

State Approves Consentino School Renovation, Expansion

I want to use this edition of the Mayor's Column to explain and celebrate some wonderful news for our city.

I recently attended a meeting of the Massachusetts School Building Authority Board of Directors in Boston, where they voted to approve the renovation and possible expansion of Haverhill's Dr. Albert B. Consentino School.

Depending on the results of an upcoming feasibility study, the state might even decide that we need a whole new school.

Consentino, which is nearly 50 years old and currently educates about 1,000 students in grades 4 to 8, has been a top priority of mine for several years.

We first applied for approval of a renovation and expansion project in 2017. We were passed over at that time in favor of other school projects around the state. We then hired an engineering firm to document problems at the school and applied again. This time the answer was yes!

Our legislative delegation including Reps. Andy Vargas and Linda Dean Campbell as well State Senator-elect Diana DiZoglio wrote letters of support and joined me in lobbying the SBA on behalf of Consentino. Rep. Vargas and our school Superintendent Margaret Marotta joined me in person at the SBA Board meeting earlier this month to make our final pitch.

In recent years, we have spent millions on smaller repairs and upgrades to Consentino, including installing new windows and doors, new lockers, a new boiler and repaving the parking lot and walkways. However, overcrowding, limited space and the need for a totally new roof have signaled that it's time for a major renovation and expansion of the building.

Over the years, most of the specialized classrooms and storage areas have been converted to regular classrooms to accommodate overcrowding at the school, located at 685 Washington St. in our Mount Washington neighborhood.

At the very least, the new project is expected to include a new roof and up to eight new classrooms and teaching spaces including: science labs, teacher workrooms, specialized rooms for speech and other special education services and storage areas. We won't know the full scope and price-tag for the project until after the feasibility study, but the state is expected to cover at least half the cost.

The next step is for us to form a Building Committee to oversee the project and to select the architects for the feasibility study. You'll be hearing more from me on that in the very near future.

There is a long way to go, but state approval is the most important step, and we have finally cleared that hurdle.

My sincere thanks to all who assisted and supported this project: our legislative delegation, the City Council, School Committee, Superintendent Marotta, former Superintendent Jim Scully and many others. This was a great team effort.

I'm so happy to see this project that I have long championed for finally moving forward!