



School Building Committee
Meeting Packet
September 4, 2024



Questions from the May Forums & Site Selection Survey - August 2024

Community members have been asking the SBC many questions related to renovating or replacing Dale. This handout is one way to send out clear information to the entire community.

Have you chosen a location?

The SBC held 4 forums in May focused on site selection, and conducted a town wide survey to determine the future site of an elementary school building project. Over 1,100 community members responded to the survey. The data collected indicates that a majority of community members support The Dale Street location for the future building project. To view the survey data please visit our [town website](#). The SBC will vote on the future site location at their October meeting.

Didn't the prior school building proposal (Fall 2021) already determine the site location?

NO. The prior 2021 proposal to build a new school on the Wheelock property failed. In a 2023 survey conducted by the current SBC, voters identified many reasons for voting no: costs, facility size, location, enrollment numbers, traffic concerns, environmental concerns, process concerns, etc. The new SBC has been systematically taking each reason for the prior no vote and examining/studying voters' concerns so we can create a future proposal that the community will support. Determining a location that the majority of the community supports was one (no) factor that needed examination. We also conducted a new enrollment study in March 2024.

Why can't we use the Hospital land for a new school?

The Town of Medfield voted at the [May 2022 Town Meeting](#) to sell part of the Medfield State Hospital property to the Trinity Financial Company. Trinity plans to do an historic rehab of the buildings, add space to some buildings, and create approximately 330 apartments. The Town also leased the chapel and one additional building to [Bellforge](#). The SBC also considered other parcels of land that potentially had space for a school building, but determined that only the Dale Street and Wheelock properties were viable.

What is the MSBA process and what is the reimbursement for Medfield?

The MSBA (Massachusetts School Building Authority) is a government authority that determines which town(s) in Massachusetts will get a reimbursement for renovating, building, or replacing a school. The MSBA supports both new school construction projects as well as major repairs and renovations of existing buildings. The amount of reimbursement depends on many factors. For Medfield, our reimbursement for eligible expenses would possibly result in \$20-\$25 million on a \$90 million dollar project. Thus the Town would still be responsible for \$60-\$70 million. The SBC has a MSBA explanation handout on our website [MSBA Info Sheet](#).

Does the MSBA require towns to build a school in a particular design?

No. The MSBA has numerous suggestions to help in the design of a quality elementary school. The MSBA does have a few requirements for elementary schools such as classrooms that must be at least 900 square feet in size and have two sinks, (1) of which must be handicap accessible. As with any building project, there are many ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) requirements to ensure a safe environment that is suitable for all people. All new buildings also have to meet local and state code requirements.

When will we hear from the MSBA?

December 2024. We did not make the list of towns invited into the program for December 2023.

What happens if we do not get accepted into the MSBA program in December 2024?

It is possible for any town to undertake a school project without MSBA support, however the cost would be entirely funded by the taxpayers without support from the Commonwealth. If we do NOT get accepted into the MSBA program in December 2024, the SBC will immediately need to evaluate next steps including engaging the town in the possibility of self-funding a building project.

Why not build a new Park & Rec facility when you build a school?

The SBC has a specific charge from the Town of Medfield to find a solution for the deteriorating conditions at the Dale Street School. The SBC was formed using the Medfield School Building Committee Bylaw. The Bylaw and/or the Town charge does NOT include the Park & Rec facility. The Select Board has discussed the need for an updated Park & Rec facility.

Can voting for a future proposal be done online or be open all day?

There are TWO parts to passing a building project in Medfield. Part (1) $\frac{2}{3}$ of the Town Meeting attendants must vote YES, Part (2) There must also be a ballot vote (open all day) during which a majority of people who go vote, vote YES.

With regard to the Town Meeting process, Massachusetts Law requires all voting to take place in person, during the meeting, when a quorum is present. For additional information, please see the separate communication from our Town Moderator that provides a detailed explanation of Town Meeting procedures.

Have you done any work to understand the expected costs of a new building?

The Warrant Committee has performed some preliminary analysis to understand expected future costs of a project based on current trends of other school construction projects throughout the Commonwealth as well as the current interest rate environment. You can watch the Warrant Committee's presentation to the School Building Committee at <https://tinyurl.com/Newdaleschool>.

How does the School Building Committee communicate findings?

The SBC is using their website, FB page, handouts, meetings, surveys, and information sessions to communicate as much as possible. We also welcome your participation at any of our School Building Committee meetings. You can register for alerts by signing up for School Building Committee updates under the "Notify Me" section at the bottom of the town homepage at town.medfield.net. You can reach the committee by emailing SBC@medfield.net. Note that due to Massachusetts Open Meeting Law requirements, questions may need to be addressed in the next SBC meeting. You can find the list of members on the SBC website

Dear Neighbor,

I understand from the SBC that there have been a number of questions during the recent public forums relating to Town Meeting. I have addressed three of those questions below, but would welcome the opportunity to discuss these and others in more detail. I also highly recommend Secretary Galvin's Guide to Town Meetings for more information:

https://www.sec.state.ma.us/divisions/cis/download/Guide_to_Town_Meetings.pdf

And if you want to go right to the source, links to state and Town laws on Town Meeting are below:

<https://malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws/PartI/TitleVII/Chapter39>

<https://ecode360.com/27373239>

<https://ecode360.com/27373423#27373423>

1. Can I zoom from home and cast a vote during a Town Meeting? Other towns allow this, why not Medfield?

Medfield is an Open Town Meeting government, which is the most common form of government in Massachusetts, being utilized by 260 towns. In Open Town Meeting, every voter in a town may attend and vote on legislation. 32 towns have adopted Representative Town Meeting government, where the voters elect a certain number of Town Meeting Members at the ballot. Those elected Members then vote for legislation at Town Meeting on behalf of the rest of the town.

Under state law, Open Town Meeting "shall be held within the geographic limits of the town unless a special law, charter or by-law provides otherwise[.]" There is no provision in MA allowing for virtual voting in an Open Town Meeting government.

In 2020, the Massachusetts Legislature passed An Act Relative to Municipal Governance During the COVID-19 Emergency. As part of this Act, towns with a Representative Town Meeting government are allowed to hold virtual Town Meeting. This Act does not apply to Open Town Meeting. My understanding is that most Representative Town Meeting towns do not use this virtual option because of the logistical challenges. The towns that do exercise the virtual option will only be able to do so through March 2025, unless the Act is further extended.

2. Why can't we bring our children to a Town Meeting?

Town By-Law Chapter 70, Section 70-7 provides that “[a]ny resident of the Town over 15 and under 18 years of age may attend a Town Meeting, provided that, in the sole discretion of the Moderator, there is sufficient room for such persons in addition to all registered voters attending said meeting.” I believe the purpose of the restriction is that Town Meeting is limited to voters, with certain exceptions for those individuals necessary to conduct Town business. The amendment allowing children between 15-18 to attend was added in 1982 for educational purposes.

There have been childcare accommodations at previous Town Meetings. For example, during 2021 Special Town Meeting the School Committee offered childcare services, and an outside voting area was established where children were allowed to attend with their parents (note that outdoor voting is not always an option). I am always happy to work with anyone to craft common-sense solutions to make sure everyone that wants to attend Town Meeting can do so.

3. Why can't we hold a Town Meeting, but then have the vote be the next day by ballot?

The general procedures for Open Town Meeting are governed by MA statute. Medfield, like other Towns, has additional regulations in its Charter and By-Laws. Under all applicable statutes and regulations, votes are required to be taken during Town Meeting. While in certain circumstances votes may be taken by secret ballot, those ballots still must occur at and during Town Meeting. While we take votes at Town Meeting, those votes are legislative in nature – it is fundamentally different than casting a ballot in an election.

As always, please email or call me any time with questions.

Email: medfieldtownmoderator@medfield.net

Cell: 617-908-5487

Sincerely,

Mike Pastore