

3. GROTON-DUNSTABLE SPACE UTILIZATION ANALYSIS

INTRODUCTION

In this section, we provide a basic inventory of the GDRSD school buildings, making note of utilization statistics and listing standard facilities (or lack thereof). We compare this data with other districts, DESE data and MSBA data and standards. We have developed an outline of long-term and short-term plans that GDRSD can use to move forward. Please note that the type of building inventory provided by an architectural / engineering firm is beyond the scope of this study.

ASSUMPTIONS

The following assumption points are based on conversations with various School District officials.

- 1) GDRSD seeks to find space in their buildings for the Central Office in order to avoid paying rent for space in Prescott. The Central Office is currently using approximately 12,700 square feet at Prescott, which includes a supply warehouse, other storage space and some underutilized areas.
 - a) One option is moving to the Boutwell Building.
 - i) The Early Childhood Program would need to be moved
 - ii) The district is considering moving the Early Childhood program to the High School
 - b) One option is to move the Central Office to the four (4) modular buildings in the South Middle School Building.
- 2) GDRSD seeks to renovate or replace the Florence Roche Elementary.
 - a) A Statement of Interest (SOI) has been issued to the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA).
- 3) GDRSD seeks a long term plan for the Swallow Union Elementary.
- 4) GDRSD is considering changing the current grade alignment (K-4, 5-8, 9-12) in order to improve the educational program and/or to improve space utilization.

PRESCOTT

The Prescott building is one of Groton's original school buildings and was used as a school until 2008. It is currently owned by the Town of Groton and used, rent free, to house the GDRSD Central Administrative Offices. Beginning on September 1, 2018, GDRSD will need to pay rent to the Friends of Prescott, Inc., the 501c3 who is leasing Prescott from the Town. Therefore, GDRSD seeks to find space in their buildings for the Central Office in order to avoid paying rent for space in Prescott.

In looking at the sites listed below, we believe sufficient space is available to house the reconfigured Prescott offices. However, if an actual plan determined that space was insufficient, there are several ways to further reduce needs. Conference room space could be shared with the host school. In addition, it is not 100% necessary to have Information Technology, special needs, the curriculum directors or the supply warehouse in the Central Offices. A value judgement could be made during final design. Space for these needs could be found throughout the district.

Findings

The following sites could be considered for such a move.

Swallow Union: The Union building could be renovated to house Central Office.

Pros: The space (9,145 square feet) is probably sufficient.

There is sufficient land to add parking, if needed.

The Offices would be substantially separate from the Swallow Elementary School building.

We understand this site is very popular, due to its proximity to Route 3.

Cons: Remote location in the District

The building is not handicap accessible.

The basement has a severe dampness problem.

The extended day program would need to be relocated.

Groton Dunstable Regional High School: The six (6) rooms in the lower level (L22-L27) could be used.

Pros: The space (6,000-7,000 square foot estimate) is probably sufficient with the option to place offices such as Information Technology in other GDRHS spaces if needed.

Some of the facilities operation now at Prescott could be moved to the facilities garage on the high school grounds.

The declining enrollment at GDRHS may allow for these rooms to be surplus. Without this, 7,000 square feet the square feet per student would be about the same as it was in 2010.

There is sufficient parking.

The lower level entrance would allow for the offices to be separate from the school.

The space is handicap accessible.

Cons: A thorough analysis of the high school schedule would need to be done to confirm that taking of this space does not impact the high school's education plan.

The high school location is away from the Town population center.

GDRMS, South Building: The four modular buildings have been considered for the Central Offices

Pros: There is sufficient parking.

The space is handicap accessible.

The separate back entrance to the modular buildings would allow for the offices to be separate from the school.

The site is centrally located.

Cons: The space (4,000 square feet) is not adequate to house everything now at Prescott. The basic superintendent's office and business office would probably fit, but other offices would need to be located elsewhere. There would probably not be a separate conference room, but there is conference room space in the main south building.

These four rooms are at least partially occupied by GDRMS's "maker space" and the Information Technology department. Space would need to be found for these operations.

There are not any appropriate spaces in the GDRMS North Building or Florence Roche Elementary.

Boutwell: The Boutwell building would probably be the ideal space if it were available.

Pros: The space (8,208 square feet) would probably be ideal for the Central Office if the warehouse function of Prescott were located elsewhere.

There is sufficient parking.

The space is handicap accessible.

The site is centrally located.

The offices would not be in a school.

The building is air conditioned and has a new heating system.

Cons: The early childhood program would need to be relocated.

Recommendation

We recommend that the long-term location of the Central Office should be Boutwell. In our discussion of Boutwell ECC, below, we have provided two options for moving the ECC program. The ECC could be moved to the high school, or the ECC could be part of a new or addition / renovation of Florence Roche. We believe that one of these options will be chosen. Along with the above pros and cons analysis we feel that Boutwell has the additional advantage that it can be a permanent home for the Central Office. We do not feel that the other options are reasonable for the long-term.

If the District chooses to move the ECC from Boutwell, there may be a short-term need for an alternative space for the Central Office. If the ECC is not moved to the high school, we feel that the lower level of the high school may be the best option. There is adequate space and the cost to renovate the space would be lower than the other sites. If the declining enrollment at the high school turns around, as expected, the space can be returned to the high school in the future.

In looking at the short term relocation, the district must weigh the costs of renovating and moving versus the cost of rent at Prescott. It is conceivable that the best option would be to stay at Prescott for the short term.

BOUTWELL EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTER

The ECC program is housed in a small school building that was first occupied in 1914. The ECC program is for 3 to 5 year old special needs students. There are also tuition paying “role model” students in the program. There were 64 students in the 2017 school year.

Findings

The Boutwell serves the ECC program well. While somewhat antiquated it has been kept up to date. It has air conditioning, and a new heating system. The space and facilities are adequate. One room is used as a lunch room. That room and an adjacent small group meeting room can be used as play space / gym when available. There is not an actual gym. There is an outdoor play area with age appropriate play structures. Since most students are in half day programs there are no prepared lunches. Parents provide lunches for all day programs.

As noted above, the district is considering moving the ECC. It is our understanding that it would be housed in the GDRHS lower level to separate the preschoolers from the high school

population. If this move were made, the high school would investigate adding a CTE early childcare program to its curriculum.

The 2010 MSBA needs study rated the building as level 1 for building condition and general environment. Utilization was Average.

Recommendation

As noted above, we recommend that the Boutwell be vacated by the ECC to make room for the Central Offices.

We feel that the ECC could ultimately be moved to a new Florence Roche or could be moved next year to the lower level of the High School. The District needs to make an educational decision on which would be preferable.

GROTON DUNSTABLE REGIONAL HIGH SCHOOL

Opening in 2003, GDRHS is the newest school in the District. It houses grades 9-12. The 2017 enrollment was 812 students.

Findings

GDRHS consists of a 165,000 square foot building on a 42 acre site that includes multiple athletic fields and parking lots.

The building has modern facilities and has been well maintained. Special facilities include a gym, library media center, black box theater, and TV studio.

The 42 acre campus includes adequate parking, a natural grass stadium with a track, and several other playing fields including a baseball and softball diamond.

The 2010 MSBA needs study rated the building as level 1 for building condition and general environment. There was 194 square feet of space per student and 16.6 students per classroom (average). This is considered average utilization.

Using 2017 enrollment numbers, these figures would be 203 students per square foot and 15.9 students per classroom. These numbers are approaching a level where MSBA may rate the building as underutilized. If the enrollment continues to decline, this threshold will probably be met in the future.

As noted above, the district is considering moving the ECC to the high school. It is our understanding that it would be housed in the GDRHS lower level to separate the preschoolers from the high school population. If this move were made, the high school would investigate adding a CTE early childcare program to its curriculum.

We noted that the High School TV studio is not used by the High School students, but rather by the community TV group The Groton Channel.

Recommendation

Our recommendation, above, is to move either the ECC or the Central Office to the High School lower level. The High School should simulate a schedule for school year 2018-2019 to demonstrate if this plan is possible, and determine what the drawbacks would be to the High School program.

The District should work with the Groton Channel to have high school students use the high school's TV studio. If that becomes a reality the school administration should consider student produced programming and possibly a student local access channel in the future.

SWALLOW UNION

Swallow Union is the Town of Dunstable's elementary school. The school is anchored by the 1895 Union School. The attached Swallow School was built in 1962. Additions were built in 1975 and 1995. The 2016-2017 enrollment was 280.

Findings

The school is a well maintained older elementary school building. The building has a library, gymnasium and cafeteria / auditorium. The gymnasium is large enough for school gatherings. The cafeteria is smaller and has a stage for productions. There is also an outdoor play area with play structures, a basketball court and a small size diamond.

The school is on 6 acres of land and adjacent to Town of Dunstable land. It has adequate parking.

The 2010 MSBA needs study rated the building as level 1 for building condition and general environment. Utilization was Average, with 163 square feet per student and 17 students per classroom.

Due to declining enrollment the students per square foot is now 218 with 12.7 students per classroom. MSBA would probably rate this building as underutilized.

The Union building is used for a before and after school program. It is not used by the K-6 elementary school.

Recommendations

If the MSBA grants the district a feasibility study for the Florence Roche School, the Swallow Union's future should be a major aspect of that study. The age of Swallow Union makes its long term usefulness questionable. While a new building could probably be built on the same site in

the future, it would also be possible to build a new Florence Roche big enough to close Swallow Union altogether. Also to be considered is the possible grade realignment, changing the K-4 configuration to K-5. Such a change would substantially increase the elementary population. If granted the study, the district must use the opportunity to establish a plan for its elementary schools for the foreseeable future.

342-346 MAIN STREET CAMPUS

We believe that this campus should be treated as one entity with different units. The current configuration is inefficient and we hope some of our recommendations can be used to make it more efficient.

GROTON-DUNSTABLE REGIONAL MIDDLE SCHOOL

GDRMS consists of two separate buildings, the original regional middle school (south) and the renovated regional high school building (north) that was closed when the new High School opened in 2003. The north building houses the 7th and 8th graders and the south building houses 5th and 6th grade students. The 2017 enrollment was 791.

Findings

The 2010 MSBA needs study rated the building as level 1 for building condition and general environment. Utilization was below average, with 201 square feet per student and 13 students per classroom. Using 2017 enrollments the average square feet per student climbs to 236 and the students per classroom drops to 11.

The building is on a 32.6 acre site that includes a track, grass playing field, baseball diamond and two softball diamonds.

Supporting these statistics is the fact that the buildings have two gyms, two cafeterias, two libraries and two principal's office. There are also three music rooms and three art rooms, which is one more each than would be expected in a middle school of this size. Even the Performing Arts Center, that is a wonderful community asset, is much larger than MSBA would allow in a new middle school. The use of two separate buildings, that were originally built to be separate schools, has clearly led to inefficiencies.

We looked at whether this excessive square footage could be used to relocate the Central Office. Most of the space is spread out throughout the building or spaces such as the gymnasium. One possibility mentioned above are the four modular buildings. The space (4,000 square feet) is not adequate to house everything now at Prescott. The basic superintendent's office and business office would probably fit, but other offices would need to be located elsewhere. There would probably not be a separate conference room, but there is conference room space in the main south building.

We also observed that operating two cafeterias rather than one is probably adding to the staff needs. In particular there could be one manager instead of two. Likewise we feel the custodial needs are inefficient. There could be one CIC instead of two. A smaller building would probably reduce the custodians needed. We did not study teacher staffing, but it is possible that the two building organization is adding to the staffing needs.

Finally the necessity for students to move outdoors between the two buildings is problematic in foul weather and could also lead to security issues.

Recommendations

Many of the problems enumerated above are tied to the two building configuration and cannot be easily fixed. For that reason we have suggested below in the section on Florence Roche, that any future feasibility study should analyze the possibility of connecting the two middle school buildings to a new Florence Roche in order to form a K-8 school complex.

If this path is not followed, we suggest hiring a firm that designs school cafeterias to assess the possibility of reconfiguring one of the cafeterias and closing the other.

We have recommended, in our section on facilities management, that the entire 342-346 Main Street campus be treated as a single facility for cleaning purposes. We believe that this could lead to efficiencies in square footage cleaned and supervision / management.

We note that the PTYC community center is partially unused during the school day. If the Central Office were to use the four modular buildings, the PTYC space may be able to replace some of that space.

FLORENCE ROCHE ELEMENTARY

Florence Roche is the Town of Groton's elementary school. The original school was built in 1951. An addition was built in 1988, and seven modular buildings were added gradually between 1996 and 2001. The 2017 enrollment was 478.

Findings

GDRSD has submitted a statement of interest (SOI) to MSBA to address "Replacement of or addition to obsolete buildings..." and / or "Replacement, renovation or modernization of school facility systems..."

The 2010 MSBA needs study rated the building as level 1 for building condition and general environment. Utilization was average, with 121 square feet per student and 17 students per classroom. With declining enrollment, the current square footage per student is 145 and the students' per classroom is 15. These levels would still constitute average usage.

The school is a well maintained older elementary school building. The building has a library, gymnasium /auditorium and cafeteria. The school uses the adjacent performing arts center for school gatherings. There is also an outdoor play area with play structures and a basketball court.

The building is on a 32.6 acre site that includes a track, grass playing field, baseball diamond and two softball diamonds.

Recommendation

We believe that what happens with the SOI will determine the long-term configuration of GDRSD. We expect that sometime in the future MSBA will offer GDRSD the opportunity to do a feasibility study. We recommend that GDRSD discuss with MSBA the possibility of including Swallow Union and the Middle School in the study. Based on our following recommendations we believe that MSBA will approve such a study and will in fact encourage it.

Once GDRSD is invited to perform a feasibility study, a building committee will need to be formed. At that time, discussions should begin on what the two town’s roles will be in the study.

Once the feasibility starts the district will need to hire an owner’s project manager (OPM) and an architect. One of their first considerations will be whether to renovate Florence Roche, or renovate part of Florence Roche and add onto it, or demolish Florence Roche and build a new school. We are confident that they will recommend that Florence Roche be demolished and replaced.

Our basic recommendation is that the District consider building an addition that will connect the two middle school buildings and provide space for the Florence Roche students and the Boutwell students. We recommend that the feasibility of this be one of the first tasks of the OPM and architect. If this can be accomplished, many of the inefficiencies of the current middle school could be eliminated.

We recommend including Swallow Union in the study because it will need a major renovation or replacement in the next ten to fifteen years. The District should know their options as they design a new Florence Roche. They may wish to build a new building large enough to enable closing Swallow Union. While this would likely be unacceptable to the Town of Dunstable, it should be looked at and an informed decision should be made.

In this process MSBA will require an education plan for the project. This is a very important step in their board’s deliberations. They want the project to be driven by the education plan, not vice versa.

The following educational decisions will need to be made.

- Is a PK-8 building acceptable as a facility

- Will the building replace Swallow Union or will there be a long-term plan to keep Swallow Union
- Will the school system remain organized as K-4, 5-8, and 9-12 or will there be some other organization such as:
 - K-8 and 9-12
 - K-5, 6-8, and 9-12
 - PK-K, 1-5, 6-8, and 9-12

Once these decisions are made an architect can design a facility that will accommodate this grade structure.

It is our belief that this is the best long-term plan for building usage in the District. Once examined by an architect, it may be determined that it is not feasible. At that point, the architect and engineer will need to work with the District to develop alternatives that achieve as many of the goals as possible.

We acknowledge that all of the above is subject to funding by Groton and / or Dunstable. The realities of funding may drive some of the above decisions.