



Belmont Citizen Herald Question:

The High School Building Committee is in the process of getting a team together for the feasibility study which will look at three possible configurations. The grades 7-12 model will help solve the overcrowding, class size issue for the whole district. The grades 8-12 model will help solve the problem of overcrowding and class sizes at the middle school. The grades 9-12 model will give high school students a better facility but will not solve the districtwide class size/overcrowding issue. The cost for any of these models is unknown but based on historic data available on the Massachusetts School Building Authority website, the building committee estimates \$200 million for the grades 7-12 model, almost \$100,000 per student. An override or debt exclusion will most likely be necessary to fund the new school, no matter how big it ends up being. And the town also has other capital projects that need to get done such as a new public works facility, new library and new police station. Is there a way to get these projects funded without taxing the Belmont taxpayers any further? If so, how? If not, then what?

Adam's Response:

The cost of the high school project is unknown. Until the feasibility study is completed, we won't know the projected price. The High School Building Committee discussed a ballpark range of \$140-\$211 million, but many variables will shape that, such as whether the current building is renovated or replaced, and how many grades will use it.

Belmont will be reimbursed approximately 30% of project cost by the MSBA— a \$42-\$63 million break for Belmont taxpayers. Our School Department worked hard to be chosen for MSBA reimbursement, and taxpayers will benefit greatly.

We also have other critical capital projects which have been on the “to do” list for many years. Decades of deferred maintenance has taken its toll. While we have already renovated or rebuilt some, there are still four large ones on that list, being the high school, police station, DPW yard and library. I have toured those facilities and can say that these projects are not optional.

There are ways we can reduce the tax burden. Private fundraising should be a part of the solution. Perhaps, some projects can be phased.

The longer we wait, the more we will spend. For a \$25 million project, delay could mean an additional \$1 million every year we wait.

We must be strategic and creative, and all Belmont residents should be part of the discussion, as the voters will ultimately determine whether debt exclusions for these projects pass. This problem was not created overnight, but we must act now to fix it.