

Q&A on the Hutchinson School Façade 12.01.16

In July 2016, after observing some visual deterioration of the brick façade at Hutchinson School, the Pelham School District hired Kaese and Lynch Architecture and Engineering LLP to conduct a full assessment of the building's exterior. The Board of Education heard a report on the firm's findings and recommendations at the Board's Nov. 29 meeting. Below is a Q&A regarding the status of the façade and the next steps for the exterior of Hutchinson School.

Q: Are students safe in and outside of Hutchinson School?

A: Architect Diane Kaese performed an initial inspection of the building in August and determined that portions of the yellow-brick façade are cracked, bulging, bowed and in danger of falling. She recommended several short-term measures to ensure students' safety, all of which were implemented before the first day of school. These include constructing a bridge over the sidewalk on Third and Lincoln avenues as well as over the stairway to the main entrance, fencing off an area near the north wall outside the auditorium, and stabilizing loose sections of brick. The District is confident that these measures are sufficient to protect all students, staff and the public.

There is no evidence that the structure itself is damaged and engineers will continue to inspect the building periodically to monitor the deterioration of the exterior. Should further safety enhancements be necessary, the district is prepared to implement them immediately.

Q: What is the long-term plan for the building and how quickly can the repairs be completed?

A: Ms. Kaese recommends replacing the entire outer layer of yellow brick (known as a wythe), and the steel lintels above the windows. The plan also calls for repairing and reinforcing the underlying steel including the spandrel beams that run between floors, installing new windows and making other upgrades that will ensure the building façade will be structurally sound for decades to come. It is anticipated that this work will be performed during the summer when school is not in session and that the work can be completed in phases over the course of two summers. The District currently expects the work to begin in summer 2018.

Last July, the Board of Education declared an emergency regarding the Hutchinson School façade and authorized using more than \$500,000 in its Repair Reserve Fund. Taking these proactive steps provides the District tools to mitigate any potential hazards quickly and efficiently.

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Q: How much will this project cost and how will the District pay for it?

A: We have received a very rough estimate of \$5 million, however that figure will change as more details become known. The District has retained a consultant who is working with Kaese and Lynch to prepare a detailed cost estimate. The Board of Education expects to pursue a long-term bond to pay for the work.

Q: What caused the damage? Could anything have been done to prevent it?

A: The first segment of Hutchinson School was built in 1914 and it was expanded in 1924. Over time, rainwater seeped behind the outer brick layer, which Ms. Kaese said is expected. The water caused the steel, including the lintels and spandrel beams to rust, expand and bow. This movement, as well as the freeze-thaw cycle, caused the outer brick to crack and loosen. Like all of the District's facilities, Hutchinson School has undergone several renovations over the years, however there is no way to fully prevent the wear and tear caused by rain and weathering, particularly over the course of more than 80 years.

Q: Are there structural issues at any of the other schools or are there other projects the District and Board are considering?

A: The five other schools in the District have been assessed and are structurally sound. The Board of Education has asked Superintendent Dr. Peter Giarrizzo to provide a list of other projects that the Board should consider in an effort to upgrade and modernize the school facilities. The Board will then consider all of these projects to determine what is needed and affordable before seeking residents' approval of a bond package.