



AMESBURY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL (AES) – Amesbury, MA

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ)

Why does the City need this Project?

There is not enough room to house the current and future students adequately at the Amesbury Elementary School. The existing Amesbury Elementary School was constructed in 1968, is undersized and does not provide the same educational programs and opportunities required for 21st century learning. Appropriate spatial relationships and adjacencies are not achievable within the existing school. The infrastructure does not allow for 21st century teaching.

How will this project solve overcrowding problems and lack of programmatic space at the Elementary level?

With the new school and the elementary grade reconfiguration (PK-2, 3-5), adequately sized spaces will be provided to accommodate current and future educational programs at the new AES. The grade reconfiguration also allows for adequate space at the Cashman School for grades 3-5. By incorporating grade 5 back into the elementary schools, this allows the Middle School to return programs that are currently not available due to lack of space.

How will the City pay for this project?

In order to bond the City's share of project costs, voters will need to approve a Debt-Exclusion Vote on October 8, 2019. This differs from a Proposition 2-1/2 override as this is a temporary tax increase and not a permanent tax increase.

The debt exclusion vote is for the sole purpose of constructing a new Amesbury Elementary Schools. The increase in taxes will be specific to this school project and temporary in nature (25 year bond). At the end of the bond repayments, the tax increase related to this school project will be removed. The tax increase will begin with small increases that will ramp up to the full tax impact around year 2022. At the peak, the average maximum tax impact will be approximately \$370 per year for average single-family household with a home value of \$400,000. This equates to approximately \$1 per day.

How much is the State going to pay for this project?

The total cost of the project is \$60,513,570. The State, acting through the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA), has committed to reimburse the City from between \$23,942,384 and up to \$24,466,254 of project costs if contingencies are used. Included in the \$60.5 million total cost is \$2.7 million in contingencies and \$320,000 in reserved costs. The contingency funds will not be utilized except for unforeseen conditions. Remaining unused contingency funds will directly reduce the City's share of the costs.

How much will the City have to pay?

The City will be responsible for funding \$36,047,316 through the debt-exclusion vote. If contingencies are not utilized, it would reduce the City's share to approximately \$33.9 million.

How will taxes be affected by a "yes" vote?

With a positive vote on October 8, 2019, a temporary tax increase dedicated to this project would be instituted. The eventual impact to the owner of an average single-family home (value of \$400,000) is projected to be \$370 per year, but this will be phased in over a three-year period, perhaps not reaching its full impact until 2022.

Unlike a mortgage, payments actually ramp up dependent upon use and can go down over time. This is not a permanent tax increase unlike a Proposition 2-1/2 tax override.

Will property values be affected?

Most often communities that build new schools see an increase in property values.

What will happen if there is a "no" vote?

Inaction is not an option. The City will still need to spend money to repair the existing Amesbury Elementary School. The school's building systems and the modularity are well beyond their useful life and need replacement. The school is not fully accessible nor is it compliant with current codes, both of which will have to be rectified per state law once repairs and replacements are implemented if they exceed 30% of the assessed value. The costs for repairs have been presented to be \$34.5 million with no MSBA participation. The existing school will need to continue to be used for at least 10 more years until a second attempt at approval and the resulting school would be available. It is important to note that there will be no programmatic or educational benefit or increased capacity provided with a repair project to the existing school.

The State will redirect its funds to other communities as the need for State assistance is significant throughout the State. MSBA can only fund a small percentage of the need on a yearly basis. The City would then lose \$23,942,384 up to \$24,466,254 million in funding. At the time of MSBA's approval, Amesbury Elementary School was one of 23 approved out of 93 submitted.

The City of Amesbury will have to re-apply to the MSBA for any potential future elementary school project, which could take years and would come at a MUCH higher cost due to escalation. This same project would cost the City millions more if it comes back to the voters in four years. The current project is already over four years in the making since its initial approval and it was denied for several years prior to finally being accepted into the MSBA program. A re-application to MSBA would not be feasible until April 2020 (MSBA deadline for Statement of Interests for Projects), resulting in a potential, late 2020 to early 2021, invitation into the MSBA program. Therefore, a best-case scenario to get back to the current stage would be late 2024.

However, it would be unlikely that MSBA would be that quick to enter into the process again with the City if there is concern about community support. The \$900,000 spent to date will have to be spent again for the new process but at a higher cost due to inflation. MSBA will also not participate in the funding of a new Feasibility Study which would be required.

Where is the new school going to be built and why?

Five public and private sites were studied in depth from a soils, traffic, environmental and neighborhood perspective. Of the 5 sites studied for the new AES, the Cashman Elementary School site was deemed the most appropriate solution from a construction, cost and educational perspective.

Much consideration was given to the existing AES site, but it was deemed inappropriate due to the buildable area of the site while the existing school remained operational. There would be programmatic compromises, extended construction duration, impact to the neighborhood, parking challenges and it would cost more than the new AES at Cashman site.

Why not put the new school on the existing Amesbury Elementary School site?

Construction on the existing Amesbury Elementary School site was more costly and more disruptive to students. Phased construction would have been required which would have taken longer.

Are there any less expensive solutions?

No. Many options were explored, as required of the MSBA Feasibility Study process, over the past two years. Refer to the Preferred Schematic Report on the Project Website which outlines the options explored and the advantages and disadvantages of each. The best solution is the one proposed. No matter how much this issue is studied, the answers will be the same: The 1968-era Amesbury Elementary School does not work as an elementary school and a replacement solution is necessary. The Feasibility Study process thoroughly vetted all available options and the new school on the Cashman Elementary School site was the most financially and educationally responsible solution.

Will there be water infiltration to the Cashman School or abutting properties during construction or after?

No, all stormwater will be managed during and after construction as required by law and will not disturb the Cashman Elementary School or abutting properties. A Storm Water Pollution & Prevention Plan (SWPPP) will be developed as a requirement of the Permit. The purpose of a SWPPP is to help the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) preserve and improve storm water quality and discharge and to ensure development on sites do not impact the site where development is occurring or abutting properties.

Is the new school going to be on Woodsom Farm?

No, the new school will not be on Woodsom Farm. It will be located on property owned by the City which already houses the Cashman Elementary School.

There will be a 24-ft. wide exit road from the AES site to Lions Mouth Road that crosses the corner of the Woodsom Farm site.

Have Public Safety officials reviewed the proposed site plan?

Yes. The site has been reviewed and approved by the Amesbury Police Department, Fire Department and Department of Public Works.

The school site is set back from the street and traffic patterns on site have been carefully designed to avoid any conflicts and safety concerns. No safety issues have been identified by any of the City Departments. In fact, the Police and Fire Department both support the Cashman School site as the location of the new AES over the current location on South Hampton Road.

The school has been designed to address current issues facing schools throughout the country and has provided multiple layers of protection for the school building and the students.

What will happen to the existing Amesbury Elementary School if the new school passes?

The Mayor will form a Committee to review the future use of the existing Amesbury Elementary School building.

How have you kept the public informed about this project?

All School Building Committee Meetings are public and posted in advance in accordance with Open Meeting Laws. We have had six Community Forums in which the public has been informed of the process. There is a Project Website where all School Building Committee documentation can be found and where all submittals to the Massachusetts School Building Authority are located.