

# BLIND BROOK-RYE PUBLIC SCHOOLS



## PROPOSED FACILITIES IMPROVEMENT PLAN

### Frequently Asked Questions with Answers

**1. Why are we proposing a renovation of this scope in the District?**

*The District's five-year capital facilities plan provides a systematic approach to establishing the capital needs of the District and prioritizing those needs in this plan. The health and safety of Blind Brook's school children is the Board of Education's highest priority. The proposed works at the BMP Ridge Street School includes infrastructure upgrades and renovation of classrooms and lavatories and are prominently highlighted in this plan. The work also includes improvements to the ventilation systems, security enhancements for the main entrance and main office, the separation of bus and parent drop-off locations, new fire alarm systems, and an updated kitchen and cafeteria. The District Facilities Committee also has recommended the replacement of the Butler building (aka Kindergarten & First Grade wing). It is 56 years old and in need of major work.*

**2. How were the proposed projects developed?**

*The Board directed the Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent for Finance and Facilities, and an advisory committee to develop a plan to identify what they believed is the District's most essential needs. In April 2014, the Facilities Committee began meeting and reviewing the District's facilities. Demographic studies were conducted and used in conjunction with enrollment data and assessments of physical conditions. Together with the District's architect, each school was carefully inspected to identify recommendations for what were considered to be the most essential capital improvements, and health and safety issues. This process resulted in the 2016 Five-Year Capital Facilities Plan which was accepted by the Board in December 2015.*

**3. What is the "Butler Building?"**

*The Butler Building is the wing of BMPRSS that currently contains the Kindergarten/First Grade classrooms and cafeteria. It was constructed in 1961-62. "Butler Buildings" are pre-engineered metal buildings often used for commercial, manufacturing, and warehousing. The Butler Manufacturing Company has been in business since 1901. In 1940, they were among the first to incorporate rigid frame steel construction into pre-engineered buildings.*

**4. What is the lifespan of a “Butler Building”?**

*The District’s consultants have advised the District that pre-engineered metal buildings typically have an average lifespan of 20-30 years. The BMRSS Butler Building is now 56 years old.*

**5. Why is there a proposal to tear down the “Butler Building” at BMRSS and not just renovate the “Butler Building”?**

*The District’s study indicates that the existing cafeteria, kitchen, and Kindergarten/First Grade classrooms are undersized based on current State Education Department (SED) standards. There is not space in the Butler Building to increase the size of these areas. In addition, the District has been advised that the building and classrooms would have to be significantly changed and brought up to code to meet current standards for early education classrooms. The cost of performing these renovations would be significant when compared to the value of the building. After expending this money, the District still would be left with a building that is 56 years old.*

**6. Why is there so much work proposed on the BMRSS infrastructure?**

*Many of the existing systems at the BMRSS have not been upgraded in decades, and they are increasingly difficult to repair and maintain. It also is difficult to integrate older systems and infrastructure with new hardware and technology, The District’s consultants have advised the District that some items (e.g. electrical panels, fire alarms) are reaching the end of their useful life, and could potentially fail if not replaced. The District’s consultants also have advised that other items no longer meet current standards or code, and would need to be upgraded or replaced in order to obtain approval for the entire project from SED.*

**7. Why is the District proposing to redesign and redirect the bus traffic on BMRSS campus?**

*The current student drop-off at the BMRSS was identified as a concern during an independent safety, security and emergency management assessment performed by Altaris Consulting Group, LLC in April 2013. A similar recommendation was made by Adler Consulting in September 2009.*

*These consultants have advised the District that bus drop-off zones should be sterile zones free of parent drop-offs and other traffic. The consultants observed numerous incidents of students walking between buses as well as buses attempting to pull away from curb side and having “close calls” with other vehicular traffic. Both consultants recommended that separate bus and/or parent drop-off zones be established so buses do not come in contact with other vehicular traffic and student pedestrians are not placed at risk of harm.*

**8. What will be the effect of this project on teaching and learning?**

*This project will allow the elementary school to have a dedicated performance space which will be separate from other programs or activities. We will have rooms that can expand or shrink depending on program needs. For example, there would be multiple spaces for small groups that could be used for further enrichment and remedial pull-out programs. There would also be a “Makerspace” for teachers to bring their classes to extend hands-on learning experiences at the elementary school, and a more extensive “Fabrication Lab” at the MS/HS. The elementary school would also have an “outdoor classroom” in an enclosed space not accessible to the public where teachers can bring their classrooms for additional learning (i.e.: greenhouse, garden, butterfly sanctuary.)*

**9. Why is a new Air Conditioning and Ventilation system proposed at the BMPRSS?**

*There is currently no central air conditioning system in the BMPRSS building. Further, the Library Wing and old gym have no ventilation system. The District's consultants have advised that a ventilation system is required to comply with the SED building requirements. Further, in the warmer months these areas get extremely hot and uncomfortable.*

**10. What is a “cafetorium” and how does it work?**

*A “cafetorium” functions as a cafeteria during meal times, but can be converted into a fully operational auditorium or a large multipurpose area when the cafeteria is closed. Retractable theater seats (not bleacher seating) will be built into one wall with a full permanent stage on the opposite side of the room. During events and other school activities, lunch tables would be collapsed and rolled into the storage space that will be provided.*

**11. Why are we proposing a “cafetorium” and not just a renovated cafeteria?**

*The current gymnasium (old gym) does not have fixed seating, and the stage is old and underutilized. By incorporating an auditorium into the construction of the new cafeteria, we will have an opportunity to install the new wiring, lighting, sound equipment, and seating without any disruption to the school's use of the gymnasium. The seating capacity of the new cafetorium will be much greater than a renovated old gym. The District's consultants advise that it is more cost effective to build these new features into the cafeteria than to renovate the existing space.*

**12. What are the features of a “cafetorium” in the District?**

*The new cafetorium would be a cafeteria which would also serve as a multi-purpose auditorium that could host large meetings of up to 350 persons. The multi-functional space will accommodate new types of student activities that are not possible due to the current space limitations. The new cafetorium will have central air-conditioning, an elevated stage, a large dining area, increased food preparation and warming areas, an office, bathrooms, electrical room, and increased storage areas.*

**13. What is STEAM?**

*STEAM is an educational approach to learning that uses Science, Technology, Engineering, the Arts and Mathematics as access points for guiding student inquiry, dialogue, and critical thinking. The goal of STEAM is to create students who take thoughtful risks, engage in experiential learning, persist in problem-solving, embrace collaboration, and work through the creative process. STEAM also is intended to promote a sense of 21<sup>st</sup>-century learning, innovation, and creativity among our teacher and students.*

**14. What are a “Makerspace” and a “Fab Lab” and how will these impact our District?**

*A “Makerspace” or “Fab Lab” provides a space for students to engage in hands-on, creative experiences to design, experiment, build and invent. It is not solely a science lab, woodshop, computer lab or art room, but it may contain elements found in all of these familiar spaces. Therefore, it would be designed to accommodate a wide range of activities, tools and materials. The “makerspace” at the elementary school will provide an additional space for teachers to bring children in a space where all the learning tools are made available and can be shared. Since projects can take time, a teacher will be able to “book” the Makerspace for a certain time period and not have to worry about setting up or cleaning up the space before the next group arrives. Dedicated spaces such as these are intended to allow for a greater range of projects, and for more time to be allotted to actual teaching and learning.*

**15. Does the proposed project provide for classroom space to accommodate any additional families who may move into the community as a result of new housing?**

*Yes. There are “swing spaces” that are included in the plan in case rooms need to be converted from one type of space to another. The current eight-classroom wing (i.e. Butler Building) would be replaced with a ten-classroom structure that is integrated into the existing school wings.*

**16. Why is there a proposal for a “STEAM Bar” (newly created art, music, and STEAM classrooms?)**

*Noise from the existing music room can be heard in nearby classrooms. The District’s consultants advise that the music room would need to be fully rebuilt to provide sound insulation that would prevent noise from travelling outside of the music room to other classrooms. Rather than rebuilding this room, the project proposes moving the music room to the portion of the school that is proposed to be heavily renovated and to use the current music room as regular classroom space. Since the new Makerspace and music room can then be grouped together, there is an opportunity to move the art room to this location as well, creating a “STEAM Bar” that physically connects the main components of the STEAM curriculum. As a result, it will be possible for the STEAM teachers to work together on interdisciplinary projects with the students.*

**17. Why is asbestos abatement proposed? Does the school have asbestos right now?**

*The Butler wing, 1950 wing and the 1955 wing all have floor tiles that contain asbestos material. In other areas there is asbestos wrapping on pipes and fittings. Also, acoustic ceiling tiles commonly used asbestos binder in the glue attaching the tiles to the ceiling. The existing condition is not dangerous as the asbestos is in non-friable condition, but if the Butler Building is excavated and flooring is replaced, the asbestos would need to be abated in accordance with federal and state laws.*

**18. Why is it proposed to renovate the BMRSS Library?**

*Updating the current library space has been a topic of discussion since 2012 when groups of parents, teachers, and administrators assembled to discuss plans for a “facelift.” A presentation was made at a Blind Brook Board of Education Meeting in 2014. The first phase of the facelift was done in 2015 through the help of donations from a previous BBEP (Blind Brook Enrichment Program) fundraiser in which we were able to purchase new furniture and technology. The proposed renovation is intended to provide for increased flexibility.*

*In anticipation of the currently proposed project, the second phase of the “facelift” was placed on hold. The second phase would have allowed for the internal space to be redesigned for multiple uses. Libraries nowadays often are converted into “Library Media Centers” which enable a computer lab and a library to be joined together since so much research is done via technology.*

*The proposed renovation would allow for multiple classes at a time to use the space for various reasons. The space in our current library only accommodates one class at a time to visit. Currently, classes are scheduled to attend the library as a special class once a week. When the librarian is engaged with one class, it is impossible to have another teacher bring his/her class to the library to work on a research project because of the noise that would be created from both classes.*

*In addition, any layout changes to the current configuration would require the flooring and carpeting to be replaced. That work requires not just removal of the carpet, but also asbestos abatement costs*

associated with removal of the tiles which lay underneath the carpet. Once the carpet is removed, a new room layout would be able to be designed. The District's consultants have advised that the cost of redesigning and modifying multiple spaces simultaneously often is less expensive than performing that work in separate and distinct projects.

**19. Why is there so much space dedicated to an inner courtyard?**

The inner courtyard provides a highly visible and easily accessible location for the school's various outdoor instructional programs, including the Kindergarten Garden, the Rain Garden, the Greenhouse, and the Butterfly Garden. This also creates instructional spaces large enough for groups of several classes or entire grades to come together for group learning, which the school does not have right now.

**20. Why is there so much money directed to renovating the bathrooms?**

The District's consultants advise that the bathrooms must be reconfigured in order to meet current accessibility standards as prescribed by the American with Disabilities Act and SED building requirements. The consultants advise that the proposed project would not be approved by SED unless the District complies with the above.

**21. If our fire alarm systems are currently functioning satisfactorily, why is there a proposal to completely replace them in both buildings?**

The District's consultants have advised that the fire alarm systems at both schools are nearing the end of their useful lives. While both are still operational, they have been patched many times as the schools have been added to and renovated. The consultants have advised that each patch degrades the integrity of the system as a whole, and over time they have become increasingly difficult to repair and maintain.

The District's consultants have advised that it is less likely to create disruptions to school activities and classroom learning if the replacement of the fire alarm systems is done in conjunction with the proposed capital project.

**22. Creating a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Fabrication Lab at the MS/HS**

A learning center, called a "Fabrication Lab" (or "Fab Lab"), will be constructed at BBMS/HS, allowing full classes of students to pursue creative interdisciplinary projects utilizing high tech equipment. See FAQ #14 above for additional explanation.

**23. How did the last voter-approved construction project turn out?**

**May 2013 Proposition: \$3,140,000**

Energy Performance Contract - 534 yes / 94 no or a 85% pass rate

**May 2007 Proposition: \$752,602**

Roofing projects at RSS and BBHS - 850 yes / 214 no or an 80% pass rate

**January 2005 Referendum: \$17,339,000**

Additions at PRSS & MSHS plus fields - 519 yes / 405 no or a 56% pass rate

**January 2001 Referendum: \$16,750,000**

Additions & Alterations primarily at King Street Campus (new MS) - 939 yes / 285 no or a 77% pass rate

#### **24. Why is this project being proposed now?**

*The current five-year capital facilities plan identifies a significant amount of work at BMRSS and Middle/High Schools, including the following:*

- *Butler Building Replacement*
- *Site Issues*
- *Building Envelope Repairs*
- *Code Compliance Work*
- *Safety/Security Enhancement – Segregate Bus Traffic from Parent Traffic*
- *New Cafeteria – More prep space for healthy food options; shorter lunch lines*
- *Infrastructure Repairs – Mechanical, Electrical and Plumbing*
- *Improvements to Educational and Extracurricular Programs*
- *New Fabrication Lab at the MS/HS*
- *Conversion of existing custodial storage room into a large modern multi-purpose classroom.*

*The majority of work identified is associated with replacement of the 1960 Butler Building.*

#### **25. Why is the infrastructure number so large?**

*At BMRSS, an old decommissioned boiler that was never dismantled would be abated and removed from the basement of the 1950 wing (under the stage). Also proposed is a completely new ventilation system for the Library wing that will include air conditioning. Upgrades also are proposed to the Old Gym and New Gym ventilation systems. Additionally, upgrades would be performed to electrical panels as well as replacement of the entire fire alarm system. The infrastructure cost at BMRSS is estimated at \$2.9 million.*

*At BBMS/HS, upgrades to electrical panels are proposed as well as replacement of the entire fire alarm system at this campus as well. The original 1973 HS building windows will be replaced along with weatherization of the original building soffits. The infrastructure cost at BBMS/HS is estimated at \$3.2 million.*

#### **26. What is a bond referendum?**

*A bond referendum seeks voter approval to permit the District to borrow money up to a specified amount. The District is only permitted to borrow the amount authorized by voters, and the funds can only be used for purposes identified in the voter-approved referendum. A bond referendum is similar to a home equity line that a family might use to make large scale repairs that cannot be done within an annual family budget. The rate will be fixed throughout the repayment period. Based on our excellent financial rating, our fiscal advisor has indicated that we are likely to receive very favorable interest rates.*

#### **26. Why a bond referendum?**

*A bond is the mechanism used to fund large capital projects. The costs of the capital projects required are too large to include in any one, or even a series of annual operating budgets. A bond permits the District to borrow funds at an advantageous interest rate, and maximize state aid. The eventual referendum will be structured to minimize the overall cost to taxpayers over the life of the borrowing.*

**27. What is the estimated cost of both projects under consideration?**

*In all, the estimated cost of these projects is expected to be about \$44.7 million of which \$38 million is earmarked for the BMPRSS campus.*

**28. How much will this cost taxpayers?**

*To minimize the impact on taxpayers it is recommended that project work commence in two phases, and coincide with the retirement of outstanding debt that was incurred to pay for the 2000 and 2005 construction projects. As a result, it is estimated that school taxes for the average home priced at \$850,000 will increase by approximately \$525-\$585. Some of these increases will be offset by the retirement of existing debt in 2020 & 2025. Actual increases in taxes will be impacted by the percentage of the project that building aid is provided for and the actual interest rate(s) in place at the time(s) of bonds are sold.*

**29. Why is the cost figure attached to this project so large?**

*The current \$44.7 million estimate includes all proposed construction at both campuses with emphasis on the BMPRSS renovations and, most importantly, the replacement of the Butler Building and replacing the cafeteria/kitchen with a new cafetorium. Also proposed is a new 2,400 square foot Fabrication Lab for the MS/HS. It includes estimates of construction costs as well soft costs that include design and construction contingencies (10%), escalation of current costs (10%), architectural, engineering, and construction management, legal, financial, insurance and certain equipment. Overall costs for the BMPRSS are estimated to reach about 85% of total project costs. The scope and size of this project relates to the life of buildings and systems – Note that it has been more than 50 years since the BMPRSS campus has had a major construction project.*

**30. Will the NYS Education Department reimburse the District for any part of the construction project's cost?**

*Yes. Reimbursement for project costs comes to districts by way of State building aid. The purpose of building aid is to ensure that each school district provides suitable and adequate facilities to accommodate the students and programs of the District. To this end, new facilities -- new buildings, additions, major alterations -- must meet specific standards pertaining to the type, size and number of teaching stations, as well as SED building requirements. Existing facilities must meet health and safety regulations, and reconstruction of existing facilities must meet SED building requirements. Building aid is calculated using a complicated formula. Simplified, building aid is a function of the amount or size of the project that is deemed eligible for aid multiplied by a school district's building aid ratio. For Blind Brook this ratio is 28.3% of approved costs.*

**31. What is the anticipated finance period for a typical bond?**

*Most bonds are financed over a 20-year fixed rate term although some are over a 30-year term.*

**32. What will happen if the referendum fails?**

*If the referendum fails the Board of Education could pass a resolution and declare emergency needs to borrow the funds necessary for the emergency remediation of certain conditions without voter authorization. The emergency needs would probably be limited to only those infrastructure items needed to address code and safety requirements and those items needed to maintain the function of the buildings. The District would not be able to take advantage of the current low cost for borrowing and construction, and the burden would be pushed into the future.*