

## Runkle School Proposed Renovation Key Points (1 Page)

### **Schools and Town Objective:**

To renovate and expand Runkle School in 2010 with 41% state reimbursement for the cost of the project.

### **Driving Issues for Renovation:**

- Relieve Extraordinary Crowding – Runkle was designed to serve 420 students. Current enrollment is 516, expected to expand to 560 students by 2015 or sooner.
- Bring Facilities Up to Date for Program – 1) Runkle has no elevator: its upper floors are inaccessible to the disabled. 2) Runkle has no large instruction/performance space at all. 3) Runkle’s cafeteria is already so crowded that lunch begins at 10:15 a.m. in order to serve everyone.
- Bring Runkle Families Back to Runkle – Because of space constraints, the PSB has for the past two years offered several Runkle families the option of sending children to other elementary schools. The renovation/enlargement will allow all Runkle families to attend Runkle, their neighborhood school.

### **Crucial Next Steps:**

- To secure state funding for this project, Brookline Town Meeting must – by mid-November – authorize a bond issue to cover the costs of the project. The bond issue request is for \$29 million; the state will reimburse the Town 41% (approx. \$12 million). Bond authorization requires a 2/3 majority vote at TM.
- Zoning/FAR disputes are not at issue at Town Meeting and are unaffected by the bond vote. They will be addressed during the design/permitting process that follows the bond authorization.
- Without the bonding authorization from Town Meeting on November 17th, the project WILL NOT HAPPEN. The public schools face an unprecedented crisis in terms of physical space for our student population. Runkle is an essential first step (but only the first step) to address these problems.

## Runkle Schools Proposed Renovation Background/Details (2 pp.)

The Runkle School Building Committee (RSBC) began meeting in September 2008 and met regularly in public meetings since then. The community and abutters have been heard, respected, and responded to. The RSBC's priority is to build the best possible space for our school program within budget. The needs of our students and teachers must drive school design.

### Runkle Deficiencies:

- No auditorium or large performance/meeting space
- Inadequate cafeteria. Lunches at the school begin at 10:15 a.m. in order to accommodate 5 lunch periods.
- Insufficient small rooms. Former janitor's closets have been refitted to be used for student and small group conferences.
- Inadequate office space for administration.
- No elevator: 3rd floor is inaccessible to disabled; 2<sup>nd</sup> floor can only be reached from the ground floor by going outside the building and using a separate entrance.

### Size/Student Population:

- Originally designed for 420 students, Runkle currently has 516 students. Some Runkle families are already at other elementary schools to relieve crowding (on a voluntary basis in all cases).
- Renovated Runkle will accommodate 560 students or 3 sections in every grade. Enrollment projections predict 560 as a likely enrollment in just a few years.
- Overall size of New Design is 105,000 square feet. The building is currently 65,000 square feet.

### Renovation will add:

- A multi-purpose meeting/instruction room
- A larger cafeteria (to accommodate 560 students in 3 lunch periods)
- Sufficient new classrooms to allow 3 classrooms per grade
- Appropriate conference/small meeting rooms
- Separation of activity (gym, multipurpose, library) wings from classroom wings
- Improved circulation and functionality, including ADA improvements
- Space for Runkle School Extended Day program

## Runkle Schools Proposed Renovation Background/Details continued (3 pp.)

### Project History

- The Runkle project has been listed on the Town's Capital Improvements Plan (CIP) for many years.
- It was always envisioned as a renovation/addition project rather than a demolition/new building project for two key reasons:
  - 1) While seriously overcrowded, the existing Runkle building has been well maintained and is in relatively good shape; and 2)Renovation/expansion is far less expensive than teardown/replacement.

### Fiscal Issues

- Original Project Scope and Cost: \$32,000,000
- Cost after “value engineering”: \$29,100,000
- Massachusetts School Building Authority (“MSBA”) approved the project on September 30, 2009
- MSBA will reimburse 41.58 % of all eligible costs
- Un-reimbursable Costs estimated at \$1,300,000
- MSBA contribution, therefore, is approx. \$11.9 million

### Zoning disputes

- Some abutters have objected to the large size of the project given its proximity to their homes
- Legitimate questions remain as to the appropriate FAR (floor area ratio) to apply to this project
- Those questions are unlikely to be resolved before Town Meeting but they don't need to be resolved in order to receive bond authorization.
- Bond authorization is independent of zoning issues. Failure of the bond warrant will effectively kill the project and leave Runkle as is.
- The project can and will go through the required permitting process fairly and expeditiously. Due to the many steps in the process, each of which require public notice periods, this will likely happen after Town Meeting. That is when the zoning issues will be addressed.

### Next Steps

- Under the MSBA rules, the Town must get bond authorization for the full \$29,100,000 for the project within 120 days of the date of MSBA approval (Sept. 30)
- Town Meeting vote on bond authorization is scheduled for Nov. 17.
- Bond authorization requires a 2/3 vote of Town Meeting.

Runkle School Proposed Renovation  
Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) (4 pp)

1. Why not demolish Runkle and rebuild on a larger site?
2. Couldn't you move some of the Runkle students – for example the district-wide Autism Program – to another school, so Runkle wouldn't need to be enlarged so much?
3. What was changed/removed from the project to bring the cost down (“value engineering”)?
4. What has been done to accommodate the concerns of neighbors closely abutting the property?
5. What changes were rejected and why?
6. There is a question about the FAR on the site. When and how will that be resolved?
7. I have heard that there is overcrowding throughout the school district. Is Runkle going to be used to relieve crowding at other schools?
8. Why isn't Brookline building a 9<sup>th</sup> elementary school to solve overcrowding and keeping Runkle small?
9. What steps is the Town taking to make this project “green” and environmentally friendly?
10. The plans call for the elimination of the small parking area off of Clinton Rd. What is going to happen with parking and traffic?
11. How long will the construction period be and what happens to Runkle kids during that time?
12. If Town Meeting doesn't pass the bond authorization in November, what happens to the project?

**Detail Follows:**

**1. Why not demolish Runkle and rebuild on a larger site?**

A few people have suggested that the Town should find another, larger site for Runkle. This is not an option.

First, there is not another site available in the Runkle district that the Town could use for this project. [The Town-owned reservoir area on the top of Fisher Hill has just ended a 7-year planning process and is under agreement with a developer for a mixed income housing project. The larger state reservoir across the street from it is currently being acquired from the State at a very advantageous price with the agreement that it be used as dedicated park land.]

The Facilities Master Plan completed last year concurred that building a new school was not a viable option for the Town.

## **2. Couldn't you move some of the Runkle students – for example the district-wide Autism Program – to another school, so Runkle wouldn't need to be enlarged so much?**

No. It is not feasible to relocate this program for a number of reasons:

First, the system-wide autism program is well integrated at Runkle, a process that involves training faculty across the school who facilitate inclusion of the students in many classes. It is recognized as one of the outstanding programs of its type in the Commonwealth. Moving to a new school would require starting over with that integration of program – this is both costly and programmatically extremely disruptive.

Second, relocating this program would simply press the educational space in another of our overcrowded buildings. Due to increased enrollments across town, there is no building with slack in its space.

Finally, students in the autism program generally flourish in an environment that is familiar and predictable. Moving these students to an entirely new environment with new teachers is not in their best interest educationally or socially.

## **3. What was changed/removed from the project to bring the cost down (“value engineering”)?**

In order to bring the costs down from the original estimate of \$32,000,000 to the \$29,100,000 that the Town believes it can afford (assuming the 41.58% reimbursement), the RSBC voted to:

- use unit ventilators rather than a central heating and ventilation system;
- have fewer small classroom spaces;
- reduce the square footage of the gymnasium and cut plans for seating/bleachers;
- use a “storefront” window system instead of a “curtain wall” window system;
- use a single 7” concrete slab under the wooden gym floor, instead of two slabs of 6” and 4”;
- use plastic laminate-faced cabinets in the classrooms instead of hardwood doors;
- several other smaller items.

## **4. What has been done to accommodate the concerns of neighbors closely abutting the property?**

Several homes are located very close to the Runkle School and will be particularly affected by this project. The yellow house on Chesham adjacent to the play area for the younger children is particularly close. In addition, there are three homes that face onto Dean Road but which back up onto the school playground on the other side that are also close. In response to their stated concerns, we have:

- pulled the proposed addition back an additional 30 ft. from the lot line for the Dean Road houses so that the addition will now be 70 feet from their property lines, 50 feet further than the existing building is from the closest abutters.
- Designed the new gymnasium with high windows so that the neighbors did not have to look at a blank brick wall, but students cannot look directly out those windows into the neighboring houses;

- agreed to plant visually “buffering” trees between the school and Dean Road houses
- agreed to site the trash compactor on the Druce Street side of the building [even though the cafeteria will be on the Clinton Road side of the school and siting the trash there would have been more practical for servicing and less expensive]
- decided against designs for a second floor over the Kindergarten wing in part because it would have cast significant shadows over the nearest house on Chesham.
- Rotated the design of the new classroom wing on the Chesham Road side to take it away from the lot line and so the windows will not look directly into the windows of the nearest Chesham Road neighbor.

## **5. What changes were rejected and why?**

The RSBC considered and rejected a number of other design options, for example:

- sinking the gym below ground in order to reduce the visual height of the addition. This option would have added \$750,000 to \$1,000,000 in cost (unacceptable) and raised the likelihood of moisture or flooding problems in the future
- using a mansard roof on the gym to have it recede from neighbors. The mansard roof required a complicated and expensive truss system;
- siting the Library over the Kindergarten wing. This would have required the existing Kindergarten wing to be torn down and rebuilt to be strong enough to hold a second floor. Also, placing the Library in that location would send more student traffic past classroom areas, which is disruptive; and the second floor would have thrown shadows on the nearest Chesham Road neighbor
- using the planned courtyard area as a library by enclosing it with a glass ceiling. Although the committee never seriously considered this option, it is worth noting that the Architects reported that the interior classrooms facing onto the courtyard need ventilation to the exterior for the heating and ventilation system to work; such ventilation is impossible if the space is enclosed. In addition, a glass ceiling on the library would make the room much too hot during warm weather. Finally, those classrooms that face onto the courtyard would not get sufficient light through the library, and the courtyard is already designed to enhance the educational program with active garden/environmental science components.

## **6. There is a question about the FAR on the site. When and how will that be resolved?**

Every public building project goes through an administrative site plan review by the Director of Planning and Community Development (Runkle’s is scheduled for October 2009), then a Building Permit is sought.

Zoning questions that might influence the permitting process are typically raised when the project – as anticipated – goes before the Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals (“ZBA”).

We expect that the questions concerning FAR will be addressed at the Zoning Board of Appeals. The ZBA may determine that the project needs to go through the Special Permit process. If so, the Town will then apply for a Special Permit. The RSBC

believes that the school is necessary and appropriate for the neighborhood and that it will qualify for the Special Permit. This process will take several months. Again, this has no bearing on the bond issue. It is an entirely separate process.

**7. I have heard that there is overcrowding throughout the school district. Is Runkle going to be used to relieve crowding at other schools?**

No. Enrollment pressures are affecting every school in the district; Runkle is simply the worst case and the only one with the possibility of expansion. It is just the first essential step in solving a complex problem.

However, the renovation will permit the Runkle School to serve the children of its established district. For two years, some Runkle “core resident” children have been accommodated in other schools on a volunteer basis. Renovation will permit those other schools (esp. Driscoll) to accommodate their own neighborhood’s children instead of servicing the Runkle attendance district.

**8. Why isn’t Brookline building a 9<sup>th</sup> elementary school to solve overcrowding and keeping Runkle small?**

The facilities Master Plan completed last year rejected the idea of building a 9<sup>th</sup> elementary school. First, there is no reasonable space available that would site an elementary school in an area that would help with overcrowding.

Second, even if a site were available, the Town cannot afford another school. Beyond the millions in construction costs, an additional elementary school would add \$8-\$10 million per year to the operating budget. A 9<sup>th</sup> school is unaffordable at any site.

**9. What steps is the Town taking to make this project “green” and environmentally friendly?**

This has been a priority goal of both the RSBC and the MSBA. The current design qualifies as a “green building” at the same level achieved by the recent Town Hall renovation. The following design components helped us meet the green standard:

- renovate rather than tear down the existing building,
- put a white roof on the building (able to accommodate solar panels if we can get a grant or find Town funds to afford them, either when the project is initially done or at some later point)
- install an energy efficient boiler and heating system,
- having windows that open, throughout the building;
- use low-flow plumbing fixtures throughout the building;
- automated temperature controls;
- all light switches will be motion sensitive to turn off automatically if a room is unoccupied.

(The Committee also considered geothermal heating and several other green options that are not cost effective at this time).

**10. The plans call for the elimination of the small parking area off of Clinton Rd. What is going to happen with parking and traffic?**

The current small parking area on the Clinton Rd. side of the building will be utilized to enlarge the new playground area. To accommodate staff parking, the Transportation Board will devise a teacher/staff on-street parking system which designates scattered spots on surrounding streets as teacher parking during a school day. Space directly in front of the school will be kept open and reserved for pickup and drop-off of students. Similar plans have been successful at other schools (e.g. Lawrence and BHS).

**11. How long will the construction period be and what happens to Runkle kids during that time?**

The current plan would have the Runkle staff and students move to the Old Lincoln School at the conclusion of the 2009-2010 school year. The students would attend school there for two years, through the conclusion of the '11-'12 school year and return to the renovated Runkle building for a September, 2012 opening.

School bus transportation will be provided during the years at Old Lincoln. Exact routes, starting/ending times and other logistics will be determined at a later date. The school department is committed to involving parents and staff in the process of planning for this and other issues of the move, as it did in past years for the Baker School and Lawrence School renovations.

**12. If Town Meeting doesn't pass the bond authorization in November, what happens to the project?**

The town has 120 days after September 30, 2009 in which to get authorization for the bond. If Town Meeting does not grant that authorization, Brookline will lose the MSBA reimbursement, effectively killing the project. The Town cannot afford to foot the entire bill.

Even if we could get back in the MSBA queue to try to win reimbursement funding again, such a process could take years. To renovate Runkle in time for its student and staff needs, we need to move the project now.