



# Whittier Regional Vocational Technical High School

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Maureen Lynch  
Superintendent

December 8, 2023

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TOWN MANAGER  
TOWN OF WEST NEWBURY

Town of West Newbury Selectboard  
381 Main Street  
West Newbury, MA 01985

Dear West Newbury Selectboard,

Thank you for your letter dated November 29, 2023. We truly do appreciate the tone and constructive feedback you have provided.

The Whittier Tech District has been providing information to the District's 11 communities throughout the project. On November 18, 2022, the District met with Town Managers and Mayors to discuss the School Building Committee's options for building new, addition/renovation, or a code upgrade. At that time, the District cost for a new building was anticipated to be \$296 million. It is now anticipated to be \$267 million. Since that November meeting, there have been 18 SBC meetings that were posted and were open to the public. It would have been our hope that if there were concerns after that meeting, attending future SBC meetings would have been crucial and a priority.

You stated in your letter that the municipal officials and taxpayers want to know what other designs were considered, why they were not chosen, and the cost impact. This information is available to everyone on the School Building Project website: [www.buildingthefutureofwhittier.org](http://www.buildingthefutureofwhittier.org). More specifically, for information on how the SBC chose the new building option, please see the SBC presentations on September 13, 2022, September 27, 2022, October 11, 2022, January 24, 2023, February 14, 2023, and February 17, 2023.

In reviewing the March 13, 2023, meeting we had at the West Newbury Selectboard, we did share the anticipated cost of a new building at \$425 million with an anticipated cost after MSBA reimbursement of \$289 million. As of today, the overall cost of the proposed building after completion of the Schematic Design is \$444.6 million, and the district-wide cost has decreased to \$267.5 million.

The District has sent out monthly newsletters informing Selectmen, Town Managers, Finance Boards, and Mayors of updates on the school building project. We also met with Finance

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Directors and Town Managers on April 3rd and 4th of 2023 to further discuss the building project as well as the school's FY 24 budget.

Since the end of September, when Schematic Design was completed, the District has been meeting with City Councils and Select boards to review the project. Until Schematic Design was complete, we did not have the cost of the project, renderings, and a final reimbursement rate. It is clear from some of our city and town meetings that most have projects in their own municipality that need attention. The District does understand this, but we also recognize that we cannot allow Whittier Tech's Building to fail.

The MSBA process is very competitive, and Whittier Tech was deemed one of the neediest schools in the state. If this vote fails, the District will not receive the \$161.6 million MSBA grant and will have to move forward with imminent repairs and a code upgrade without any state reimbursement.

I would like to clarify a statement you made in your letter in which you stated, "The fact that the MSBA will only provide funding for a new school, thereby reducing the cost to region members, is evidence that renovation is not a desirable choice." Please note the reason the MSBA may not participate in a code or renovation option for a school project is based on whether a code or renovation option meets and delivers on the education plan developed and approved for the project.

The District will continue to work with our legislative delegation and look at ways to reduce the costs. Also, changing the Regional Agreement could take many years to complete, and it would require all municipalities to agree to any changes.

It is unfortunate that the Mayor of Newburyport and the Mayor of Amesbury have come out against the project. They have organized meetings without Whittier Tech or a representative from Haverhill in attendance. If some of our Municipal Leaders truly want to work together and seek clarification on the project, wouldn't the district be invited along with the city that will pay the largest district share? It is clear that these meetings are not about moving the project forward. It is unfortunate because we have always had a great working relationship with all of our cities and towns, and we hope that we can work together as we move forward.



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To be clear, we absolutely must do something at Whittier Tech. We do not have alternative space if the building fails. The District has done the work and has a \$161.6 million grant to help with the cost, plus state and federal rebates. If the vote fails, we will be forced to fix the building on our own without any reimbursement from the state, and our estimates are that it will cost more than a new building.

I am truly grateful for your continued support and willingness to provide alternatives to move the project forward.

As I have stated to all the community members, I am happy to answer any questions on the project that will help educate the voters in the communities. There is another information session and tour of the school on January 13th at 9:00 a.m. I encourage everyone to attend.

Sincerely,



Maureen Lynch  
Superintendent

Cc: Michael McGurl, MSBA