



READING PUBLIC SCHOOLS
ADMINISTRATION OFFICES

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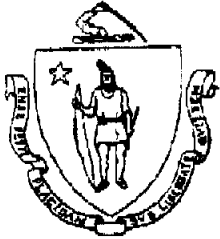
Dennis A. Richards
Associate Superintendent

TO: Reading School Committee
FROM: Dr. Harry K. Harutunian
DATE: February 21, 2003
TOPIC: Attached

Please find, attached for your information, a letter from Jeff Wulfson, Massachusetts Department of Education to Representative Brad Jones in response to questions submitted to him from Dr. Mandell.

If you have any questions, please call me.

CC: R. Graham



David P. Driscoll
Commissioner of Education

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts Department of Education

School Finance Office • 17 Pleasant Street, Malden, Massachusetts 02148 • (781) 338-3000

February 10, 2003

Hon. Bradley H. Jones, Jr., Minority Leader
House of Representatives
State House, Room 124
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Representative Jones:

You have requested that we reply to several questions submitted to you by a constituent regarding proposed school construction projects in the town of Reading.

1. Was SBA going to accept an existing order of conditions report from Flansburgh rather than a new feasibility study as is normally required?

I don't really understand this question. Flansburgh Associates are the current architects for the high school project, and they have submitted various documents with respect to existing conditions, building options, and cost estimates. In our opinion, these documents satisfy SBA program requirements for the feasibility study. Please keep in mind that the Commissioner has not yet made a final determination on the project.

2. Would the SBA accept schematics rather than a final design on the High School?

If a town wishes to defer the start of construction, it may defer the submission of the final plans and specifications. This is explained in detail in SBA administrative advisory 02-2, posted on the Department's website.

3. Following the older S&H submission, SBA told Reading to stay within the existing footprint of the building and rejected the C3 option. The new Flansburgh option 3 demolishes the entire 1953 building (184,000 sq. ft) and builds new space of approximately 120,000 sq. ft. How does this stay within the existing footprint? How does this follow the SBA recommendations?

The guidance given to the town was that the state would not support a larger building. In keeping with this recommendation, the currently proposed plans call for less space than currently exists.

4. What is the probability that funding reimbursement for the high school would start in the 10-12 year period given that the High School would be on the third list at a very low level. What is the probability that the elementary school projects #62 (new elementary) and #79 (Barrows) on the second list would be funding within 10-12 years. How many schools has SBA funded yearly over the last two years?

The length of time for projects on the waiting list to receive grants depends entirely on funding decisions in future years by the Legislature and Governor. These decisions, in turn, will

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depend in part on how quickly the Massachusetts economy recovers from the current downturn. We have no way of predicting these factors, so we will not provide guesses as to how long a particular project will have to wait for funding. The Board of Education awarded 19 new school construction grants in each of the last two years. The Department's website contains a listing of all school construction grants awarded for the past six years.

5. Regarding the Sunset Rock/Dividence Elementary School. The new enrollment projections as well as the actual enrollments show that the Flansburgh projections of 2440 students for the year 2007/2008 were in error. This is approximately 440 less students than predicted. We can now expect less students in 2007/08 (approximately 2000 students) than we had in 1997/98 when our schools had 2097 students. The enrollment information submitted to SBA by the architect were erroneous. Isn't Reading obligated to address misinformation they know is in the file. Specifically, the project was to address overcrowding which we now know doesn't exist. Would Reading be able to amend our application so that Barrows alone could proceed without losing our position on the list due to the marked decrease in projected enrollment?

The Sunset Rock Lane and Alice Barrows elementary school projects were approved by the Commissioner in 2000. By action of the Legislature (St. 2000, c.159, s.329) these and other projects were grandfathered onto the SBA waiting list, and the Department has no authority to unilaterally remove them.

Towns with approved projects on the waiting list may submit amended applications if changes to the project scope are needed to reflect changing needs. We have not received any such request from the town of Reading regarding these two projects. Whether such a request would be approved, and whether the remaining project or projects would be allowed to keep their place on the waiting list, would depend on the specifics of the proposal and detailed analysis by Department staff. In the absence of any details or supporting documentation, I cannot answer a hypothetical question as to whether we would approve such a request.

I hope you will find this information useful. If I can be of further assistance, please feel free to contact me at 781-338-6500 or by email at jwulfson@doe.mass.edu. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Jeff Wulfson
Associate Commissioner for
School Finance and District Support

cc: Harry K. Harutunian, Superintendent of Schools
Board of Selectmen, Town of Reading
Christine Lynch, Department of Education