

Braintree submits plan for South Middle School expansion

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The Patriot Ledger

Posted Nov 5, 2018 at 10:43 PM

Updated Nov 5, 2018 at 11:50 PM

The plan makes the case for how much additional space would be needed in a proposed expansion and renovation of the South Middle School.

BRAINTREE – Plans for the expansion and renovation of the South Middle School took a step forward Monday with the approval of a preliminary design program for the project.

The four-inch thick document outlines the school's education programs, matches them against the space requirements set by the Massachusetts School Building Authority and then compares it with the space available in the present building, making the case for how much more space is needed. It also evaluates various alternatives to meeting those space requirements, including replacing the existing school with a new building.

The submission of the plan to the school building authority was approved by the school building committee and the school committee at back-to-back meetings Monday afternoon.

"These are the steps we have to take as part of the MSBA process," said school committee member Tom Devin, who chairs the building committee.

The expansion and renovation project is part of a plan to move grade 5 classes from the elementary schools to the middle school, freeing up classrooms in elementary schools. The first part of this plan, expansion of the East Middle School, is already under construction and is scheduled to be completed in time for the start of the 2020-21 school year.

Hill International, the town's project manager for the middle schools, said in the submission to the school building authority that the projects "will provide space needed at the middle school and elementary school grade levels to accommodate the needs of all students and provide the room necessary to manage projected enrollment growth without having to construct additions to each of the elementary schools."

The South Middle School is being designed for a capacity of 800 students, up from the current capacity of 700.

The school was built in 1956 and four modular classrooms have been added to the building: two in 2001 and two last year.

Mayor Joseph Sullivan asked if the state favors renovation over new construction.

Mary Mahoney of Hill International replied, "they certainly give districts and incentive to do renovation."

The state is picking up about half of the \$81.3 million cost of the East Middle School project.

The MSBA will review the design program over the next couple of months. The authority's board is scheduled to make a final decision on the project in August.