

INTRODUCTION

This narrative provides the voters of Uxbridge with important information about the proposed high school project. This document is divided into three parts:

- **Part I - The Problem:** identifies issues with the current high school;
- **Part II - The Options** (Feasibility Study): reviews the options examined for solving the problem(s); and
- **Part III - The Recommendation and Cost:** provides the cost and tax implications associated with the recommended solution.

The series will be published as solid facts become available.

In preparation for three (3) more public hearings before the SBC as suggested by the MSBA, this narrative provides the voters of Uxbridge with an important overview of all aspects of the proposed (1) "Quaker Highway" project, (2) a renovation/addition project to the three existing schools, and (3) MSBA "conceptual" plan. The narrative attempts to present an accurate picture of the high school "feasibility study" and detailed information about the options before the town. Prepared by School Building Committee members Ed Maharay (Finance Committee), Jane Keegan (School Committee) and Kevin Kuros (Board of Selectmen), representing their respective boards, this document has been reviewed for accuracy by the School Building Committee, School Superintendent and Business Manager, Town Manager and Finance Director.

The following explains in laymen's terms how the town got to this point, and the pros and cons of each option so a truly informed choice can be made by fellow citizens at some point.

Part I - THE PROBLEM

Accreditation:

The New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) reviews high schools every ten years for "accreditation" renewal. In 1997 NEASC reported concerns about the high school based on the ten standards it uses for evaluation¹. In their subsequent visits, Uxbridge's failure to address all issues previously raised resulted in the issuance of a "Warning" status in 2003 and more severe "Probation" status in 2004. In its last report,² made in 2007, NEASC noted under its Overview of Findings:

"Support of Teaching and Learning at Uxbridge High School"

The renovations that have been done in recent years have been helpful in providing needed space at the high school, but this band-aid approach can't succeed for much longer. The district plant manager and the school custodial staff work diligently to keep an aging facility afloat. The faculty and staff deliver a sound educational program in a facility that has a number of significant

¹ http://cpss.neasc.org/downloads/Getting_started/complete_standards.pdf

² http://www.uxbridgeschools.com/pdf_info/uhs_NEASC_Final_Report_-Jan08.pdf

problems. Students function at a high level given the facility restraints under which they have to learn. The students of Uxbridge deserve better.”

NEASC identified the following shortcomings with the high school facility that “limits the opportunities for all students to achieve their potential.”

- Replace and upgrade HVAC system
 - Examples: poor air quality in some math rooms; poor climate control in auditorium; the attached computer lab (by library) is not air-conditioned
- Windowless instructional areas
- Expanded space for library/media center
- Many classrooms do not meet minimum square footage requirements
- Science labs are small
- Need for computer labs, workrooms, testing areas, and common planning area for teachers to work collaboratively
- Inadequate storage space
 - Examples: inadequate storage in science labs; inadequate storage for musical equipment; limited storage space for educational equipment and teaching materials
- Music classes taught in the auditorium
- Poor locker room space
- Inadequate gym facility
- Inadequate parking
- Limits the opportunity for cooperative learning

NEASC evaluates the facility based upon the program and curriculum delivery needs for high school students. As a result only the first item, “upgrade HVAC”, would need to be completed if the present high school building is to be used for our students in grades 6-8. If the existing HS was converted to a middle school, there is adequate square footage for the windowless instructional areas to be used for storage, testing areas, computer labs, and common planning areas. The library, gym, and locker rooms are adequately sized for middle schools and comparable to Whitin. The current music program facilities at Whitin are very limited. The high school building would provide an auditorium for our middle school students and additional space for our music program. Whitin has as many undersized classrooms as the high school facility. Parking would be adequate since student parking is not an issue for middle school students.

In 2008 the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) conducted an internal facility analysis of Uxbridge High School. While specifics are unavailable to us, as a result of their findings and a review of our Statement of Interest (SOI), the MSBA invited Uxbridge as one of a limited number of communities to participate in the MSBA Feasibility Study.

Student Enrollments and Overcrowding: In addition to the UHS accreditation problem, there is the issue of overcrowding in the lower grades. According to the MSBA’s regulations governing “square footage per pupil” Taft is at 110% capacity and

Whitin at 141%. Future projections for the school year 2016-2017 show Taft increasing to 121% capacity and Whitin at 131% capacity. These projections do not include students who will continue to school choice out if nothing is done. Since these buildings are overcapacity, Uxbridge will never realize the financial benefit of local students returning to the town or the benefits of additional students wishing to school choice into our schools.

Education:

The dual problems of accreditation and overcrowding have prompted parents to take their children out of the Uxbridge School District. The following charts show the changes in the students educated in and out of district (all grades) for the period 2002 through 2009.

**Uxbridge District Enrollment
As a Percentage of Total Enrollment**

Year	District	Total	Percent
2002	2,217	2,607	85.0%
2003	2,107	2,557	82.4%
2004	2,006	2,621	76.5%
2005	1,972	2,649	74.4%
2006	1,909	2,596	73.5%
2007	1,890	2,575	73.4%
2008	1,917	2,564	74.8%
2009	1,912	2,516	76.0%

Out of District Enrollment

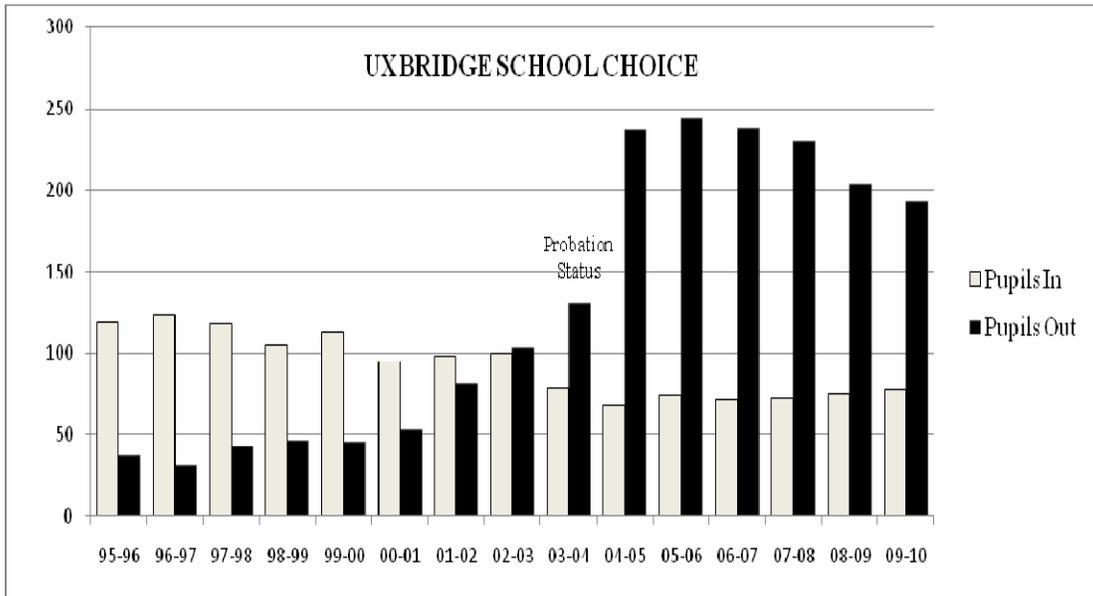
Year	School Choice	Vocational	Private	Total
2002	103	142	145	390
2003	131	152	167	450
2004	237	159	219	615
2005	244	186	249	677
2006	238	207	242	687
2007	230	208	247	685
2008	204	204	239	647
2009	193	203	208	604

Financial Cost: Overcrowding and Accreditation

School Choice

The State’s school choice program allows parents to send their children to schools in communities other than the city or town in which they reside. Tuition is paid by the sending district to the receiving district.

The following graph and chart shows Uxbridge's recent history in school choice.



Between 2002 and 2009 Uxbridge went from a plus \$116,697 in combined School Choice In/Out funds to a negative \$694,514, a swing of \$811,211.

School Choice

Year	School Choice In	School Choice Out	Total
2002	\$472,681	\$ 355,984	\$ 116,697
2003	\$432,498	\$ 525,903	(\$ 93,405)
2004	\$426,209	\$ 718,351	(\$292,142)
2005	\$380,723	\$1,136,083	(\$755,360)
2006	\$612,294	\$1,268,596	(\$656,302)
2007	\$443,494	\$1,333,315	(\$889,821)
2008	\$430,193	\$1,184,223	(\$754,030)
2009	\$427,964	\$1,122,478	(\$694,514)

Vocational High Schools:

In addition to School Choice Out, the town pays for students attending vocational high schools like the Blackstone Valley Tech. During 2002 and 2009 the town's cost for students attending the Blackstone Valley Tech went from \$944,261 to \$1,776,006, as the percentage of Uxbridge students attending BVT increased from 14% to 18% of the total student population.

**Uxbridge Student Enrollment
Blackstone Valley Tech**

Year	Students	% of BVT Enrollment	Cost
2002	116	13.6%	\$ 944,261
2003	123	15.1%	\$1,151,037
2004	119	14.5%	\$1,102,387
2005	128	15.1%	\$1,240,301
2006	138	14.9%	\$1,320,801
2007	168	16.9%	\$1,482,847
2008	190	18.2%	\$1,696,696
2009	195	17.8%	\$1,776,006

In addition to the above costs, the space limits have caused several educational programs to be established outside the schools. This in turn added annual rental and operations costs to the budget:

Good Shepherd for Kindergarten classes	\$120,000
15 Mendon St. for the 18 – 22 year old Independence program	\$ 31,000
Unitarian Church for the Mosaic program	<u>\$ 22,000</u>
Total	\$173,000

The overall financial cost to the town, i.e., school choice out, vocational assessment, and rental property expenses, is in excess of \$3.1 million annually, or roughly 9.3 % of the town’s operating budget. The FY 10 costs in these areas are:

Since 2002 this cost has increased \$1.8 million:

School Choice Out	\$ 811,211
Rent/Lease	\$ 173,000
BVT Assessment	<u>\$ 831,745</u>
Total	\$1,815,956

The FY10 town operating budget, which includes a separate transfer article to fund part of the Rent/Lease figures listed above, is \$33,589,787

Feasibility Study:

In 2008, at the Fall Annual Town Meeting, funds were voted for a high school feasibility study in partnership with the MSBA. The next article in this series will review the work and recommendations of this study.