

FAQ - Herrick Avenue Building Project

January 2019

We have compiled these questions based on feedback from Community Comments and General Inquiries. If you have a question not listed here please email us at jcrenshaw@mymtsd-vt.org

Q: What initiated this project?

A. Although the history is murky, discussions related to space concerns for the Herrick Avenue seemingly began around 2011 when 7th and 8th grade were moved from the MHS to this location. Over the last few years, with the addition of the PreK along with a significant changes in how we meet needs of students academically and social/emotionally, concerns of crowded and/or limited space have increased. To that end, the 2017/18 MTSD Board of Trustees made a decision to conduct a space study. The Weimann and Lamphere space study confirmed the concerns of the school and the community.

Q. What was the result of the Weimann and Lamphere Space Study?

A. The Space Study identified needs for both the Herrick Avenue Building and the MHS building, with the Herrick needs being significant. The most immediate need was for the addition of five learning spaces along with conference room space. The study also indicated longer term options if the need arises - for example, if the student population was to increase by 100 in any one age group.

As the community has already experienced, making decisions related to school expansions and/or new buildings is challenging due to factors of the unknown. We can't predict the future and thus rely on recent trends and the current situation to make decisions.

Q. What has the process been to date?

A. **September / October 2018** - Weimann and Lamphere conducted the space study. In **November**, they presented the findings to the MTSD Board of Trustees who invited the community to join in the conversation.

Meanwhile, the Board of Trustees and Administration engaged in a dialogue about the current state of all three schools and how to address the most pressing needs of each one. For MES, the focus was addressing the complex and diverse needs of students within limited space. This conversation for a new organizational structures and the challenges of space and quickly tied into the space study recommendations from Weimann and Lamphere.

In **late November**, the Board of Trustees directed Administration to come up with three or more options for considering short term and long term solutions- see below. They also wanted to know the current impact that the space challenges were having on student learning and school experience. Another invitation was sent to the community to please join the conversation.

In **December**, the Board of Trustees reviewed the collection of materials requested. Although it wanted to continue to understand and explore options for how to address the space challenges, they unanimously decided that the elementary school was at a tipping point and action for more space could no longer be put off.

In **January**, the Board of Trustees revisited the options, decided it was time to make a decision and would do so in a **Warned Special Meeting to be held on Thursday, January 24th @ 6:00 pm in MES Library.**

Q. Why do we need this expansion?

A. Several factors are in play. First, MES was reconfigured over the summer to add two classrooms without more physical space - 1 in PreK and 1 in grade 2. Our enrollment numbers remain steady; however, the needs of our students continue to change and grow.

- Currently there is no space for our STEM learning (science, technology, engineering and math) via a Maker Space. This is an opportunity students enjoy, it fosters an interest in STEM careers and better prepares students for courses in middle and high school.
- Also, many of our students receive support services through Special Education or 504 as required by law. The lack of space is hindering staff's ability to fulfill the needs of all students' required services.
- Due to changes in societal trends, we have many students who begin school unprepared for a structured learning experience. These students are not able to navigate routines, they have difficulty interacting with their peers, and they are generally overwhelmed by academic engagement. These children need transition spaces and other support services to foster resiliency and skill development.

Q: What are the limitations to the Herrick Avenue building:

1. There is no available space to house our Maker Space - there is a designated room; however, it can not be set up and used regularly as it is often used to accommodate other needs listed below.
2. Currently 4 speech language pathologists and 3 special educators share a room. This creates logistical challenges for providing individual and small group services, conducting confidential business on the phone or in person with families, or simply meeting federally required documentation deadlines.
3. Many of our students present with complex learning profiles and require access to a continuum of learning environments. We only have space for 1 therapeutic classroom for students PreK-5. We could serve students better if we had 1 for PreK-2 students and 1 for students 3-5.
4. Along these same lines, there is limited space in our school that provides regulation space for students. In a building this size, it can be challenging to move a dysregulated student the distance from the classroom to the behavior regulation space.
5. The English Language Learner teacher does not have a classroom space to serve our increasing English Language Learner population. Currently, she is housed in a storage room off the library without telephone access.
6. We do not have adequate testing rooms - quiet spaces for a variety of academic and social / emotional assessments to take place. The result is that office and/or small classroom spaces are used and during this time, displacing students who receive services in those spaces and interfering with services.
7. We only have one nurse's office and our youngest students have the greatest distance to travel to go to the nurse. A second nurse's station would shorten visits.

Q. What short and long term solutions did Administration consider?

A. Note that all solutions were considered, meaning they were discussed and researched in terms of feasibility

- Suggestions emailed or raised by stakeholders - moving grade 8 to the high school; moving pre-school to the high school and creating an Early Childhood Certificate Program; and building a new PreK-2 school on the Bradley Street property.
- Building a new District Office on Bradley Street and refitting the current DO for additional classrooms
- Moving the District Office (DO) into a rental space and refitting the current DO for additional classrooms and conference space
- Moving the District Office into a temporary trailer while building the new DO on Bradley Street and refitting the current DO for additional classrooms
- Utilizing classroom trailers temporarily until a more long term solution can be decided.
- Purchasing a highgrade, permanent modular for the District Office and putting it on Bradley Street and refitting the current DO for additional classrooms and conference rooms.

Q. Why don't we move the 7th and/or 8th graders back to the HS?

- A. Simply, for the same reasons the District decided to move the students to Herrick Ave, including
1. Just as it was then, to accommodate this move, mobile space would be required. Currently, the waiting list for mobile classrooms is 12-18 months.
 2. Curriculum and programming is clustered 6-8, so separating students would interrupt the vertical coherence we are trying to create in academic planning and delivery.
 3. The Unified Arts at Herrick Street is 5-8. Not only is there no space at MHS to house MS Unified Arts' teachers, splitting these teachers between buildings would negatively impact access for all students.
 4. There is only 1 gym at MHS so locker rooms along with school bathrooms would be shared for students ages 12-18. This is a range that comes with both developmental and legal concerns.
 5. Programs and services have been added to MHS since the departure of grades 7&8 so previously used MS team classrooms are no longer available.
 6. Researched best practices in education cluster students for social, academic and physical development grades 5-8 and 9-12.

Q. Why aren't we considering using modular classrooms for Herrick Avenue?

A. Temporary modular classrooms were presented to the Board but the waitlist for classroom specific mobile units is 12-18 months. The Board has tried to weigh all options to ensure the needs of our students are met while remaining fiscally responsible. The utilization of trailer classrooms would have helped fulfill the immediate need but as a temporary fix. The need for additional space would remain and could create more significant and costly problems the longer it remains unsolved.

Q. Why aren't we considering building a new elementary or middle school?

A. The option of building a new elementary school was discussed both at the administrative and board meetings, but building a new school is an expensive proposition which would take 3-5 years from planning to opening the doors. It would also require additional staffing in areas like food service, administrative assistants, custodial and service providers. The Board decided that this was not a fiscally responsible option. Furthermore, at this time, there is no reliable evidence to demonstrate an increase in student population to justify a new building.

Q: Did the District consider partnering with Milton Town on an expansion of the Milton Town Office to house the Milton Town School District offices?

A. District Administration did have a conversation with the Milton Town Manager and their Manager of Finance. With a focus on other projects, including a priority capital project for Milton's Public Works, expansion of the Milton Town Office has not been an area of consideration. An opportunity to partner on future projects would certainly be welcomed, but this would not be able to begin for a couple of years. Undoubtedly, there are many factors involved and the discussion and planning would take time. The scope of work to build would be within the same range as the current estimate for a new building (or more if time and materials increase during the planning stages) plus any additional costs for blueprints and the relocation of an existing parking lot.

Q: Why is the relocation of District Office and refitting it for classrooms the plan the Board of Trustees is considering:

A. Foremost, there is an immediate need. To do nothing, for even another year, would be detrimental to student learning. The Board of Trustees believes the most efficient and cost effective remedy is to move the District Office space out of the Herrick Avenue building and refit that portion of the building with classroom and other flexible learning spaces. Office space is significantly less expensive to rent in terms of a mobile space and/or to build compared to mobile classrooms or a new school. Office modules are also readily available and the renovation could be done in time for school to begin next year. Also this plan allows for variance in both mobile and permanent structures, short and long term planning and funding. For example, we could decide to rent a temporary mobile office and build a new office building or we could simply buy a permanent mobile office.

Q. How will the District pay for the expansion?

A. We could use the Capital Repair Replacement Reserve Fund for the modular office eliminating any debt service - no borrowing for this portion of the project. We could then feasibly amortize the renovation of the Herrick building using a long term debt service between 20-30 years. Interest rates are favorable for long term debt, minimizing the burden by spreading it out over time. Another option is the District could go to bond for the whole project.

Q. What will the project cost?

A. The estimated cost of the project began with the quote from the Weinmann & Lamphere study. Since then we have collected additional estimates and are waiting for a more due this week. Once all the estimates are in hand, the various project options will be estimated and shared with the Board of Trustees at the January 26th meeting. Along with these estimates will be estimated tax rate impact.