

Current History of Amherst School District Facilities Exploration

The Joint Facilities Advisory Committee (JFAC) was appointed by the SAU 39 Board and charged with completing an analysis and providing recommendations regarding the state of our public school buildings in Amherst. Encompassed in the charge are Clark-Wilkins Elementary School, Amherst Middle School, and Souhegan High School.

- In 2017, Capital Needs Assessments (CNA) were developed by the firm Onsite Insite for all of our schools. These CNAs provide a 20 year plan to maintain the status quo at existing school buildings. The plans do not address how space is used, current or projected enrollment, the use of temporary portable buildings, etc.
- In spring 2018, with support from the SCSB, SFAC, and Community Council, residents supported funding the SHS 2.0 design phase for an upgrade and remodeling plan for Souhegan High School.
- Also in 2018, the SAU 39 Board recognized the need for a comprehensive plan for the aging buildings in the Amherst School District (Clark-Wilkins Elementary & Amherst Middle School) and the need to align those plans with the work that would result from the design phase taking place at SHS. While the districts are separate, the impact to students and resident taxpayers is consistent, and the plan for buildings should be as well. This same year, temporary portables, in service now for over 14 years, at Clark-Wilkins caught fire, displacing two classes worth of students and causing a further space crunch ripple effect throughout the school. Also, in this same year, kindergarten enrollments were swelling to the point where the district was seriously entertaining the generous offer from Mont Vernon for Amherst residents to attend the Mont Vernon Village School.
- In March of 2020, residents supported all school budgets and all associated articles related to capital maintenance. The firm of Lavallee Brensinger Architects (LBA), the same firm who completed SHS 2.0, was engaged to conduct the facilities master planning study to examine facilities, sites, programming capacity, security and safety.
- LBA's master planning study, concluded in December 2020 (LINK), included the following: existing conditions analysis, review student enrollment, engage educators and community, programming and visioning, developing facilities master plan and vision, order of magnitude costs, conceptual designs,

mechanical/electrical/plumbing engineer narratives, evaluating multiple solutions, and gathering community feedback. In gathering information, they

- The culmination of the work with LBA was a recommendation to the Amherst School Board to complete a major renovation at the middle school and build a new elementary school housing students in preschool through 5th grade.
- With the master planning study complete, the Amherst School Board, Joint Facilities Advisory Committee (JFAC), and administration elected to select an architect to move forward with defining the facility projects. A comprehensive proposal process once again took place. At this time, Banwell Architects was selected.
- The scope and construction costs continued to be refined, and the Amherst School Board placed a warrant article on the March 2022 ballot for construction of a new preschool through 5th grade elementary school and full renovation of the middle school. The warrant article did not pass.
- JFAC (at this time organized as three separate subcommittees of Amherst Building and Grounds, Souhegan Building and Grounds, and Mont Vernon School Board), the Amherst School Board, and SAU and school administrations conducted listening sessions and surveys, while also confirming scope, enrollment, and goals of the projects.
- In May 2022, the Amherst School Board agreed to make the elementary school the priority project, while continuing to explore system renovations at the middle school.
- In July 2022, the Amherst School District submitted the application for NH Department of Education state building aid.
- The Amherst Building and Grounds subcommittee completed separate tours and work concluding with the recommendation to JFAC that the elementary school was in the most need, followed closely by the systems causing water damage at the middle school. These include HVAC unit ventilators and roof leakage.
- The Amherst School Board voted unanimously at their October meeting to place a new Elementary school construction project on the March 2023 ballot.
- The Amherst School Board voted unanimously to expend funds to begin the design work for new HVAC and Roof at the Amherst Middle School.

