CITY OF NORWALK
Alan Lo, Buildings and Facilities Manager
alo@norwalkct.org P: 203-854-7877
Norwalk City Hall
125 East Avenue, PO Box 5125
Norwalk, CT 06856-5125

TO: BOARD OF EDUCATION – FACILITIES COMMITTEE
COMMON COUNCIL – LAND USE AND BUILDING MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

FROM: ALAN LO, BUILDINGS AND FACILITIES MANAGER

**RE: NORWALK HIGH SCHOOL – PROJECT PLAN APPROVAL**

DATE: FEBRUARY 25, 2022

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Project Introduction:
The current Norwalk High School (NHS) was built in 1970 and the City has continued to invest into the school as required for maintenance and necessary improvements. In 2006, the City undertook a $42 million code updated project which included new mechanical system, windows, a new science wing and music wing. In 2017, $6 million was budgeted for additional improvements. After discussions with the school community, that budget was then increased by $5.5 million, for a total of $11.5 million. This included exterior painting, culinary arts expansion, restroom renovations, mechanical system upgrades, structural repairs, hazardous abatement and other aesthetic improvements.

The City began submitting applicable projects to the State for reimbursement. After submitting several small projects, the State called for a meeting to discuss the ongoing requests. At the meeting, the State indicated that they were not supportive of funding numerous small projects over the next 20+ years. It was recommended that the City to consider a more holistic approach and plan a project that would encompass all of the needs at NHS.

In response to the State, the City noted that we could not afford to build a new school or renovate-as-new with a reimbursement rate of 23% and 33% respectively. Upon further review, the State determined that if the P-TECH program were to accept 100 out of district students, a new school would be eligible for 80% reimbursement, with some non-education components reimbursable at 40%. Understanding that major upgrades to the existing NHS facilities would be required within the next 10 years, the City and Norwalk Public Schools agreed a new school would be the most economical path forward.

Following the meeting with the State, the City retained an Architect for a conceptual design and a Construction Manager for initial constructability and professional cost estimating. Following

these efforts, a grant application was submitted to the State in the amount of $225 million. The State legislation approved the project in October 2021, however the total budget was reduced from $225 million to $189 million. As a result of the reduction in State funding, the total square footage of the school would need to be reduced and the existing science wing structure would remain and be renovated as new. Also, the pool which was included in the original grant application, would continue to be designed as part of the total project but would be bid as a add alternate for construction due to the budget limitations.

Project Design:

At the inception of the project there was some discussion regarding construction of the new school the project team assessed the feasibility of the construction of the new school within the Testa Field complex. The City requested an estimate from the construction manager for this option. We found that it had a projected additional cost of $9.4 million. Due to the budgetary constraints, the decision was made to proceed with designing for phased construction within the existing building's footprint (Option A).

Option A - The Architect focused on and completed the building program and the schematic design phases for a phased construction project fronting along Strawberry Hill Avenue and County Street. The extensive construction phasing requirements and site constraints are expected to have a significant impact on project costs. Additionally, there were significant concerns of disruption to building operation and academics throughout more than four years of construction.

In light of these concerns, the project team began to further evaluate the feasibility of constructing the new school on Testa Field (Option B).

Option B – The Architect completed a conceptual design for constructing the new school on Testa Field. This option eliminates the need for phased construction and greatly reduces disruptions to building operations and academic programs. However, this would have impacts to NHS Athletics during the approximate 5 year construction schedule.

Use below link to see recording of presentation for the two design options:
**https://youtu.be/chImcBcozFE**

After numerous design schemes the City, Architect and Construction Manager agreed that Option B would have greater benefits relating to the site programmatically, for land use and impact to the neighbors and for constructability.

Community Feedback:

Both options were presented during the Joint Meeting of BOE Facilities Committee and Common Council of Land Use and Building Management Committee on January 25th, 2022. Following this meeting, subsequent outreach meetings were scheduled to inform the community and receive feedback. Based on the recommendations during this meeting, the following community outreach meetings were conducted in February:

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| 2/8/2022 | NHS and P-TECH Community Feedback |
| 2/9/2022 | NHS Athletics / Recreation & Parks |
| 2/10/2022 | NHS Band |
| 2/16/2022 | NHS Athletics / Recreation & Parks - Follow-up |
| 2/22/2022 | SGC Feedback |
| 2/24/2022 | NHS Transportation for Athletics |
| 2/24/2022 | NHS Athletics / Recreation & Parks - Follow-up |
| 2/24/2022 | NHS and P-TECH Community Feedback |

Based on feedback received during community outreach meetings, the following were noted as re-occurring questions and concerns:

1. King Street Traffic – Option B includes an entrance off of Kings Street. Following community feedback and concerns regarding potential traffic impact, the design team has developed and evaluating seven (7) site vehicular circulation options in an effort to minimize impacts to the adjacent streets. Additionally, a traffic study will be completed as we develop the preferred option.
2. Athletics – Both Option A & B will have an impact on NHS Athletics. However, Option B has a greater impact and will disrupt athletic programs through construction for approximately 5 years. Several meetings have been held with Athletic Directors at NHS and Brien McMahon, as well as with representatives from the Recreation & Parks Department, to develop a plan for alternative sports facilities. By using alternate facilities within the community, including West Rocks, Nathan Hale and potential other locations, the team is developing a plan of alternative locations which will accommodate existing NHS athletics programs during the construction of Option B. The biggest challenge is to find alternate location for track and field sports. We also discussed means create “home field” environment at off site locations.
3. Transportation for Athletics – Transportation for offsite athletics was a consideration when developing list of alternative sports facilities. The fields at West Rocks Middle School present the best opportunity of offsite athletics. West Rocks proximity to NHS and the benefit of utilizing their fields for multiple sports will simplify transportation logistics on a daily basis.
4. Alternative School Site – Suggestions have been made to use an alternative site for the construction of the new NHS. There are currently no City owned properties that would accommodate the construction of the new school which would require 30 or more acres. Also, the City does not have the budget required for the acquisition of new property.
5. Pool – Due to the budget reduction by the State during the initial grant application, the project budget does not currently include the construction of the pool. However, all of our design options continue to include the pool as an integral part of the building program so that the pool can be bid as an Add Alternate to the project. The City continues to seek funding options to finance the pool construction. If funding permits, the pool will be constructed as part of the project.
6. Additional Design Options – The City has assembled a project team that is highly recognized in major school design and construction in the State and the region. For

over a year the City, Architect and Construction Manager have developed and evaluated numerous design options to achieve the school program requirements within the constraints of the existing site, while maintaining building operation and academics. Of the design options evaluated, Options A & B were the most feasible and were developed further.

Conclusion:

The current state of the existing NHS will require major upgrades in upcoming years. These upgrades will not be without disruption the building operations and academics. The approved reimbursement rate at 80% (compared to our standard reimbursement rate of 23% for new construction) for NHS is unprecedented for the City of Norwalk and unlikely to be repeated.

We believe building a new school on Testa Field (Option B) is the most practical option. This provides the least amount of disruption to academics and daily operations of the school as well as allows the design to be consistent with the educational goals of the new facility.

**ACTION REQUESTED:**

**Approve design Option (option to be determined) for the new Norwalk High School Improvement Project and refer recommendation to the (Board of Education/Norwalk Common Council) for approval.**