

## **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) for the New Athol Elementary School Project**

### **Q: What are potential costs savings from students “choicing” back into the District who have “choiced out” if a new Athol Elementary School will be built?**

Currently, \$850,000 per year is paid to other school districts for Athol elementary students who “choice out”. Families “choice out” for several reasons, including chronic underfunding of the District budget, the condition of the schools, particularly the elementary schools, and inconsistent student performance on MCAS testing. It is estimated the new elementary school will reduce ‘choice out’ by 50%, resulting in a \$425,000 annual savings for the District

### **Q: How many elementary students are currently enrolled and is future growth considered?**

There are currently 516 Pre-K through Grade 4 students enrolled in the District. The new Elementary School is designed to accommodate 615 Pre-K through Grade 4 students. The future growth has been considered by the MSBA, in collaboration with the ARRSD, and the new elementary school has been designed specifically to meet the MSBA’s 10-year enrollment projections.

### **Q: What will happen to Pleasant Street School?**

The Pleasant Street School is over 46-years old and has systems that have all reached their useful life. The estimate to renovate the Pleasant Street School to comply with current building, life safety, and accessibility and energy codes is approximately \$9,000,000 which would have to be fully paid by the Town of Athol with no possible reimbursement from MSBA. This will not provide any space improvements needed to bring the building up to today’s educational standards. A variety of re-uses for the existing Pleasant Street School building are possible. Following opening of the new consolidated school the Town of Athol and ARRSD will determine the highest best use.

### **Q: Will there be increased bus traffic, and increased traffic on Pleasant Street?**

Consolidation of existing traffic counts from all three (3) elementary schools will result in an increase of approximately three (3) buses but an anticipated decrease in the number of parent drop-offs and pick-ups. Extended review and discussion of the traffic analysis performed at the three (3) existing elementary schools and at the intersection of Pleasant and Main Streets during several Building Committee Meetings and Community Meetings indicates that traffic resulting from consolidation of the elementary schools does not represent an issue negatively impacting traffic volume or flow on the school campus, neighborhood, or community.

### **Q: What is the plan for Vine Street?**

No public utilization of Vine Street for access to the new building is planned. Vine Street will continue to be used for emergency vehicle access only, or as a secondary means of egress if Pleasant Street were blocked during an emergency.

### **Q: What is the reimbursement rate and why?**

We are receiving 80% reimbursement of *eligible* costs from MSBA, including MA-CHPS green building compliance, the maximum allowable by MSBA. MSBA has very defined categories of what project costs are eligible when calculating the actual reimbursement and MSBA treats every community the same when determining what costs are eligible. MSBA has determined what costs are eligible and has calculated what our actual reimbursement will be. Our actual reimbursement will be approximately 63%, which is significantly higher than the statewide average of 52% for elementary schools.

**Q: Why don't we just renovate the existing elementary schools?**

The MSBA study process requires us to review a renovation only, renovation and addition and a new construction option. The Architects developed ten different design solutions. There was no renovation only option that satisfied our enrollment and our education needs or was cost effective. The renovation and addition options, while being slightly less expensive than a new Athol Elementary School, provided for significantly less playfield area, less than optimal educational spaces, and required construction to occur while our children were on site.

**Q: Why aren't we building a High School?**

A joint meeting was held in March 2010 of all the Town's boards of Athol and Royalston, including Selectmen, Finance Committee, Capital Planning Committee, and School Committee, to review the needs of all of Athol's schools. Due to the significant number of Athol elementary students choosing-out to neighboring school districts, plus the age and condition of the existing elementary schools, the All-Boards decided the elementary schools were the higher need.

**Q: Can't we just wait another year or two until the economy gets better to build a school?**

If the project is delayed it will be removed from the State funding list with no assurance that it will be reimbursed in the future and due to a continuing weak economy, borrowing costs are currently at historic lows and due to a very competitive building climate, construction costs are lower than they have been in years.

**Q: What is the impact on my taxes if I support the new school?**

**October 18, 2013 Update: The Town has applied for financing through the USDA at an expected interest rate of 4.50%. Based on this, the impact on taxes is \$1.71 per thousand as shown on the chart below.**

**Projected Impact on Real Estate Property Tax Increase of \$1.71 per thousand**

Cost of Construction	\$ 43,931,363.00
Reimbursement Rate of Eligible Costs	62.94%
Principal Financed	\$ 16,279,743.00
Years	25
Yearly Int. rate	4.500%
Monthly Payment	\$ 90,488.10
Annual Payment	\$ 1,085,857.19
Total Payments	\$ 27,146,429.68
Increase in Tax Rate/Thousand	\$ 1.71

Property Assessed Value	Annual Tax Increase	Quarterly Tax Increase	Property Assessed Value	Annual Tax Increase	Quarterly Tax Increase
\$ 50,000	\$ 85.55	\$ 21.39	\$ 300,000	\$ 513.31	\$ 128.33
\$ 75,000	\$ 128.33	\$ 32.08	\$ 325,000	\$ 556.09	\$ 139.02
\$ 100,000	\$ 171.10	\$ 42.78	\$ 350,000	\$ 598.86	\$ 149.72
\$ 125,000	\$ 213.88	\$ 53.47	\$ 375,000	\$ 641.64	\$ 160.41
\$ 150,000	\$ 256.66	\$ 64.16	\$ 400,000	\$ 684.42	\$ 171.10
\$ 175,000	\$ 299.43	\$ 74.86	\$ 425,000	\$ 727.19	\$ 181.80
\$ 200,000	\$ 342.21	\$ 85.55	\$ 450,000	\$ 769.97	\$ 192.49
\$ 225,000	\$ 384.98	\$ 96.25	\$ 475,000	\$ 812.74	\$ 203.19
\$ 250,000	\$ 427.76	\$ 106.94	\$ 500,000	\$ 855.52	\$ 213.88
\$ 275,000	\$ 470.54	\$ 117.63			