

Q & A

Why is it necessary to replace the current school on the Lake Street site?

Situated on less than 2 acres, Lake Street Elementary School has served area children for more than 3 generations. But the old brick building has become inadequate with limited space for necessary programs for even the current enrollment. This K-3 School has no art or music room, no library, no kitchen, no cafeteria or gymnasium. Outdoor play areas and parking spaces are inadequate.

Why not expand on the present site?

The first choice was to enlarge and build on the present site. The plan was too expensive to purchase and demolish surrounding homes. Building on the present site would have forced families out of their homes who have lived in the area for many years. The site was well below guidelines for an 8-acre minimum site size to accommodate 300 students. There were too many constraints for future expansion. Last October, the Commissioner of Education advised the Auburn School Department to look at alternative sites other than the Lake Street School site to solve facility issues.

Why is the school being expanded from K-3 to K-6 Elementary School?

In the 1990's the citizens of Auburn sent a clear message in favor of smaller, neighborhood schools in a citywide referendum by voting against a proposed large consolidated school on a site off Turner Street. Therefore, the master plan of 1998 is in keeping with community wishes, which is to have neighborhood schools and grade levels starting from Kindergarten through grade 6 and have less transition during their educational years in Auburn.

Since enrollment in our schools is declining, why are we building a school to increase the number of students to 300?

Our long-range plan is to equalize the elementary schools throughout the district both programmatically and, as close as we can, in student enrollment size. We are bringing an additional 50 students into the new site from Sherwood Heights for the ESL (English as Second Language) Program. We are also looking at the 4th, 5th, and 6th grade students

from the Lake Street neighborhood to come to the new site. Currently, these students walk to Webster School. Once we can move forward with our master plan we will be looking at three schools of approximately 300 students on the North Side and lowering the number at both Fairview and Sherwood Heights where overcrowding occurs now. The enrollment decline does not happen at any one particular site or one particular grade and will not allow us to cut back in the number of classrooms. We do not have the appropriate program space at this point in all our elementary schools. Our Master Plan for facilities addresses all these deficiencies.

What impact will it have on the other K-3 or K-6 Schools?

Our Master Plan of 1998 is in keeping with the community wishes, which is to have neighborhood schools and grade levels starting from Kindergarten through Grade 6, have less transition, and where parents and students would get to know the school staff with greater continuity for parents and students. The South Side of Court Street has been designed and implemented K-6 grade levels at Walton, Sherwood Heights and Fairview Schools. With the new elementary school moving to a K-6 student population, it is the first series of changes for North Side of Court Street and moving toward three K-6 schools. Upon the integration of K-6 at the new school, the other two elementary schools to follow suit are Washburn and East Auburn.

Eventually, grades 4-6 at Webster School will be moved to their respective neighborhood schools and Webster School will revert to an Alternative 7-12 grade school, thus closing Franklin and greater part of Merrill Hill. Webster transformation will also allow for the Adult Education Center to move from the old Great Falls, where they are using temporary space, to a permanent space at Webster. Albeit Fairview and Sherwood Heights were renovated in 1996-97, the improvements did not allow for new program spaces; however, the new elementary school will allow for some appropriate program spaces to be built and create some growth room for both Fairview and Sherwood Heights. An example is the English as Second Language, (ESL) at Sherwood Heights. This is a new program within the Auburn School District that was not contemplated during the 96-97 renovations; and since then, Sherwood Heights has become the ESL program for the entire K-6 population. Adding an ESL program space to the new elementary School, which will accommodate the ESL students on the North Side of Court Street, will alleviate space needs at Sherwood Heights.

Will it increase the cost for bussing?

Currently, there are two school buses that service the Lake Street School K-3 population and a third that accommodates some of the 4-6 grade students from the Lake Street neighborhood to Webster School. It is expected that with the transition for Lake Street

School to a K-6 grade level, that our bussing may increase by one bus, thus having need for three buses but no greater than four.

What will occur with the existing school?

Superintendent Eretzian has stated during public meetings that the existing Lake Street School most likely will be retained by the School Department and that they will explore its use as a 'Before and After School Child Care' expansion and/or possibly a system-wide initiative for a Pre-Kindergarten program. A neighborhood compatible use is our intent, but will require discussion with School Committee and City Council.

Will it help with the overcrowding of Sherwood Heights and other schools?

Yes, the new elementary school will assist in the overcrowding at Sherwood Heights and Fairview. Both of these schools were renovated in 1996-97 in preparation for the closing of the elementary schools of Great Falls, 4-6 grade levels, Western Avenue, K-3 grade level and Annie Woodbury, non-grade K-3 school. They were renovated to accommodate 450 students each, and now have enrollments in excess of 500 plus additional program spaces that were not anticipated at the time of the renovations.

If this school project is not approved by the voters at the referendum, what are the alternatives, what impact will this have on the other K-3 and K-6 Schools in the future, and what will happen with the funding by the state for this project?

This is a multi-part question. First, if the Auburn voters do not approve the referendum, the State DOE will divert the unused funding into the Major Capital Projects pool, where the available funds will be distributed to the next community on the rating list. In comparison, when the 1993 New Elementary School on the North Side of Court Street was defeated in a referendum, the pool of money for our new elementary school was diverted to Gardiner, where they used the available funds to build a new elementary school.

The impact to the other elementary schools (specifically Washburn, East Auburn and Webster) will mean that Phase-Two of East Auburn and Washburn Schools will be postponed indefinitely. In accordance with our Master Plan these renovations/expansions would move the remaining Webster School 4-6 students to their respective neighborhood schools. East Auburn and Washburn Schools had renovations with small expansions in Phase One of the Master Plan, primarily in preparation for the full transition to K-6 schools and in anticipation of Phase Two once Lake Street School was fully implemented to K-6. The South of Court Street elementary school, too, would continue to have overcrowding, enrollment, and inadequate program space needs. Lake Street School is

the commencement of the domino theory, whereby without the successful referendum support for the new elementary school, it may very well be another 10 years before the City of Auburn has another opportunity for a major school project with State DOE funding participation.

Why was a site on Park Avenue selected?

The State is funding a large share of the cost of the project to replace Lake Street School. The State prefers schools within a neighborhood area to prevent unnecessary sprawl and bussing. The State Board of Education looks for long-term solutions, quality issues and the end result must be expandable and flexible for future changes. The Park Avenue site will continue to be within the vicinity of the old school and will still be a walking/neighborhood school. There are 456 homes within 3/4 mile of the Park Avenue site. The Park Avenue site consists of 10+ acres.

Will this school create traffic congestion and safety issues on Park Avenue?

Presently, over 500 cars travel on Park Avenue between Lake Street and Court Street during peak traffic hours. (This was revealed by Casey & Godfrey, Consulting Engineers of Gardiner, Maine, during a recent traffic study). There is already a need for a traffic light at the intersection of Park Avenue and Court Street. Traffic will be more controlled on Park Avenue in the future. There will be a 15 mph speed limit in front of the school when children are present. The 25 mph speed limit will be strictly enforced, with a school in the area. There will be a traffic island for turning in front of the school for additional safety. Sidewalks will be constructed on Park Avenue near the school in the future. The number of additional vehicles as a result of a K-6 school on Park Avenue will have a relatively minor impact on the traffic conditions. The school site plan and the design of ingress and egress to the project have implemented the highest levels of concern with a full contingent of professionals with experience in site selection and traffic issues. Project engineers are very cognizant of the various traffic movements and measures to increase the margin of safety for the concerns of students.

Park Avenue is fairly close to the Auburn Middle School, so why not build a new K-6 School there?

This would move the school into the Fairview district of Auburn and it would no longer be a small neighborhood school within walking distance of the present location. The city would also lose several heavily utilized community athletic fields.

Is State funding a competitive process for this project?

Major Capital Improvement Program for School Facilities Priorities is an application process and rating cycles occur every two years. All school construction applications are rated independently following a strict set of guidelines as established by the State Board of Education Chapter 61 – Rules for Major Capital School Construction Project.

The Rating System takes into account three major categories: Building & Grounds, School Population & Program and Planning. A maximum of 200 points can be garnered for various deficiencies noted while during a visual inspection tour of the school facility. The Department of Education staff will rate each school on:

- 1). Unsafe Conditions regarding Site & Building
- 2). Obsolete and/or Unsuitable Program space and Mechanical and Building System Deficiencies
- 3). Overcrowding in areas of Instructional Areas and Program Scheduling
- 4). Enrollment Estimates and Population shifts with emphasis on Program and Planning.

The Lake Street School application rating dates back to the rating cycle in 1999-00. Of the 70 applications received for review and rating by DOE, Lake Street was 23rd highest in needs assessments with a total of 104.29 points. DOE had sufficient funds to approve 25 projects and therefore the remaining 45 applications were denied and those denied school districts had to then resubmit new applications for consideration in the Rating Cycle of 2001-2002. Putting things into perspective and getting an understanding of the enormous school facilities improvement needs that exist in the State of Maine, the rating Cycle of 2001-2002 had a total of 92 applications for review/rating by DOE. Should Lake St. School project not have been funded in the 99-00 Rating Cycle, our total 104.29 points would have ranked us at 31 on the list of 92. DOE only approved funding for 11 school projects of the submitted 92 applications. So competition is very keen.

How will this school expansion project benefit our community?

It is important and responsible to upgrade inadequate facilities to stay competitive with other communities around the state and to provide the best educational opportunities that we can for our children. Our community is strengthened and is a more desirable place to live with smaller, neighborhood schools at the elementary level. Our neighborhood school concept during the key learning years will help to keep and attract families and employers within our Auburn community who might otherwise settle in another area.

How can I keep up to date on the progress of this project?

The design of the school and cost of the project will be presented at a public meeting in June. A citywide referendum will be held in September. If the referendum is approved, construction will begin in the spring of 2005 with an anticipated opening in the fall of 2006. Anyone is welcome to attend the building committee meetings and be kept informed of the process/progress. To review maps, common questions and answers, meeting minutes, dates of building committee meetings and the progress on this project, please see www.auburnschl.edu and click on the “Lake Street School Info” icon.