



## NEEDHAM PUBLIC SCHOOLS

1330 HIGHLAND AVENUE \* NEEDHAM, MA 02492  
781-455-0400 EXT. 206 \* 781-455-0417 (FAX)

### Frequently Asked Questions October 2018 Special Town Meeting Article 11: Appropriate for Emery Grover Feasibility

#### 1. What does this article accomplish?

Article 11 appropriates \$130,000 to evaluate the various alternatives for renovating/reconstructing the Emery Grover building.

#### 2. Why reconsider an article to study the feasibility of renovating Emery Grover?

The School Department had proposed a similar study at May 2018 Annual Town Meeting, funded from Community Preservation Act (CPA) funds. Although the Community Preservation Committee had determined that such a study met the eligibility criteria for funding through CPA, because historic preservation was the primary focus of the study, Town Meeting raised a concern about the legitimacy of using CPA funds to study alternatives to historic renovation of the Emery Grover building. In addition, Town Meeting sought to include a study of other options for the Emery Grover in addition to historic renovation.

#### 3. What is the purpose of Article 11, Appropriate for Emery Grover Feasibility?

This study, which is proposed to be funded by the Tax Levy, will evaluate the various alternatives for renovating/reconstructing the Emery Grover building. The alternatives that will be evaluated are: 1) full renovation and addition; 2) complete demolition and new construction; 3) preservation of one or more facades with new construction behind; and 4) the sale and relocation of School District administration to leased/purchased space. The study will evaluate each option with regard to feasibility, schedule, and cost; will assess the suitability of each option for meeting school space needs; will identify zoning requirements; and will address temporary relocation requirements. It also will identify how each alternative is categorized with regard to CPA funding and define the approvals (local, state and national) necessary to move each of option forward.

#### **4. What is the problem at Emery Grover?**

The Emery Grover School Administration Building, which is on the National Register of Historic Buildings, is in need of additional office and storage space, as well as extensive repair and modernization to meet the needs of the School Department. The desired renovations would allow for a more efficient use of space, would permit handicapped accessibility and the full utilization of all four floors, and would make needed building repairs, including: replacing deteriorating HVAC, electrical, plumbing and window systems; and removing lead paint and asbestos.

Specific deficiencies of the Emery Grover building are listed below. The top (fourth) floor of the building is condemned and none of the floors are handicapped accessible. Many systems are original to the building and are failing or deteriorating, including roof, windows, HVAC (radiators only, no air conditioning), electrical and plumbing. Toilets often fail and drinking water must be brought in for use. Furthermore, the structural integrity of the building is stressed by the weight of papers and files which have caused floors to sag and doors to stick. The current stairs are structurally compromised and are non-compliant with fire codes. The layout retains the wide circulation spaces of a former school, but lacks both office and meeting space for administrative use. In addition, the serial retrofits which have occurred over the years have left it poorly organized for modern use. Significant renovations will allow for a healthier building, a more efficient use of space, as well as full utilization of all four floors and full handicapped accessibility.

#### **5. Why does the Emery Grover Building need additional office and storage space?**

The building, a converted high school, was not designed as administrative office space. Although the overall size of the building is generally adequate to meet school needs, the number of offices is insufficient to meet current requirements. The building lacks adequate conference and meeting space, and the layout of space is not conducive to efficient operation. The current partitioning is the result of many serial retrofits over the years which have resulted in inappropriately sized spaces, spaces with little access to natural light, and large areas devoted to circulation (a remnant of the building's original use as a high school.) In addition, the layout does not recognize departmental adjacencies. For instance, it is important to keep the departments with the most public interface, such as Human Resources and Transportation/Nutrition Services, on the first floor, while other departments (like Business) might benefit from a location on the second floor. Finally, the need for confidential paper records is highly compromised, since storage is scattered throughout the building without order or proper security.

#### **6. Has Emery Grover already been studied?**

It was studied by DesignLAB Architects in August 2013 as one possible option for meeting school space needs, but not at the level of detail necessary for informing a potential construction project, or even to determine if it would be structurally and economically feasible to upgrade the existing structure.

The August 2013 study was a conceptual assessment of school space needs, and a broad examination of various options for meeting these needs, including: repairing/ expanding the existing facility, leasing/ purchasing commercial office space, and relocating/ upgrading other Town-owned sites for school use.

The 2013 study is available for review on the School Department website.

**7. How will the proposed study differ from the 2013 study?**

The proposed study will provide the depth and specificity needed to determine if it would be structurally and economically feasible to upgrade the existing structure for school administration purposes. Specifically, it will study: a) full renovation and addition; b) complete demolition and new construction; and c) preservation of one or more facades with new construction behind. In addition, it will examine the potential sale and relocation of the School District administration to leased/purchased space, as an alternate to renovating the building.

The study will examine these alternatives with regard to feasibility, schedule, and cost. In addition, it will assess the suitability of each option for meeting school space needs; will identify zoning requirements; and will address temporary relocation requirements. Finally, it will identify how each alternative is categorized with regard to CPA funding and define the approvals (local, state and national) necessary to move each of option forward.

**8. How will the proposed study address Town Meeting's concerns?**

The proposed study will be funded from the general Tax Levy and will consider alternatives to historic preservation, including: complete demolition and new construction, the preservation of one or more facades with new construction behind, and the potential sale of the Emery Grover building and the relocation of school administration to leased/purchased space.

**9. Will the proposed study evaluate alternatives to historic renovation?**

Yes, the proposed study will consider alternatives to historic preservation, including: complete demolition and new construction, the preservation of one or more facades with new construction behind, and the potential sale of the Emery Grover building and the relocation of school administration to leased/purchased space.

**10. What if the study reveals that the full historic renovation is not feasible?**

If the study reveals that full historic renovation is infeasible or impractical, or if relocation of School Administration is the most desirable alternative, the proponents will evaluate the options for relocating and/or rebuilding the school administration department.

**11. If an historic renovation project were to be undertaken, what could be the potential schedule?**

A potential time line for the project is summarized below:

- Feasibility Study: FY19 (Oct '18 STM) - Jan '19 - April '20
- Design Funding: FY21 (May '20 ATM)

- Design: Jun '20 - Dec '21
- Construction Funding: FY22 (Oct '21 STM)
- Bidding: Jan '22 - May '22
- Emery Grover Occupies Swing Space: Aug '22 (Move-In) - June '24
- Construction: Aug '22 - June '24 (24 Months)
- New Building Opens: (FY25) July '24



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### Frequently Asked Questions October 2018 Special Town Meeting Article 12

**1. What does this article accomplish?**

Article 12 appropriates \$1,350,000 for the purchase and installation of two modular classrooms at the Mitchell Elementary School. The classrooms will provide the additional space needed to implement Full-Day Kindergarten in September 2019.

**2. What is the current capacity of the Mitchell School building?**

Currently, the Mitchell School has 22 grade level classrooms. These classrooms include four sections each of Grades 1-5, and two classrooms for Kindergarten, for a total of 24 sections K-5, or 500 students. (Since Kindergarten currently is half-day, each Kindergarten classroom accommodates two sections each - one in the morning and none in the afternoon - for a total of four Kindergarten sections.) Two of these classrooms are modular classrooms, which were installed on the site in 2014.

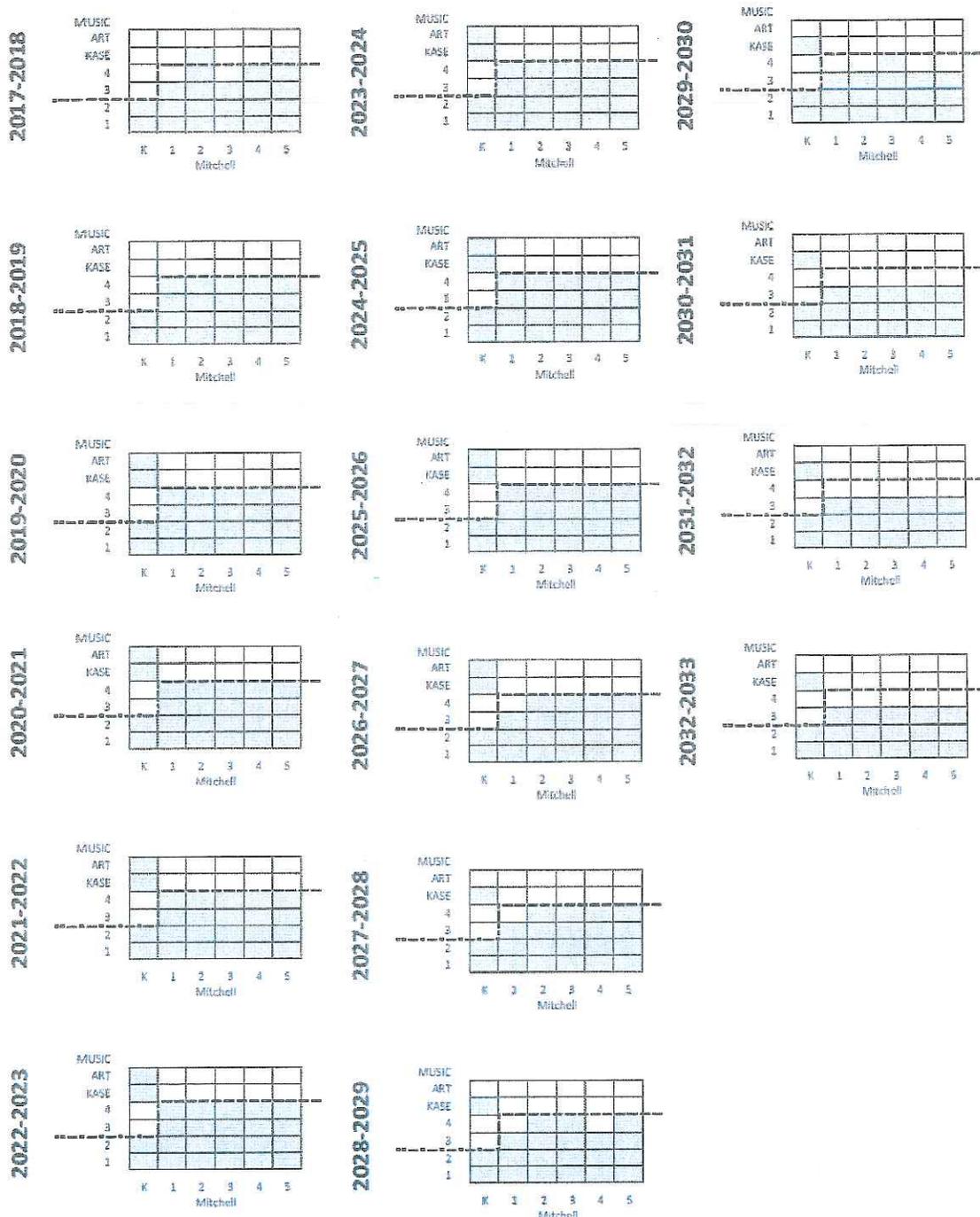
The preliminary September 1, 2018 enrollment of the Mitchell School is 496 students.

**3. How many additional classrooms are needed?**

To prepare for the anticipated implementation of Full-Day Kindergarten in September 2019, the Needham Public Schools commissioned Dore & Whittier Architects to conduct a space study to determine how best to implement the new program, given the District's existing inventory of classroom spaces.

The study revealed that Mitchell School will need to have four classrooms for Kindergarten when Full-Day Kindergarten is implemented, creating the need for two additional grade level classroom spaces. After 2030-31, the population of Mitchell School is expected to decline to three sections per grade level at all grades.

The graphic on the next page illustrates Mitchell's classroom need over the next fourteen years. The dashed line represents the capacity of the building without re-purposing space. Colored boxes represent when a classroom section is needed. The dedicated specials boxes above the dashed line represent spaces available for potential conversion to grade level classrooms.



**4. How does the School Committee propose to provide the additional classrooms spaces needed?**

Based on the results of that study, the School Committee recommends that two additional modular classrooms be erected at the Mitchell Elementary School. The modular classrooms would supplement the school’s 22 existing classroom spaces to provide the 24 classroom spaces deemed necessary in the first year of Full-Day Kindergarten in September, 2019.

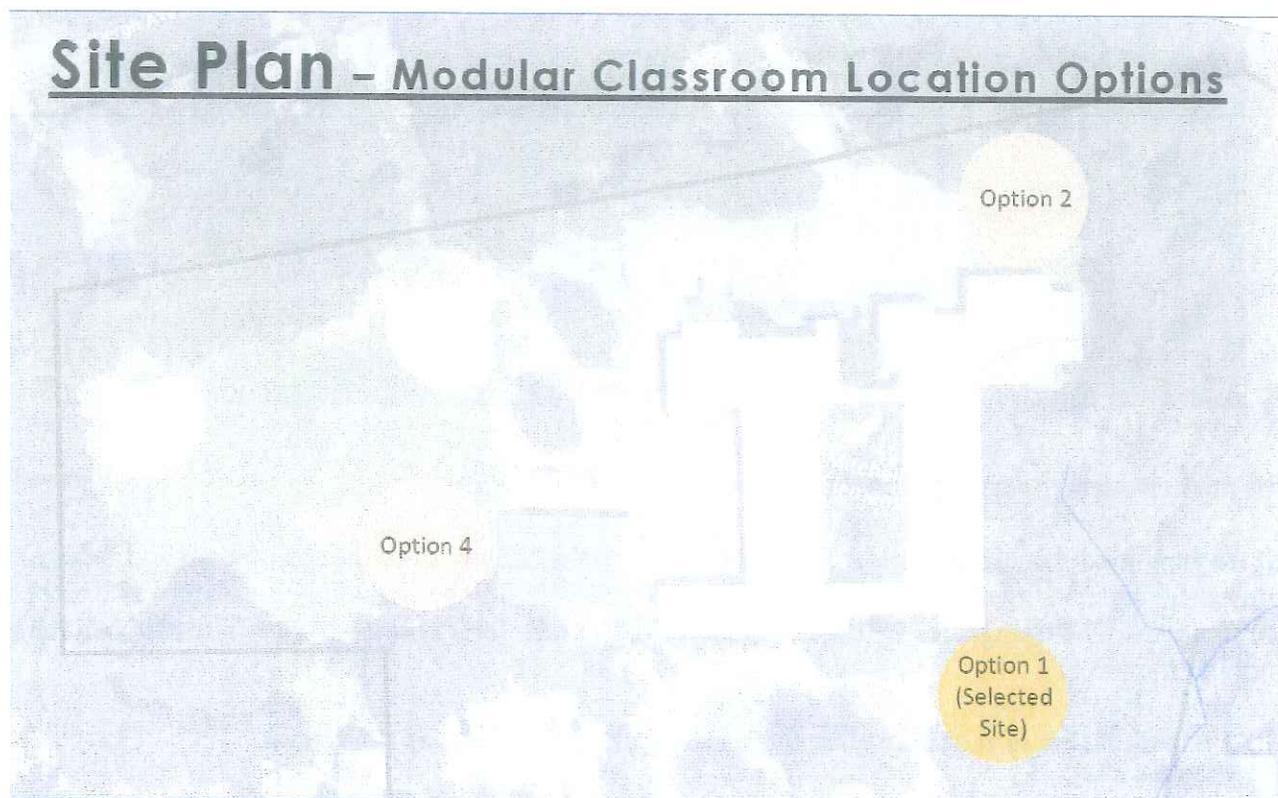
**5. How will the new modular classrooms be used?**

In September, 2019, the four existing modular classrooms will be converted to Kindergarten classrooms, and will house the Kindergarten program. This use will displace Music and Art from their current spaces, however, and will require that two new classrooms be added at the school. The new modular classrooms will provide space for Music and Art.

**6. Where will the new modular classrooms be located on the Mitchell campus?**

The new modular classrooms will be located in the front of the school, to the right of the circular driveway. The proposed location was selected on the basis that it offered the best proximity to the main entrance, offered the best location for administrative surveillance, allowed ease of access for before/after school programs, and provided good proximity to utility connections. The major drawback to the preferred site is slightly increased cost due to site conditions (trees and ledge), which will require the removal/ replanting of wetlands trees/shrubs.

A graphic showing the proposed location is presented below. The chosen site is labeled "Option 1."



**7. What other locations were considered?**

The PPBC and Dore & Whittier Architects considered other potential locations for the new modular classrooms, including a location in the rear of the school, near the back entrance and bus loop (Option 2) and a location at the rear of the existing modulares, on the field (Option 3.) The Option 2 site was rejected on the basis that it had limited visibility from administration; had poor soil bearing capacity (leading to an approximately \$80,000 expense for soil removal/replacement); would have required new sewer, water and

power connections from Lindbergh Avenue; and would have required sewer pumping (a maintenance issue.) The Option 4 site was rejected as being the most remote location, creating a bad weather access concern. In addition, the Option 4 site was not visible from the main school (a safety concern), encroached upon the playing field, was close to an abutter, and would have required a new sewer connection to Brookline Street.

**8. Will the new modular classrooms have the same look and feel as the existing modular classrooms?**

Yes, the new modular classrooms will be constructed of the same materials and will have the same 'look and feel' as the existing modular classrooms. An exterior rendering of the proposed new classrooms appears below.



**9. Will the new classrooms be connected to the school?**

No, the new modular classrooms will be detached, with a canopy over the front ramp and steps. This is required to avoid triggering code upgrades to the main building, including fire/safety and accessibility improvements. These upgrades will be completed as part of the larger project to renovate Mitchell Elementary School in the future.

**10. Will the installation of modular classrooms solve all space needs at the school?**

No, installing additional modular classrooms will not address space deficiencies in the area of Physical Education, Special Education and overall storage. The space deficiencies in these areas will need to be addressed by the long-term project to renovate the school. However, the new modular classrooms will provide the additional space needed for Art and Music, starting in September, 2019.

**11. What alternatives to adding modular classrooms have been considered?**

Dore & Whittier considered a number of potential solutions to addressing Mitchell's anticipated space needs, including the installation of two modular classrooms; the construction of a fabric structure gymnasium and

renovation of the existing gym into Art and Music; and the installation of a pre-engineered gymnasium and renovating the existing gym into Art and Music. The modular classrooms were determined to be the most economical and practical option for creating space in the building.

**12. When will the Mitchell Elementary School main building be renovated?**

The School Committee has prioritized renovation of the Mitchell School as a top priority for the next ten-year period. Although the school has undergone several additions in the past fifty years, it is in need of total renovation/replacement to address building deficiencies and bring the building to a level of modernization comparable to the Hillside School. The School Department's Capital Improvement Plan calls for the school to be updated by September, 2026, however, funding will be contingent upon the Massachusetts School Building Authority agreeing to partner with the Town to complete this project. In addition, the School Committee will need to carefully balance needs imposed by growing enrollment in other areas of the District, and the need to update the Pollard Middle School (including modular classrooms at the end of their useful life), before a final funding plan is developed.

**13. If Mitchell Elementary is renovated, what will happen to the modular classrooms?**

If Mitchell Elementary School is renovated, the modular classrooms could be moved to meet classroom needs elsewhere in the District, or re-sold.

**14. What is the total budget for the project?**

The total budget for the project is \$1.56 million, of which \$0.21 million already was appropriated by Annual Town Meeting in May, 2018 for engineering and design costs. The balance of \$1.35 million is needed for construction and is what is requested by Article 12.

**15. What is the schedule for the project?**

If funding for construction is approved, the PPBC will seek approvals from the Planning and Zoning Boards in October, will issue bid documents in November, and will award a contract in December. The new classrooms will open in September, 2019.

