

# Nashua Middle School Project

July 2019

Nashua is currently in the first phase of a major project to investigate education and infrastructure needs with our three middle schools: Elm Street Middle, Fairgrounds Middle and Pennichuck Middle Schools. The project's focus is to improve the middle school experience and education for the students of Nashua at each of the three middle schools.

As phase I of the project, the Joint Special School Building Committee (JSSBC) hired an architect, Harriman of Portland, Maine, and a construction manager, Harvey Construction of Bedford, New Hampshire. Harriman's first task was to evaluate whether it would be more cost-effective to renovate the current Elm Street Middle School or build a new middle school on property the City of Nashua owns in the south part of Nashua.

The additional focus of the project will be to remove portable classrooms currently used at two middle schools, which were installed some 20 years ago as a temporary measure to relieve overcrowding and have never been removed. These temporary portable classrooms are very tired and reaching the very end of useful life. We are also looking to provide improvements required to allow the schools to easily handle 800 students. Our goal is to balance three middle school enrollment to 800 students each. Elm Street Middle School currently has more than 1,200 students, which is too large for a middle school. Fairgrounds Middle School has almost 800 students now and renovation is expected to be less demanding to that building. Because Pennichuck utilizes portable classrooms, at least 8 to 10 new classrooms will need to be added. All three middle schools have other infrastructure issues that also need to be addressed.

Initially discussions centered around the cost to renovate Elm Street Middle School but, because costs quickly became excessive, focus shifted to possibly building a new middle school and renovating the other two. A preliminary study was undertaken to see if further detailed examination was required and it was determined that it did. The Nashua Board of Education asked the Joint Special School Building Committee\* to take on a middle school evaluation project and the JSSBC asked the Nashua Board of Aldermen for the funds to begin this study.

The Nashua Board of Aldermen passed a funding Resolution to re-purpose \$300,000 to begin the first phase of the project. Again, the purpose was to fully evaluate the current middle school Infrastructure issues and evaluate if our middle schools were meeting current state and federal guidelines for middle school education. Phase I commenced in January 2019 and is in its fifth month of study. Harriman is evaluating each middle school relative to physical space, electrical service, energy efficiency, security, educational approach, educational services provided, etc. The results of analysis are being put together in comprehensive reports that will be shared with the JSSBC in the July/August timeframe. Also being evaluated is the feasibility of building a middle school on a piece of City-owned land in south Nashua. Surface and subsurface studies have been conducted to ascertain whether a new school can be structurally built on the proposed site. An industrial hygienist has been hired to verify potential hazardous construction materials at the three middle schools. Traffic studies are also being done at all four sites to evaluate current and future traffic loads and mitigation options.

\* The JSSBC is comprised of five Aldermen and five members of the Board of Education. Alderman Dowd is the Chairman of that committee.

Of primary interest during this first phase of the project is the evaluation of renovating Elm Street Middle School versus building a new middle school on City owned land in south Nashua. I have included a picture of the possible site below:



This site shown above off Medallion Court was set aside for a new school some 20-plus years ago when the land was being developed. The site comprises more than 20 acres and can easily host a new 800-student middle school with athletic fields and still maintain an adequate buffer with its neighbors. As noted earlier, a traffic study is being completed to assess the impact of the school on the surrounding city streets.

The project is very important to the City of Nashua because changes need to be made to meet middle school needs, particularly the aging of Elm Street Middle School, which was built 83 years ago (main part of the building) as Nashua High School and additions were added on in 1963 (57 years ago). When a new high school was built (completed in 1975) on Riverside Street, Elm Street was converted to a junior high school and then later as middle school in 2004 when Nashua High School South and Nashua High School North opened. The original Elm Street building has numerous infrastructure issues that will be extremely expensive to renovate and, even with the renovations, may still not meet current middle school requirements. The 1963 addition to the rear of the school also has several issues that would need extensive repairs.

While all of the structural issues are being evaluated and a cost estimate developed, educational adequacy is being examined as well. This report will be available this summer.

One other aspect to consider is that if we undertake renovations at Elm Street, work will take about four years (minimum) because portions of the school would be closed while

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renovations are underway. Additional portable classrooms will need to be installed on the front lawn, shifting students to dedicated, albeit temporary classrooms while construction is underway. Alternatively, if we build a new school, it will be approximately a two-year project because current students could remain at Elm Street until the new school was completed.

Some of the challenges of possibly renovating Elm Street are:

- Energy costs: Today middle schools are required to have R-18 insulation in the walls. Elm Street currently has a value of R-2. If we do all we can to insulate Elm Street, we might get up to an R-11 value. In addition, the mechanical systems are very old and inefficient and marginally effective.
- The heating and ventilation is very old, with many components dating back to the original construction in the 1930s. Any renovations will definitely be expensive.
- Middle school requirements today call for larger classrooms than are currently in the school.
- Special Education classrooms have very specific requirements that are not being met.
- Elm Street was built as a high school with three floors; middle schools should be designed with no more than two floors. Also ADA (Americans with Disabilities) requirements need to be met.
- The extent of renovations required will also require the City of Nashua to try and bring the school up to current building codes.

The final report will detail the challenges and the cost to renovate Elm Street Middle School versus building a new school. In addition, separate reports will be written detailing challenges and costs to renovate each of the current middle schools.

Public informational meetings will be held and a final decision by the JSSBC should be made this fall 2019.

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