

A Public Service Newsletter Dedicated to Keeping the Citizens of Wilbraham Informed About Important Matters.

CCW Directors Visit Proposed Model School

by Zigmund Pabich, CCW Board Member



Completed in 2005 for \$49 million, the Whitman-Hanson Regional High School is an example of a new standardized model school the MSBA has proposed for Minnechaug.

On August 8, 2008 the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) offered the Hampden-Wilbraham Regional School District (HWRSD) the opportunity to participate in a pilot program for the Model School building plan. Our superintendent and school committee graciously accepted the opportunity for the towns. Prior to this third option, the only two options were renovate the existing building, or build a new uniquely designed building.

On September 10, 2008 three board members of the Concerned Citizens of Wilbraham (CCW) visited the Whitman-Hanson

Regional High School in Hanson, MA to gain insight and perspective on the particular model being offered the HWRSD.

Robert Page, Allan Kinney, and myself were hosted by school principal Edward Lee on a two and a half hour guided tour of the three year old facility. Principal Lee stated that we were the first group from Wilbraham to visit. With a project construction cost of approximately \$49 million and designed to accommodate up to 1350 students, it appears to be a great model to adapt for our needs in Wilbraham and Hampden.

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Dollars and Sense

By Robert L. Page Jr., *Chairman CCW*

Wilbraham and Hampden are going to be required to make a difficult decision in the very near future about the possibility of building a new "Model School" Minnechaug.


We are all going to have to determine for ourselves just how much our individual household budgets can afford. Adding \$300 to \$400 as an annual expense would be difficult for some.

We are likely also going to be asked to dig down even deeper in our pockets to pay for a new swimming pool. The State will not be chipping in to help us pay for this pool. Early in 2006 we asked a couple of engineers to research how much a new pool would cost the taxpayers to build. The numbers were pretty hefty.

These engineers spoke with knowledgeable construction companies and it was determined that the building costs to house the pool were \$235 per square foot. The Dore & Whittier drawings from their feasibility study indicated that approximately 80 feet by 170 feet would be required which would include the dressing rooms..

These same knowledgeable construction companies indicated that the pool and tiled apron including all the pumps, filters and such, would cost approximately an additional \$300 per square foot for a 6 lane pool of 80 feet by 100 feet.

When you do the arithmetic it works out like this:

| | | |
|---------------------|--------------------|---|
| Pool Building..... | \$3,196,000 |  |
| Pool and Apron..... | \$2,400,000 | |
| TOTAL | \$5,596,000 | |

(Calculated on February 14, 2006)

Assuming 8% annually for inflation and increased cost of construction, these numbers rose to a projected \$7,048,000 by February 14, 2009. Wilbraham's share of that expense is in the neighborhood of \$5,286,000. That's some neighborhood!

Now we all know that a swimming pool is a very popular asset. It is also widely thought that a high school graduate should know how to swim when he leaves high school. Ours is a superior swimming team. Our town is very active in its use of the high school pool.

That extra 7 million dollars will increase the Model Minnechaug costs by about 25 percent.

However there are three very important facts: 1) We can

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Chairman Chapman Has the Right Idea

By Allan R. Kinney, *Vice Chairman of CCW*

According to an article in the August 14 issue of the Daily Republican newspaper, Regional School Committee Chairman Scott Chapman stated, "Construction of a pool and administration offices could be placed on the ballot as separate options".

He states that the school could be voted on separately as debt exclusions - the pool and Superintendents area. It must be clearly understood that the State (MSBA) does not contribute at all to the cost of the pool or the district offices. The towns of Wilbraham and Hampden must pay the full cost for these areas of construction.

The Regional School Committee should recognize that the pool and the administration offices should be voted on as separate issues.

The school committee may choose to add

several changes to the model school plans. I would suggest we listen to the following 3 quotations that I personally heard and wrote down at the last Mass. School Building Authority directors meeting: State Treasurer Timothy Cahill stated, "Towns and districts must be willing to give up or sacrifice things that do not impact on education." Katherine Craven Executive Secretary of the MSBA said, "We are concerned that the MSBA and the communities can both afford their proposed plans." She also warned, "The only time you can do what you want is to go off on your own."

When our Regional School Committee requests a town meeting and includes items the MSBA will not help fund, the voters must have options. If everything is piled into one debt exclusion, the school, the pool and the district offices, we may be running the risk of a no vote on the school. That is a very big risk!

The voters need to be given the option of a choice of three debt

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“If everything is piled into one debt exclusion - the School, the Pool and the District Offices, we may be running the risk of a no vote on the School. That is a very big risk!”

**Allan R. Kinney
Vice Chairman, Board of Directors,
Concerned Citizens of Wilbraham**

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| <p>Eagle Eye News is a bi-monthly public service newsletter published by Concerned Citizens of Wilbraham, a taxpayer watchdog group dedicated to keeping Wilbraham citizens informed about important matters. Articles may be submitted for consideration, but are printed at the sole discretion of the editor and may be edited if too long. All submissions must be signed by the author.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design/Graphics and Interim Editor: Matt Villamaino • Mail Address: CCW, 903 Stony Hill Rd., Wilbraham, MA 01095 • Phone 596-8719; Fax 596-8719 • www.ConcernedCitizensofWilbraham.org • email: Editor@ConcernedCitizensofWilbraham.org |
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Assuming a New High School...

What about the District School Offices?



As talks continue with the Massachusetts School Building Authority about the possibility of a new Model School Minnechaug, one of the questions we are going to have to answer is what is going to happen with School District Administrative Offices? The reason that the question comes up is that the State will not be helping us with the costs

of these offices. Hampden and Wilbraham are going to pay for them ourselves.

So, since we are going to be spending our own money, we should be asking, how much will it cost and where will we put it?

The Dore & Whittier feasibility study of December 2004 stated the need for 4010 square feet of office space for the superintendent, staff and district nurse. At a cost of \$235 per square foot, that comes to \$942,350 in 2004 dollars. Adjusting for inflation and increased construction costs, that burden grows easily to \$1,100,000 in 2008 dollars.

The next question is where do we put these offices? The costs

to our communities must be considered. Here are 5 options to consider. There could be more. Which do you think would be the best solution?

- 1) Incorporate district offices in the new Model School. This idea may be favored by the current administration.
- 2) The present location. Salvage the present location as a stand alone facility with renovations and retain the band and chorale rooms as expansion space.
- 3) The existing media center. Salvage the present location as a stand alone facility with renovations. The present media center has more than ample space.
- 4) Renovate and preserve the Grange Hall. This idea would be far less costly than new construction and would save a very historic building.
- 5) Lease office space on Boston road corridor. Instead of spending money on new construction or for renovation of existing older space. There could be significant cost savings in leasing surplus office space, especially in today's market.

All five suggestions have advantages and disadvantages. Wilbraham and Hampden taxpayers will be expected to pay for whatever solution is decided. We must begin to think about what will be the wisest course of action for our communities.

We ask that the readers help us by sending us your thoughts and suggestions for a solution to this question to 903 Stony Hill Road, Wilbraham or by emailing us at Editor@ConcernedCitizensOfWilbraham.org

Para-Professional and Clerical Workers' Union Contact Settled

On September 9, 2008 the School Committee announced that they had reached agreement with the Clerical Workers' Union and the Para-professional Workers' Union on a three year contract.

The contract awards a 2.75% raise in the first contract year. The second year awards a 3.00% raise. Finally the third year awards a 3.25% raise. Additionally the contract will require an additional \$5.00 increase in employee contribution toward health insurance per pay period.

If these raises are duplicated in the three remaining union

bargaining units, here are what these raises would amount to: 2.75% equals pay increases of \$605,000 in year one, \$678,150 in year two and \$757,420 in year three. These calculations are based on the school districts fiscal year 2007 payroll which was approximately \$22 million dollars. Bare in mind that these figures do not include step raises which would increase these amounts by 30% to 40%.

In these days of state and local revenue shortfalls, one can't help but wonder where the extra \$2,040,570 will be found.



Please feel free to invite your neighbors and friends to our next CCW Meeting. It's open to everyone and we encourage comments and feedback of all kind!
Visit us on the web: www.ConcernedCitizensOfWilbraham.org

Proposed Model School Visited from Page 1

We all were very favorably impressed. An adapted version of this model could prove to be what we are looking for in our towns. It is much more than a renovation of the existing regional school, and at significantly less cost than building a uniquely designed new building. Most importantly it is what has been offered by the MSBA as their recommendation to the towns.

Some of the specifics that support the CCW enthusiasm include:

1. A very attractive 235,000 square foot, 3 story structure, with the flexibility for about 75 to 80 classrooms and/or labs.
2. A 860 seat theater style auditorium.



An impressive view of the administrative lobby on the first floor.

3. A 20,000 square foot gymnasium with an elevated walking track.
4. A computer system with a "Smart Board" in *all* labs and classrooms.
5. Air conditioning in all areas except the gym.
6. Hallways lined with full size 10" wide student lockers.
7. Special "Green" features that allow them to heat, cool, and light the facility for the same cost as the old high school which was without air conditioning and 100,000 square feet smaller.
8. A modern state-of-the-art fire, security, and communications systems.
9. A cafeteria that can feed the occupants in three 24 minute lunch periods.
10. Building design that accommodates a 3 minute travel time between classes.



Building design accommodates a 3 minute travel time between classes.

As some examples of the innovativeness of the design, rain-water from a 20,000 gallon rainwater cistern is used to flush all toilets in the complex. Solar panels on the roof of the gymnasium provide 5% of their electrical needs. The boiler room contains 6 separate boilers and is centrally located saving \$250,000 in original plumbing construction costs. There is an



6 high tech, centrally located redundancy boilers saved \$250,000 in original plumbing expenses.



View of the library research desk. It took 24 months to build the Whitman-Hanson Regional High School.

abundance of natural lighting based on the building's compass orientation, skylights, and courtyard.

Principal Lee, when asked, emphasized the positive impact on the students and the faculty. All vacant teaching positions for the new school year were filled by July 1, 2008. Faculty meeting facilities are very helpful for department and teacher group planning. Students show greater pride in their school with very little vandalism occurring. Academic performance also appears to be impacted. 72% of the graduates in the old school matriculated to a college. In the latest year, 92% have done so.

As you realize, the MSBA does not participate in the cost of



Modern cafeteria can serve students in three 24 minute lunch periods.



Partial view of the 860 theater style seating performing arts auditorium.

***“Time is money!
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**Zigmond Pabich
Member, Board of Directors,
Concerned Citizens of Wilbraham**

certain items. The two towns decided not to add a swimming pool, but they did add space for the superintendent's administrative staff offices. These were fully paid for by the communities without state aide.

Summarizing; the Whitman-Hanson Model seems to be the right choice at the right time. We encourage the Minnechaug Building Committee to move forward promptly to not only gain approval of the two towns and minimize the escalating construction cost, but also secure state grant funding. To see more photographs of Whitman-Hanson Regional High School visit: www.extron.com/company/article.aspx?id=whitmanhanson

Time is money! It's time to take the MSBA recommendation, adapt the model plans, and gain final approval from the MSBA while state funds are still available.

SHARING GOOD SCHOOL DESIGNS

July 18, 2008, Reprinted with permission of Richard Lodge, Executive Editor of MetroWest Daily News, Framingham, MA

Every student deserves to attend school in a building that is structurally sound, adequately heated, well-equipped and big enough to handle essential functions. But educational excellence doesn't require the school be a unique piece of architectural art.

More to the point, Massachusetts can't afford to keep building schools that meet ever-higher standards of sumptuousness and cost. Outrage over the new Newton North High School - priced at nearly \$200 million and not yet completed - has spread far outside Newton and helped inspire new thinking about how schools are built and paid for in Massachusetts.

State Treasurer Tim Cahill, whose office has taken over the School Building Assistance program, has already begun rewriting the rules. He's made it clear the state will not subsidize "exorbitant" new schools. His office is meeting with local school officials in the early stages of the planning process, letting them know what he considers exorbitant, spelling out limits on state reimbursements and encouraging renovation of old schools over building new ones.

Now he's floating another good idea: standardized school designs he contends could cut building costs by as much as 30 percent.

Some architects don't like the idea, which should surprise no one. But architect and engineering costs, typically set at 10 percent of a school building's total price, are one factor in construction inflation. It's hard to calculate the cost impact of architects' egos - we know of one case from another state of a terribly designed new high school that, when seen from above, spelled out the architect's name - but the suspicion is widespread.

But while they may not like it, 21 architectural firms have expressed interest in submitting designs to Cahill's office, which will pick a few that seem most feasible for different sites. They will meet the state's extensive requirements for dimensions and facilities, but don't look for fieldhouses and swimming pools. The state won't pay anything for those frills, Cahill says.

While standardized designs are used in several states, New England's rolling hills and wetlands will make fitting the model schools on some sites difficult. But the firms whose designs win SBA approval will work with school districts to adapt them, and cost-conscious districts will factor the potential savings into their site selection process.

Standardized blueprints for public buildings is not a radical new idea: Ever notice how similar older Massachusetts National Guard Armories look? These small castles were

(Continued to Page 8)

You Don't Need To Learn In Taj Mahal

By Joann Fitzpatrick, August 23, 2008, Reprinted with permission of Terry Ryan, Managing Editor, The Patriot Ledger

Even with Whitman-Hanson as the model for new schools, communities should forget the frills

QUINCY — I have mixed feelings about Whitman-Hanson Regional High School. It's beautiful, of that there is no doubt. And by today's standards, six years after the plans were drawn and approved, it's something of a bargain at \$43 million.

If I lived in Whitman or Hanson, I would be filled with pride that the two towns came together to build a 21st-century school with all the technological bells and whistles necessary for today's academics while incorporating historical touches and creating a structure so pleasing to the eye.

But I don't live in either town and, like all Massachusetts taxpayers, I helped pay for a large share - 72 percent - of the cost of the school. So I look at it from a different perspective, especially now that the school is a model for future schools the state will help finance.

Selecting Whitman-Hanson as a model to be used in other towns - Norwood and Hampden-Wilbraham are among the first - is the latest effort by the state School Building Authority to control the cost of new school buildings across the state. The gravy train that had the state ladling out as much as 90 percent for new school construction ended with the creation of the authority, headed by Katherine Craven, who works for state Treasurer Tim Cahill.

Both Craven and Cahill are anomalies in the spendthrift world of Beacon Hill. Cahill is fighting on a number of fronts to hold back the avalanche of debt that Gov. Deval Patrick and the Legislature are accumulating. And Craven, once a House Ways and Means budget cruncher, is determined to convince local officials that good schools don't have to be grandiose. Cities and towns seeking grandeur will have to pay for it from their own accounts, not the state's.

Other states long ago adopted "prototype schools," proven designs that work well in most communities. State Inspector General Gregory Sullivan has been pushing this concept for years but with no result in the Legislature.

Opponents react with derisive phrases like "cookie-cutter schools" while pursuing visions of dream schools. However, fiscal reality dictates that those dreams be set aside. Public schools should be attractive but they should be built with the emphasis on learning above all.

There is much to recommend Whitman-Hanson as a model. It's a green school, designed to make maximum use of natural

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Please Read: This chart is intended to provide information that will aid taxpayers in determining what the possible impact will be on their property taxes if we build a new Model School Minnechaug. It is not intended to suggest what that final cost will be. It should be noted that column number one represents only the cost of the school itself. The cost of a pool or district offices have not been included as the state does not share in the cost of these amenities. Finally, it has not been determined yet if the state will share in the cost of the demolition of the old Minnechaug.

WHAT'S IT GOING TO COST ?

Estimated Financial Impact of Model School Minnechaug on the Residents of Wilbraham

or "What Does It Mean To Me"

(Revised Sept 2008)

| Total Estimated Cost of High School Only | Two Towns (3) share after State Contribution Deducted | Wilbraham's Share for Bonding <i>Not including Pool & District Offices</i> | TRADITIONAL 25 YEAR BONDING for WILBRAHAM | | |
|---|--|--|--|--|--|
| | | | Annual Tax Cost per Ave. House Year 1 | Annual Tax Cost per Ave. House Year 12 | Annual Tax Cost per Ave. House Year 25 |
| \$ 65,000,000 | \$ 26,825,500 | \$ 20,119,125 | \$ 342 | \$ 262 | \$ 169 |
| \$ 70,000,000 | \$ 28,889,000 | \$ 21,666,750 | \$ 368 | \$ 282 | \$ 182 |
| \$ 75,000,000 | \$ 30,952,500 | \$ 23,214,375 | \$ 395 | \$ 302 | \$ 195 |
| \$ 80,000,000 | \$ 33,016,000 | \$ 24,762,000 | \$ 421 | \$ 322 | \$ 208 |
| \$ 85,000,000 | \$ 35,079,500 | \$ 26,309,625 | \$ 447 | \$ 342 | \$ 221 |
| \$ 90,000,000 | \$ 37,143,000 | \$ 27,857,250 | \$ 474 | \$ 362 | \$ 234 |

1. Assuming Bonding rate of 4.5% and 25 Year Bond.

2. Average Home assessed value @ \$305,000.

3. Assuming State contribution @ 53.73% plus
5% Model School Bonus equals 58.73%.

Prepared by Concerned Citizens of Wilbraham

Tell Us What You Think?

We'd love to hear what you think about our newsletter and website. Call
Bob Page 596-8719 or email us: Editor@ConcernedCitizensOfWilbraham.com

Dollars and Cents from Page 2

resolve the Minnechaug question quickly using the “Model School” approach; 2) The construction costs for the voters are only going to increase in cost with every passing day; and 3) Adding the additional cost of a swimming pool will amount to an extra \$100 to \$150 per household.

Here is a thought: This might be a worthwhile long range project for the Community Preservation Committee.

Here is another thought: The present Minnechaug pool is owned by the School District. The pool is considered by many to be a community asset. If it is desired that our community have a pool then the community perhaps needs to decide whether or not to build one.



We will need to decide individually if we want to spend our tax dollars for a school or for a school and a pool.

Sharing Good School Designs from Page 4

functional for their time and remain attractive a century later. Off-the-shelf designs don't have to be ugly.

State Inspector General Gregory Sullivan, who has been pushing for standardized school designs for five years, predicts Cahill's plan could save hundreds of millions of dollars. With property taxes sky high and tax overrides an increasingly tough sell, those savings would be welcome.

Schedule of Upcoming Meetings

Concerned Citizens of Wilbraham at Wilbraham Middle Sch • Thurs • 7:00 pm

- October 16, 2008
- November 13, 2008
- December 18, 2008

Board of Selectmen at Town Hall, Selectmen's Meeting Room

- September 22, 2008, Monday, 6:45 pm
- September 30, 2008, Tuesday, 7:00 pm
- Oct. 6, 20, and 27, 2008, Mondays, 7:00 pm

Hampden-Wilbraham Regional School Committee • Tuesday • 7:00 pm

- September 30, 2008, Stony Hill Rd School
- October 14, 2008, Minnechaug
- October 28, 2008, Memorial School
- November 18 and 25, 2008, Minnechaug

Get Involved - Your Opinion Matters

Chapman Has It Right from Page 2

exclusion overrides:

1. An override for the school at a specific listed dollar cost to Wilbraham and Hampden.
2. An override for the pool at a specific listed dollar cost to Wilbraham and Hampden.
3. An override for the district offices at a specific listed dollar cost to Wilbraham and Hampden.

This method can give the town the strongest possible option for passing a debt exclusion override for a Model School Minnechaug at a big reduction in cost. It will leave in place the option for Hampden and Wilbraham to decide or not to decide on non-state reimbursable projects.

What do you think?

No Taj Mahal Needed from Page 4

light – using an interior courtyard, for example, and with solar panels on a portion of its roof. It also captures rainwater to flush toilets and urinals and has state-of-the-art sensors to minimize light use.

Whitman-Hanson began with an asset many schools do not enjoy: The towns owned a large tract of unoccupied land on which to build the school and adjacent athletic fields.

The good news, from a savings perspective, is that other towns may not have enough space to include all the amenities in the Whitman-Hanson design. And I question some of the finer things at Whitman-Hanson, even if the project came in under budget.

For example, the school has an 850-seat auditorium with the best sound equipment and a smaller lecture space with a balcony that can be used for teacher training and such.

I can't see the need for the smaller space at all; make it another classroom instead. And I question whether high schools should have large performance centers.

The gym, too, is expansive. Three different activities can happen there at the same time and on the floor above there is a walking track for use by the public before and after school. Making the school available to the community at large is a practice that should be replicated elsewhere but a smaller gym would do fine.

Cities and towns are slow to revise their thinking on school projects, which depend largely on sales tax revenue for the state's share. That revenue is now plunging, along with the state's economy. So even with Whitman-Hanson as a model, the goal must be to focus on the basics and forget the frills.

JoAnn Fitzpatrick is at joannftzptrck@yahoo.com.

Thank you to the many citizens who support Concerned Citizens of Wilbraham.