.

Problems at the three schools include:

- Heating systems, plumbing systems (including bathrooms), electrical systems, life safety/fire alarm systems, and windows beyond their useful life, resulting in frequent repairs, uneven heating and the constant threat of failure;
- Exterior envelopes (facades) in need of significant repairs;
- No sprinkler systems and combustible roof framing;
- Lack of compliance with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA);
- Modular classrooms being used well beyond their service life;
- Undersized classrooms not conducive to learning, with outdated finishes, cabinetry, lighting, doors and acoustical treatments;
- Lack of specialized spaces for delivery of services;
- Need to use hallways for storage and for one-on-one teaching space; and
- One space used for gym, cafeteria and auditorium, which reduces time available for physical education classes and results in significant inefficiencies due to setup and changeover of the shared space.

The School Committee (SC) has been looking into the HHU issue for some time. A complicating factor is that the school system is in a cycle of declining enrollment that supports the consolidation of elementary schools from seven to six. The enrollment issue has been studied extensively over the past six years by the School Department, external consultants and Town study committees, including the HHU Master Planning Committee (HHU MPC). The currently observed declines in enrollment (K-5 enrollment is down more than 11% over the past decade) and the consistency of the projections of future declines led the SC to adopt the position last year to replace Hunnewell—the only school that serves the southwest quadrant of the Town—and to replace either Upham or Hardy pending further study. The HHU MPC recommended, and the SC agreed, that a third school would be rebuilt only if and when current enrollment trends were to reverse.

In keeping with the decision to replace two of the three HHU schools, the STM last June approved \$1 million to fund a feasibility study for options to replace the Hunnewell School. The Hunnewell feasibility study is already underway and will provide the Town with critical information, including the buildable options at the site and possibilities for timing of the construction. The Hunnewell project will be funded entirely by the Town and will follow the standard Town process for major capital projects, with further Town Meeting approval required for both design funding and construction funding and a Town-wide vote required for debt exclusion. Rough cost estimates for the Hunnewell project range from \$55 million to \$61.5 million, depending on the timing.

A second, separate project to replace either Hardy or Upham is proceeding concurrently with the Hunnewell project. In December 2017, the MSBA invited the Town into its so-called Eligibility Process to help address the deficiencies at the Upham School. The Town is fortunate to have received an invitation; only 15 of the 83 elementary school projects for which communities submitted statements of interest were selected. The Town has successfully partnered with the MSBA in the past—the High School was funded and built using the MSBA process—and a number of key Town employees and volunteers possess significant experience working with the MSBA. Town staff and board members involved are working to obtain as much MSBA funding as possible.

Article 2, the only substantive article before this STM, seeks funding for the Hardy/Upham feasibility study, followed by schematic design of the preferred solution. As prescribed by the MSBA, the process is slightly different than the ordinary Town capital process being used for the Hunnewell project. Instead of three decision points for Town Meeting approval—feasibility, design and construction—the design phase is subdivided, so that there are two phases and approval points: (1) feasibility and schematic design, and (2) detailed design and construction. The feasibility study will examine the possibility of renovating or rebuilding either the Upham or Hardy Schools, as well as the possibility of constructing a new school at another site, should such a site be identified. The feasibility study will gather information on factors such as educational needs, total cost, traffic, swing space, topography, and geotechnical and environmental issues so that the buildable options at each site can be identified, evaluated and compared. At the end of the feasibility study, using all the information obtained and including a robust process for public participation, the three Town boards—the School Building Committee (SBC), SC and Board of Selectmen (BOS)—will agree on a preferred solution, which will then be put through a more detailed assessment, or schematic design. The goal of schematic design is to produce a project of sufficient clarity in scope, schedule and budget that the Town can vote to approve detailed design and construction funding.

As discussed in the *STM Advisory Report*, there is unanimous support by the Advisory Committee for moving forward with funding the feasibility study and schematic design for the Hardy/Upham MSBA project. The need for a new elementary school to replace either Upham or Hardy is clear, but the Town must now gather critical information to identify the best solution to serve the children and teaching professionals of those schools. The feasibility study and subsequent schematic design will allow the Town to do just that. The involvement of the MSBA offers the potential for substantial state funding assistance during a period when the taxpayers of the Town will be facing the costs of other major capital projects, including the Hunnewell project.

I am thankful to my colleagues on the Advisory Committee, especially Jane Andrews, for their work on this *STM Advisory Report*. I am also appreciative of the citizens who attended the Public Hearing for this STM and voiced concerns and asked questions, as these were very helpful to the Advisory Committee. Finally, we should all be grateful to the members of the SC, School Administration, Facilities Management Department, HHU MPC, SBC and BOS for their tireless dedication and work to provide the Town with the proper school facilities required to offer the highest quality education to the children of Wellesley.

Sincerely,

Tom Skelly, Chair
Advisory Committee