

Whittier School Building Project Information Sheet

Prepared by the Georgetown Select Board and
Finance and Advisory Committee

Where can I learn more about the project?

Whittier is holding an open house at their campus on January 13, 2024. You may learn more about Whittier and the project at buildingthefutureofwhittier.org. The tax impact calculator, referenced below, can be found [here](#).

When and where do I vote?

Voting will take place from 11:00 am to 7:00 pm at the Penn Brook school gymnasium. Absentee voting is permitted, however, voting by mail or early voting is not allowed for this election. Please call the Town Clerk's office for more information on absentee voting, registering to vote, and election deadlines.

IF YOU VOTE YES:

A **YES** vote approves the Whittier Regional Vocational Technical School District (the "District") to borrow the amount of \$444,613,813 for the purpose of paying costs of designing, constructing, *originally* equipping and furnishing a new District high school and related athletic facilities, to be located at 115 Amesbury Line Road, Haverhill.

- In order to approve the District to borrow money for this project, **the majority of voters in the entire district must vote yes**. The District includes Haverhill, Newburyport, Amesbury, Ipswich, Georgetown, Groveland, Merrimac, Newbury, Rowley, Salisbury, and West Newbury. If a majority of Georgetown residents vote "no" but a majority of the aggregate number of district residents vote "yes," Georgetown residents will still have to pay their share of the project costs.
- Georgetown and the surrounding towns will be subject to the assessment regardless of the outcome of the overall town's vote. The agreement is based on a regional agreement signed in 1967 and individual towns may not leave without the consent of every other city and town in the region.
- This loan includes the payment of all costs incidental and related to the project.
- The District has been given a school construction grant from the Massachusetts School Building Authority ("MSBA") for \$131,000,000, which is to be expended at the direction of the School Building Committee.
- Should the borrowing for this loan be approved on January 23rd, the District's actual share is estimated at \$267.5 million - with MSBA reimbursement and other grant funding.

Implications for Georgetown residents if the Whittier debt is approved:

- The estimated debt service for Georgetown is **\$35,901,617**. The total appropriation to Georgetown will be based on Georgetown's ratio of total number of children attending school *anywhere (including public, private, or parochial school wherever located)* compared to other towns in the District. This number changes frequently, based on estimated costs and other anticipated funding sources, including the approved amount from the MSBA.
- In the case of a "yes" vote, Georgetown will have to vote at a Town Meeting whether to exclude this debt from the tax levy limit, seek an override to the base tax rate, or fund the debt out of our operating budget.
- It is anticipated that Georgetown would begin paying this debt during FY 2026.
- The current FY24 tax rate in Georgetown is \$12.55 per \$1,000 of value. Georgetown's total annual operating budget for FY 2024 is \$35,565,105. Annual debt payments related to the Whittier project will be based on available interest rates on municipal bonds at the time but are likely to be in excess of \$2 million annually for more than 30 years.
- To fund the payments out of Georgetown's current operating budget would necessitate significant cuts to our town services and limit our ability to make capital investments in town buildings and resources.
- The tax impact calculator provided by Whittier is based on an anticipated total district share of \$264 million and projected interest rates between 4% to 5%. In this scenario, the tax impact on Georgetown residents is an additional \$0.58 per \$1,000 of assessed home value. In this example, an assessed home value of \$500,000 would see an average annual tax impact of an additional \$290.85.

Additional information:

- Despite getting a new building, Whittier will not be able to accept increased enrollment over their total current approved enrollment of 1,280 students across all 11 District communities.
- Total Georgetown enrollment (based on October 1 counts) is 61 for FY 2024, 55 for FY 2023, 44 for FY 2022, 39 for FY 2021, and 33 for FY 2020. These numbers are subject to fluctuate throughout the year as students move in and out of the district; however, Whittier's annual operating budget reflects these expectations.
- Georgetown will continue to pay annual tuition costs to Whittier. Total annual tuition assessments paid or to be paid to Whittier total **\$1,015,342** for FY 2024, \$794,275 for FY 2023, \$706,828 for FY 2022, \$582,583 for FY 2021, and \$569,321 for FY 2020. These payments are made out of Georgetown's annual operating budget.

IF YOU VOTE NO:

A **NO** vote means that you oppose the current project as presented moving forward.

- In order to deny the project loan, **the majority of voters *in the entire district* must vote no**. The District includes Haverhill, Newburyport, Amesbury, Ipswich, Georgetown, Groveland, Merrimac, Newbury, Rowley, Salisbury, and West Newbury.
- Per the MSBA: In the event that a school district fails to approve funding for a proposed project within the 120-day deadline, by no later than 10 business days following the failed vote, the school district must submit to the MSBA a plan that: (1) presents the vote results, (2) explains the school district's understanding of the reason(s) for the failed vote, and (3) sets forth the school district's plan to remedy the failed vote and a suggested timeline for such a remedy. The MSBA will review the plan and determine whether it can continue to set aside MSBA funds for the proposed project. However, a failed local vote likely will result in the school district being required to submit a new Statement of Interest to the MSBA and await an invitation from the MSBA to enter the Eligibility Period phase of the MSBA's process.
- A "no" vote does not mean that the District cannot seek future funds from the MSBA or will not receive money for capital improvements from its member communities or other funding sources.
- In the event of a "no" vote, the Whittier School Committee expects to embark on a major renovation project to replace failing equipment and systems and bring the structure up to modern building codes. They anticipate that work will cost \$350 million, with no reimbursement from the MSBA.
- A no vote does not mean that Whittier must close.