

# RSU 16

## Whittier Middle School Building Addition Update

### *Building Project: Rumors, Questions, Concerns and Excitement*

**S**o you have heard rumors about an addition at Whittier Middle School? To keep you updated on the facts, this article is the part of our public information process that will progress over the next several months. Watch for future newsletters from Superintendent Tina Meserve to get the whole story. You can also follow the meeting notes on the RSU website [www.rsu16.org/operations/BWMSAddition.html](http://www.rsu16.org/operations/BWMSAddition.html).

### *A History Lesson ... of PRHS/BWMS*

Poland Regional High School and Bruce Whittier Middle School were opened in 1999.

The high school was a necessity because, at that time, Poland, Minot, and Mechanic Falls



were transporting their kids to various out-of-district high schools. Poland made the decision to build a high school to alleviate that problem and included a middle school project to deal with crowding issues at the Poland Community School. Once the State funded school construction was completed, students from four towns began to attend the high school (a number of student from Raymond also attended). But the middle school was utilized by Poland students only.

### *Then Came Consolidation*

During Governor Baldacci's administration, school districts were required to consolidate or face financial penalties. In fear of losing State school funding, the three Union 29 towns took

on the arduous process of creating Regional School Unit 16. A year after consolidation, the collapse of the economy necessitated merging all of our middle school students into a single school (BWMS). This was a cost saving solution at the time, but also the beginning of the overcrowding issue.

### *What about the extra space at the elementary schools?*

There are several reasons why that is no longer an option. Pre-kindergarten was added and has become a beneficial program for kids entering elementary school. Adult Education was in need of a new home after losing their space at the Mechanic Falls town office. And finally, the needs of our students are ever changing, and the number of students requiring specialized education, such as Gifted and Talented, Title I and Special Education is growing. These factors have taken up space once used by our seventh and eighth graders.

### *Overcrowding and Student Safety*

Remember, Whittier Middle School was initially built for just Poland students. It was constructed for about 150 kids. This past year, there were 250 students. Classroom sizes were built to State standards at the time of construction and today's State recommended classroom square footages are more substantial and appropriate for current day needs. With the increased number of students, the small classroom sizes, higher demand for specialized services and heightened security concerns, a larger building has become a necessity.



Modular classrooms, two placed shortly after consolidation and a new one just recently, has helped with spatial deficiencies, but it does not adequately address the issue in the long run. Modularity is never intended to be long-term replacements for quality, functional, secure education space.

### *What has happened so far?*

In 2014, the voters approved \$95,000 for a Feasibility Study. We have used that money to study the issue and options available to us. A group of staff and school board members formed the Facilities Review Committee (FRC) and evaluated the spatial requirements. The RSU also enlisted the expertise of Planning Decisions from Portland - the leading specialists at determining population trends and making projections. They analyzed historical trends based on the number of births to residents and the number of students moving in and out of the district. The study revealed that our student population is expected to remain relatively stable over the next twenty years.

Once we completed our research, the direction we needed to take was very clear. A school addition is going to be the best solution for us. Using feasibility study funds, the committee selected the architectural firm, Portland Design Team (PDT), that originally designed the high school/middle school. A public listening session was conducted at the high school on June 22, 2016 and with the information gathered by the FRC and comments made at the public meeting the architects began to formulate options.

### *The Middle School Building Committee*

It was at this point that the FRC needed to morph into the Middle School Building Committee (MSBC). RSU staff and community members appointed by local elected officials make up the committee. The MSBC had their first meeting at the end of August and was presented with several concept plans. These plans were presented to staff and administrators at the middle school for comments. Their observations and comments, as well as suggestions from MSBC, were considered and the plans narrowed down to a single design.

The committee is made up of the following representation:

RSU 16 School Board – Mary Martin, Jack Wiseman and Norm Davis.

Staff – Tina Meserve, Superintendent, Cari Medd, PRHS Principal, Shawn Vincent, WMS Principal, John Hawley, Director of Operations, and Tony Bennett, 7-12 Maintenance Supervisor.

Public Reps. – Steven Bolduc and Nick Konstantoulakis, Mechanic Falls, Lisa Cesare, Minot and Stan Tetenman, Bill Eldridge for Poland.

Rick Jones, also a Poland resident, is serving as environmental and engineering consultant for the group.

In a very near future update, I will give you the answer to that one question everybody is sitting on the edge of their seat for...how much is it going to cost? You will also find out when we will hold the next public forum.

*-John Hawley, RSU 16 Operations Director*

