



A Report Prioritizing Improvements Needed for Each School Building

Strategic Capital Improvements Committee
August, 2025

Background

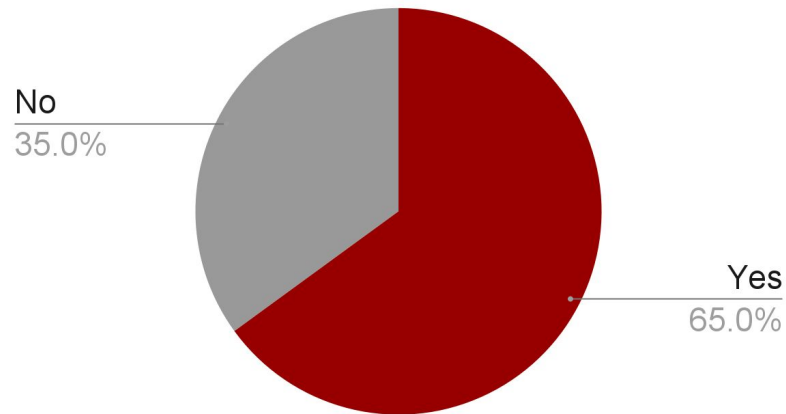


On November 5, 2024, Portland voters considered a bonding resolution that would have allocated approximately \$68 million to support the consolidation of Portland Public Schools. Specifically, the resolution would have:

- Relocated sixth grade to Portland Middle School
- Decommissioned Brownstone Intermediate School
- Decommissioned Gildersleeve Elementary School
- Renovated and expanded Valley View Elementary School to create a unified PreK–5 facility

The referendum was rejected by voters, with 2,337 voting YES and 3,446 voting NO.

Referendum Vote: Nov 5, 2024



Community Feedback

While no formal exit polling or post-referendum study was conducted, an analysis of social media posts, community editorials, and informal conversations revealed several key concerns that likely influenced the outcome:



- Concerns about size of the proposed PreK-5 facility
- Traffic Impact
- Uncertainty Regarding Future use of decommissioned schools
- Loss of community gymnasium space
- Need to address secondary complex needs
- Costs, mill rate increases, and length of bonding
- Communication and outreach challenges



Strategic Capital Improvement Committee

Formed by Board of Selectmen on November 20, 2024.

Asked to:

- Prioritize the capital improvements needed for each school building and compile a total cost for a future bonding referendum.
- Develop a timeline for capital improvements with the goal of decommissioning one elementary school upon completion of the project.
- Collaborate with Friar Architecture to identify state reimbursement opportunities that may coincide with the project.





Committee Priorities



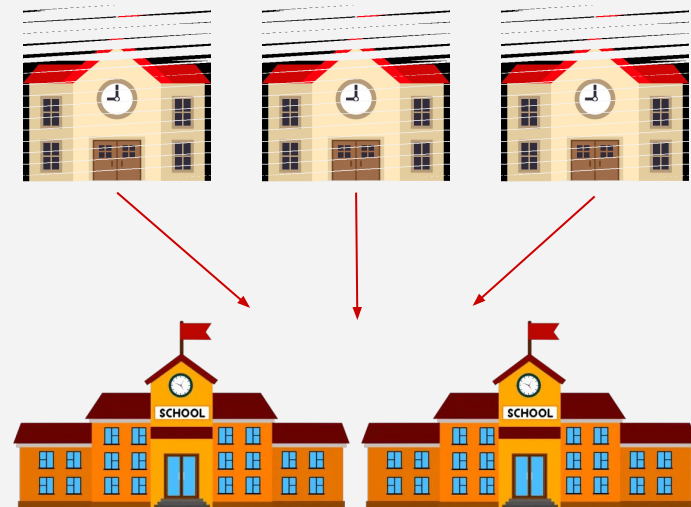
1. High-quality academic space
2. Environments that foster positive school climate and culture
3. Facilities that support school security
4. Improved heating, air conditioning, and indoor air quality
5. Energy-efficient building systems
6. Flexible, cost-effective learning spaces
7. Capacity for enrollment growth, including full-day PreK
8. ADA-compliant accessibility
9. Dedicated community spaces for athletics, arts, and public use

Unanimously supported at first meeting:
January 2, 2025

Initial Agreements

The Committee quickly reached unanimous agreement on the following:

- Consolidating from three to two elementary schools is in the best interest of the community
- Relocating sixth grade to Portland Middle School is also in the best interest of the community
- We can no longer ignore the significant infrastructure problems in our schools



Developing Options



Option 1

- Decommission Valley View Elementary School
- Convert Gildersleeve Elementary into a PreK–2 facility
- Convert Brownstone Intermediate into a Grades 3–5 facility

Option 2

- Decommission Gildersleeve Elementary School
- Convert Valley View Elementary into a PreK–2 facility
- Convert Brownstone Intermediate into a Grades 3–5 facility

Option 3

- Decommission Brownstone Intermediate School
- Convert Valley View Elementary into a PreK–2 facility
- Convert Gildersleeve Elementary into a Grades 3–5 facility



Committee Recommendations

& Points of Consideration

Option 3

After extensive research and discussion, the committee vote 7-2 to recommend *Option 3*.



- Decommission Brownstone Intermediate School
- Convert Valley View Elementary into a PreK–2 facility
- Convert Gildersleeve Elementary into a Grades 3–5 facility



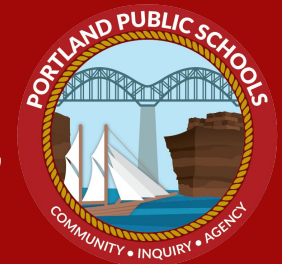


Brownstone Intermediate School - *Considerations*

The recommendation to decommission Brownstone Intermediate School followed extensive and passionate deliberation. Ultimately, the Committee concluded that converting a 1930s-era high school into a 2030s-era elementary school was not feasible for the following reasons:

- The cost of alterations and a renovation-to-new at Brownstone were higher compared to Valley View and Gildersleeve.
- In order to remain within the State's square footage requirements, renovation-to-new would necessitate demolishing large areas of the building, and/or requesting special permission to remove areas of the building such as the auditorium and basement from the renovation project and designating those areas as non-school-use zones.
- Even with substantial renovations, the Committee determined that the building could not adequately meet the developmental and educational needs of elementary-aged students.
- The school's location on Main Street adjacent to the Connecticut River and Brownstone Quarry, in an area targeted for waterfront economic development, presents logistical challenges for drop-off, pick-up, daily school operations, and outdoor activities.
- The Brownstone building, recognized for its architectural and historic significance, and prominent Main Street location, holds the greatest potential among district facilities for repurposing as a municipal, mixed-use, or commercial space.





Brownstone Intermediate School - *Recommendation*

Committee Recommendation (*Passed by a vote of 7 YES, 2 NO*):

Decommission Brownstone Intermediate School and authorize a bond in the range of \$2 million to upgrade the electrical system and address immediate capital improvement needs necessary to transition Brownstone into a facility for Portland Parks and Recreation and to enhance its viability for future tenants.

Reimbursement Rate:

The Committee anticipates that 100% of the costs (plus financing costs) would be a Town of Portland responsibility.





Valley View Elementary School - *Considerations*

The majority opposed decommissioning Valley View for the following reasons:

- Valley View shares a campus with Portland Secondary School, enhancing operational efficiency.
- It is the only elementary school with sufficient acreage for future expansion, should enrollment increase.
- The facility is purpose-built for early childhood education.
- The absence of a proper gymnasium limits its utility as a Portland Parks and Recreation facility.
- Other than demolition or leasing to another educational entity, the building has limited commercial resale value or use as a municipal facility.





Valley View School - *Recommendation*

Committee Recommendation (*Passed by a vote of 7 YES, 2 NO*):

Authorize an approximately \$47,000,000 bond to support a renovation-to-new of Valley View Elementary School, reestablishing it as a PreK–2 facility.

Reimbursement Rate:

The Committee anticipates that 40% of this amount would be paid for by the Town of Portland and 60% paid for by the State of Connecticut:

- Cost to Portland: \$18,800,000 (not including financing costs)
- Cost to State: \$28,200,000





Gildersleeve School - *Considerations*

The majority opposed pursuing a renovation-to-new at Gildersleeve because in order stay within the State's space requirements and thereby maximize reimbursement, approximately 9,000 square feet of the existing facility would need to be demolished during the renovation process. Eliminating 9,000 square feet would necessitate reducing approximately 18% of the space from the current 48,844 square feet footprint.

The Committee determined that, although slightly more expensive, robust alterations and targeted capital improvements were preferable to a renovation-to-new, primarily because this approach would allow the district to retain the full square footage of the existing building as a safeguard against future enrollment growth.





Gildersleeve School - *Recommendation*

Committee Recommendation (*Passed by a vote of 7 YES, 2 NO*):

Authorize a bond in the range of \$27 million bond to support the alterations and capital improvements necessary to reconfigure Gildersleeve Elementary School as a grades 3–5 facility.

Reimbursement Rate:

The Committee anticipates that 75% of this amount would be paid for by the Town of Portland and 25% paid for by the State of Connecticut:

- Cost to Portland: \$20,250,000 (not including financing costs)
- Cost to State: \$6,750,000





Secondary School - *Recommendation*

Committee Recommendation (*Unanimous Agreement*):

Move sixth grade to Portland Middle School. Authorize a bond of \$8,000,000 to replace the roof, air-handling units, and HVAC control systems at the Portland Secondary School. Apply any savings realized through school consolidation to address other districtwide infrastructure needs until those savings are required to support the debt service on the bond.

Reimbursement Rate:

At this time, the State reimbursement rate for HVAC upgrades and roof replacement is not known.



Addressing Community Concerns about PreK-5 School

Concern

- Concerns about size of the proposed PreK-5 facility:
- Traffic Impact:
- Uncertainty Regarding Future use of decommissioned schools:
- Loss of community gymnasium space:
- Need to address secondary complex needs:
- Costs, mill rate increases, and length of bonding:
- Communication and outreach challenges:

Solution

- Maintains small elementary schools
- Return Valley View to configuration pre-2015, no change at Gildersleeve, and adding 6th will cause minimal impact at PMS
- Offers a short-term plan for BIS along with long-term options contained in Land Use Committee Report
- Depending on disposition of Brownstone, Portland will gain a gymnasium
- Addresses infrastructure challenges at secondary complex
- Fiscally prudent
- Tonight will (hopefully) begin ongoing efforts to communicate and dedicate the community



Addressing Priorities

1. High-quality academic space
2. Environments that foster positive school climate and culture
3. Facilities that support school security
4. Improved heating, air conditioning, and indoor air quality
5. Energy-efficient building systems
6. Flexible, cost-effective learning spaces
7. Capacity for enrollment growth, including full-day PreK
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Summary of Recommendations

- Consolidate Portland's elementary schools from three facilities to two.
- Relocate sixth grade to Portland Middle School to establish a grade 6–8 middle school model.
- Apply savings from school consolidation and the retirement of bonding on the secondary school to address capital improvement needs at the Portland Secondary School Complex and other district facilities, until such time as those funds are needed for debt service.
- Decommission Brownstone Intermediate School as an elementary school facility. Authorize a bond of \$2 million to upgrade electrical systems and address other immediate capital needs. Once decommissioned, maintain or expand the lease with Oak Hill, and relocate Portland Youth Services, Portland Parks and Recreation, and the Portland Food Bank to the Brownstone building. The Town should then explore longer-term municipal and commercial uses for the facility.
- Authorize a bond of \$42–\$47 million to support a renovation-to-new of Valley View Elementary School, reestablishing it as a PreK–2 facility.
- Authorize a bond of \$26–\$30 million to support alterations and capital improvements necessary to reconfigure Gildersleeve Elementary School as a grades 3–5 facility.
- Authorize a bond of \$8 million to replace the roof, air-handling units, and HVAC control systems at the Portland Secondary School.



- Commission a new 10-year demographic study to assess enrollment trends and future projections.
- Contract with an architectural firm to develop the project scope and a conceptual order-of-magnitude budget for all proposed capital improvements, alterations, and renovations.
- Share the conceptual budget with the Town's financial planner to create a long-term bond repayment schedule.
- Engage a financial planner to conduct a trend analysis of Portland's projected net grand list growth, current and anticipated debt obligations, and other financial indicators critical to long-term planning.
- Leverage the November municipal election as an opportunity to begin educating Portland voters about the scope and rationale of the proposed projects.
- Engage the Town's bond counsel to draft a clear and comprehensive bonding resolution that outlines the full cost of the project, anticipated State reimbursement percentages, and offsetting savings from school consolidation and retired debt obligations.
- Ensure timely and accurate dissemination of information to Portland residents well in advance of any proposed bonding resolution.

Further Recommendations



Suggested Timeline - Summer 2025 - Fall 2025

Recommended Phases for Advancing Committee Recommendations

Summer 2025

- Present the Committee Report at a joint meeting of the Board of Education and Board of Selectmen.
- Share the report with the community and initiate public feedback sessions.

Fall 2025

- Leverage municipal elections to begin educating the community and building coalitions to support the Committee's recommendations.

Suggested Timeline - Fall 2025 - Winter 2025-26



- Commission a new 10-year demographic study to assess enrollment trends.
- Develop educational specifications for the renovation-to-new of Valley View Elementary School.
- Engage an architectural firm and construction company to fully develop the scope of work for alterations, renovations, and capital improvements at:
 - Valley View Elementary School
 - Gildersleeve Elementary School
 - Brownstone Intermediate School
 - Portland Secondary School
- Use the developed scope to create a conceptual order-of-magnitude budget.
- Share the conceptual budget with the Town's financial planner to develop a detailed bonding table.
- Contract with a financial analysis firm to produce a full fiscal projection, including:
 - Projected net grand list growth
 - Impact on the mill rate
 - Future debt obligations
 - Retired and retiring debt
 - Savings generated from school consolidation
- Share all financial documents (conceptual budget, bonding table, fiscal analysis) with bond counsel to draft the formal bonding resolution.
- Clearly communicate the resolution and financial analysis to the community, including projected mill rate impacts.

Suggested Timeline - Winter - Spring 2026



- Conduct comprehensive community outreach to address questions and concerns.
- Bring the bonding referendum forward for a vote.
- If referendum passes, submit the grant application to the State Department of Administrative Services by the June 30, 2026 deadline.





2026 - 2027 School Year

- **Await grant decision from the State Department of Administrative Services (expected by December 2026).**
- **Continue detailed planning and prepare for Phase One implementation.**



2027 - 2028 School Year - Phase 1



- Relocate the 6th grade to Portland Middle School, creating a 6–8 middle school.
- Move grades PreK–2 to Gildersleeve Elementary School.
- Move grades 3–5 to Brownstone Intermediate School.
- Begin capital upgrades at Portland Secondary School and Brownstone Intermediate School.
- Complete the renovation of Valley View Elementary School.



2028 - 2029 School Year - Phase 2



- Relocate grades PreK–2 to the newly renovated Valley View Elementary School.
- Maintain grades 3–5 at Brownstone Intermediate School.
- Complete remaining upgrades at Portland Secondary School and Brownstone Intermediate School.
- Complete capital improvements at Gildersleeve Elementary School.

2029 - 2030 School Year - Phase 3



- Relocate grades 3–5 to the newly upgraded Gildersleeve Elementary School.
- Repurpose the updated Brownstone building to house appropriate municipal entities.

