

## Special Town Meeting, Monday, October 20, 9:00 pm - Article 3 Update

This is an Addendum to the commentary on Article 3 that appears on pages 13-15 of the Advisory Committee Report to the Special Town Meeting scheduled for Monday, October 20 at 9:00 pm. This Article relates to the provision of additional temporary classroom space at Wellesley High School to meet enrollment and other needs until the new high school is ready for occupancy. There have been several changes since the Advisory Committee submitted its initial report on this Article. The School Committee has voted to seek funding for just the first phase of the total project outlined in the earlier report, i.e., the conversion of the little theater/lecture hall into five new academic classrooms. Also included are modifications to the cafeteria's ground floor and mezzanine spaces to accommodate projected student enrollment growth while maintaining the existing 3-shift lunch service. Cost estimates have been refined and the proposed budget has been approved by the Permanent Building Committee (on October 9). Finally, the Board of Selectmen, in consultation with the Town's Executive Director, has determined that Free Cash, rather than short-term borrowing, is the appropriate source of funds for this scaled-back project for interior space conversions.

The School Committee's goal is to initiate design, permitting, and other pre-construction work as soon as possible, with construction activities expected to begin in mid-May. The objective is to complete all work prior to the start of the school year in September 2009.

### Cost Estimates

The proposed budget is as follows:

Construction Costs (including one year of escalation at 5%)	\$699,531
Architectural, Engineering & Other Professional Services (Design & Construction)	123,000
Furniture, Fixtures, & Equipment	76,000
Other Costs, including Contingency (10% of construction costs), Permitting, etc.	<u>86,400</u>
<b>Total Cost</b>	<b><u>\$984,931</u></b>

Roughly 93% of the construction cost budget is for the interior space conversions for new academic classrooms; \$50,000 (around 7%) is for the cafeteria modifications.

The all-in cost per classroom for this project is significantly higher than for the project approved at the 2008 Annual Town Meeting and completed this past summer, for four classrooms at a total cost of \$236,000. These recently-completed conversions were simple reconfigurations of several existing spaces. The per-classroom cost for the little theater/lecture hall conversion is also higher than projected for future space conversions that are currently still anticipated, but not requested at this time. As these future conversions, which could be brought to subsequent a Town Meeting for approval on an "if needed/as needed" basis, would have greater impact on the educational program at the high school, they are seen as less desirable.

The proposal before the Special Town Meeting is to fund this next phase of interior space conversions from the Town's Free Cash reserves, thus avoiding the need to enter into short-term borrowing. Advisory notes that the School Department turned back to the Town's Free Cash a total of \$1.3 million of un-

expended funds at the end of the 2008 Fiscal Year, a figure which includes the entire \$530,318 Special Appropriation approved at the 2008 Annual Town Meeting.

### **Advisory Observations**

The School Department and School Committee have recognized for quite some time the need for additional, temporary classroom space at the existing high school to meet projected enrollment growth and other needs. They have moved deliberately in planning for these needs, adding four new classrooms this past summer at relatively low cost, but waiting for greater clarity on the specifics of the high school project to propose these additional classrooms through interior space conversions. Most members of Advisory were supportive of the decision to fund the classroom conversions out of Free Cash. However, given the very challenging economic and financial environment, including the likelihood of very tight capital and operating budgets, some members of Advisory have questioned the advisability of using Free Cash at this time; indeed, if fewer teachers and larger class sizes are a potential outcome of the current financial challenges, then the pressure for additional classroom space may be reduced. Alternatively, members of the School Committee and many in the community have expressed concern that funds for additional classroom conversions - that are still very likely to be needed in the future - may be even more difficult to obtain at a later date. They would have preferred that sufficient funds for the entire project (for up to ten classrooms) be appropriated now. On balance, Advisory members felt that moving ahead with what might be best described as a prudent compromise seemed appropriate.

**Advisory recommends favorable action, 14 to 0.**