

Strategic Capital Improvements Committee

Presents:

A Report Prioritizing Capital Improvements Needed For Each School Building

Presented To:

The Portland Board of Selectmen and Portland Board of Education



Report Approved July 29, 2025

Executive Summary

Following the rejection of the November 2024 bonding referendum and in light of persistent concerns about the condition and configuration of Portland’s school facilities, the Strategic Capital Improvements Committee was established by the Portland Board of Selectmen in November 2024. The Committee was charged with reviewing the district’s facility needs, prioritizing capital improvements, and recommending a sustainable plan for school consolidation, renovation, and long-term financial planning.

After six months of deliberation—including comprehensive facility reviews, cost analyses, site visits, and consultation with architects and construction experts—the Committee unanimously agreed on the following:

- Urgent action is needed to address the district’s aging infrastructure and decades of deferred maintenance.
- Portland should consolidate from three elementary schools to two.
- Sixth grade should be relocated to Portland Middle School, creating a grades 6–8 middle school model.

Key Recommendations

To address the district’s immediate and long-term capital needs, the Committee recommends the following actions:

- Renovate-to-new Valley View Elementary School to serve grades PreK–2
Estimated Bonding Cost: Approximately \$47 million
- Reconfigure Gildersleeve Elementary School to serve grades 3–5 through targeted alterations and improvements
Estimated Bonding Cost: Approximately \$27 million
- Decommission Brownstone Intermediate School and repurpose the facility for Parks & Recreation, Portland Youth Services, and the Portland Food Bank, while maintaining and expanding the lease with Oak Hill
Estimated Bonding Cost: Approximately \$2 million
- Upgrade critical systems at the Portland Secondary School Complex, including roof replacement and HVAC improvements
Estimated Bonding Cost: Approximately \$8 million

In total, the Committee recommends bonding in the range of \$79–\$89 million, with potential offsetting savings from:

- Decreased operational costs due to consolidation
- Retiring existing bonding obligations
- State reimbursement for eligible renovation projects

Addressing Community Concerns

The Committee’s recommendations were shaped directly by community feedback following the failed 2024 proposal. Specific concerns addressed include:

- Facility size: Preserving small schools with developmentally appropriate grade spans (PreK–2, 3–5, and 6–8)
- Traffic: Expected to remain manageable on High Street, based on historical traffic patterns
- Use of decommissioned schools: A detailed plan for repurposing Brownstone Intermediate School
- Secondary Complex improvements: Bonding includes funding to address critical needs at the Portland Secondary School complex
- Cost and mill rate impact: A phased financial plan and recommendation to engage bond counsel and financial planners
- Communication: A clear public outreach plan beginning in Fall 2025 and continuing through the referendum process

Next Steps

To advance these recommendations, the Committee proposes the following timeline:

- Summer–Fall 2025: Launch immediate community outreach and initiate updated demographic studies
- Fall 2025–Spring 2026: Develop educational specifications and prepare formal bonding documents
- Spring 2026: Hold bonding referendum
- June 2026: Submit application for state reimbursement grant
- 2027–2030: Begin phased implementation of grade reconfiguration and capital improvements

This plan offers a pivotal opportunity to modernize Portland’s schools, create high-quality learning environments, and plan responsibly for the town’s future. The Committee urges Town leaders and residents to consider these recommendations with the urgency and resolve the moment demands.

Introduction

This report summarizes the deliberations, findings, and recommendations of the Strategic Capital Improvements Planning Committee (the “Committee”), formed by resolution of the Portland Board of Selectmen on November 20, 2024 [click [here](#) to access resolution]. At the request of the Portland Board of Selectmen, the Committee was charged with the following tasks:

- 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 Members

Carl Johnson, Chair
Laurel Steinhauser, Vice Chair
Chris Dickman
John Dillon
Brett Hertzog-Betkoski
Jenn Martinez
Darcy Parmelee
Robert Shea
Ben Srb

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.

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 the Size of the Proposed PreK–5 Facility

The consolidation would have resulted in one larger elementary school, transitioning from our current configuration with three of the state’s smallest. Community members voiced concerns about logistics, including lunch waves, student schedules, class sizes, parking, student transitions, and the potential impact on school and town culture.

Traffic Impact

The plan to consolidate students and staff on a single campus raised concerns about increased traffic along High Street, Hall Hill Road, and Bartlett Street, particularly during arrival and dismissal times.

Uncertainty Regarding Future Use of Decommissioned Schools

Under the proposal, Gildersleeve and Brownstone schools would have been returned to the Town. Although a Land Use Committee [click [here](#) to access the Land Use Committee report] had begun exploring potential reuse options, no firm plans were in place, and voters were wary of the unknown costs and implications.

Loss of Community Gym Space

While a new gymnasium was included in the Valley View renovation, community access to gyms at Brownstone and Gildersleeve could have been lost depending on what happened to the decommissioned spaces. This potential net reduction of gym space was a significant concern for local athletic organizations, especially youth basketball programs.

Secondary Complex Needs

Many residents were concerned that the bonding resolution did not include funding for capital improvements at the Portland Secondary School complex. Although future savings from consolidation might have supported some needs, the absence of an immediate plan left voters uneasy.

Costs, Mill Rate Increases. And Length of Bonding

Voters were apprehensive about the overall financial implications, including overall cost of the project, length of the proposal 30-year bond, and impact on the mill rate. Additional anxiety stemmed from the unknown future costs associated with repurposing or maintaining decommissioned buildings.

Communication and Outreach Challenges

Despite the availability of detailed information, including historical background, committee reports, conceptual budgets, schematics, financial projections, student and faculty schedules, logistical and operations models, and tax impact tables, many residents found the materials overwhelming. The complexity of the plan, paired with a lack of accessible communication, contributed to public confusion and mistrust.

The Committee agreed that any new recommendation must directly address these concerns to gain broad community support.

Review of the Facilities Study Committee Report

At its first meeting on January 2, 2025, the Committee reviewed the report developed by the Facilities Study Committee. While not all recommendations were endorsed, the following priorities were unanimously supported:

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

The Committee affirmed that any recommendation must clearly demonstrate how it advances these priorities.

Developing Options

Following its review of the Facilities Study Committee Report and the 2024 bonding proposal, the Committee unanimously concluded 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

With these guiding decisions, the Committee explored three consolidation 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

To assess the feasibility and cost of each option, the Committee undertook a comprehensive review of all relevant facilities. This included:

- A line-by-line review of the Sightlines Report [click [here](#) to access the Sightlines report]
- Detailed discussions of the Friar Architecture Facility Analysis [click [here](#) to access the Friar Facility Analysis and cost estimates]
- Site visits to all facilities
- Consultations with Friar Architecture, Downes Construction, and SLAM Architects to determine cost options and logistical challenges associated with capital improvements, alterations, renovations, and renovation-to-new options

The findings of this review are summarized in the next section.

Facility Analysis & Recommendations

Portland Secondary School

On November 6, 2001, Portland voters approved a referendum authorizing renovations to Portland High School and the construction of a new Grades 7–8 Portland Middle School. Following the completion of the new construction and renovations, the Portland Public Schools implemented new grade-level configurations beginning with the 2005–06 school year:

- Valley View Elementary School: Grades PreK–2
- Gildersleeve Elementary School: Grades 3–4
- Brownstone Intermediate School: Grades 5–6
- Portland Middle School: Grades 7–8
- Portland High School: Grades 9–12

Currently, there is sufficient space at Portland Middle School to relocate sixth-grade students from Brownstone Intermediate School without requiring significant renovations or alterations to the facility. Establishing a Grades 6–8 middle school would align Portland with a common grade configuration used throughout Connecticut.

Although the Portland Secondary School Complex is the newest facility in the district, it is now more than twenty years old and in need of substantial capital improvements. Critical issues include aging infrastructure and a poorly designed heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) system. After an extensive review of the Sightlines report, along with recommendations from Friar Architecture and the Portland Public Schools Director of Facilities, the Committee identified the following capital improvement needs at the Portland Secondary Complex [[Click here](#) to access committee approved capital improvements spreadsheet].

Committee Recommendation (*Unanimous Agreement*):

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.

Valley View Elementary School

Valley View Elementary School was originally constructed in 1953, with additions completed in 1958 and 1992. Over the decades, it has served a variety of grade configurations, including grades PreK–2 until 2015. To accommodate these grades, portable classrooms were installed in the 1990s. By the mid-2000s, those portable structures had exceeded their usable lifespan, leading to their removal and the relocation of second grade to Gildersleeve Elementary School. Since 2015, Valley View has operated as a PreK–1 facility.

Aside from the removal of the portables, no significant capital improvements or renovations have been made since the 1992 addition. As a result, the building has deteriorated and now requires substantial upgrades. Following an extensive review of the Sightlines report and recommendations from Friar Architecture and the Portland Public Schools Director of Facilities, the Committee identified the following capital improvement needs at Valley View [[Click here](#) to access committee approved capital improvements spreadsheet].

The Committee explored the feasibility of decommissioning Valley View but ultimately rejected that recommendation by a vote of 6–3. 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.

The Committee evaluated the relative costs and benefits of targeted capital improvements, partial alterations, and a full renovation-to-new. The Committee determined that a renovation-to-new is the most advantageous option, as it qualifies for maximum State reimbursement, allows for both modernization and reconfiguration of the building, creates additional classrooms within the existing building footprint based on State per pupil square footage requirements, and is the *only option that will accommodate the return of second grade to Valley View*.

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

Gildersleeve Elementary School

Gildersleeve Elementary School was originally constructed in 1964, with an addition completed in 1991. Over the years, the building has housed various grade configurations, serving grades 3–5 until 2015. Since that time, Gildersleeve has functioned as a grades 2–4 facility.

No major capital improvements or renovations have been made since the 1991 addition. As a result, the building has deteriorated and is now in need of substantial upgrades. After a comprehensive review of the Sightlines report, along with recommendations from Friar Architecture and the Portland Public Schools Director of Facilities, the Committee identified the following capital improvement needs at Gildersleeve Elementary School [[Click here](#) to access committee approved capital improvements spreadsheet].

In addition to evaluating the costs of capital improvements, the Committee requested a quote from Friar Architecture for a full renovation-to-new of Gildersleeve. While Friar provided a cost estimate, they also advised that to 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.

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

Brownstone Intermediate School

Brownstone Intermediate School was originally constructed in 1931, with additions completed in 1955, 1966, and 1992. Brownstone originally served as the district's grades 9-12 high school. After constructing a new high school in 1959, Brownstone became the district's grades 6-8 middle school. After constructing a new middle school in 2002, Brownstone became the district's grades 5-6 intermediate school.

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.

In the short term, the Committee recommends maintaining the current lease with Oak Hill and considering the relocation of entities currently experiencing a space shortage, such as Portland Youth Services, Portland Parks and Recreation, and the Portland Food Bank to the Brownstone building upon decommissioning. In the long term, the Committee encourages the Town to explore additional uses for the facility, such as leasing space to other tenants, housing municipal services, and referring to suggested uses in the Land Use Committee report.

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.

Summary of Recommendations

The following recommendations were approved by a unanimous vote (9 YES, 0 NO):

- 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.

The following recommendations were approved by majority vote (7 YES, 2 NO):

- 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.

To achieve these recommendations, the Committee further recommends the following interim steps:

- 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.

State Reimbursement Rates for School Construction Projects

School construction reimbursement rates in Connecticut are determined annually by the Department of Administrative Services (DAS), based on a formula established in state law. These rates reflect each town's relative wealth, measured by adjusted equalized net grand list per capita (AENGLC). For eligible costs, local school districts may receive reimbursement ranging from 20% to 80%, depending on project type and town wealth. Bonuses are available for specific priorities, including PreK spaces and Open Choice program participation. The reimbursement rate in effect at the time of a grant application remains fixed for the duration of the project.

To access the full legislative overview of the grant process, [click here](#) to view the Connecticut General Assembly’s summary report.

Throughout its deliberations, the Committee was guided by architects and consultants with extensive experience in the DAS school construction grant process. The following outlines anticipated reimbursement eligibility by school facility:

Valley View Elementary School

If DAS classifies the project as a “renovation to new”, and at least 55% of the square footage is renovated (as defined in CGS § 10-282(18)), the Town of Portland will be eligible for a base reimbursement of approximately 54%. Additional bonuses may apply:

- +5% bonus for including dedicated PreK space (provided the district maintains enrollment for at least 10 years)
- Up to +10% bonus for expanding access to the Open Choice program. The bonus is determined based on the percentage of Open Choice students enrolled in the district. Historically, the district has earmarked 5% of enrollment as Open Choice seats; thus, the district would be eligible for a 5% bonus.

These bonuses would bring the anticipated maximum reimbursement to 60% for eligible project costs. Renovation classification is also contingent on building age and prior grant history.

Gildersleeve Elementary School

The Committee recommends retaining approximately 9,000 square feet of existing building space, which precludes classifying the project as a “renovation to new.” As a result, the project will not qualify for the full 54% reimbursement rate. However, certain discrete improvements remain eligible for partial reimbursement:

- Roof replacement (depending on roof age and condition)
- Security infrastructure upgrades
- ADA-compliance modifications

Overall, the Committee anticipates that approximately 25% of the project’s cost will be eligible for reimbursement under current DAS guidance for limited-scope renovations and code compliance.

Brownstone Intermediate School

Because Brownstone will no longer function as an active school facility, it is not eligible for any state school construction reimbursement. This restriction applies to projects that do not serve an instructional purpose as defined under CGS § 10-282 and § 10-283.

Portland Secondary School

If the state reopens the Indoor Air Quality (IAQ) grant program, Portland may qualify for up to 50% reimbursement of eligible HVAC-related expenses. Should the IAQ grant remain closed, the project may still qualify for partial reimbursement (approximately 25%) for:

- Roof work (if conditions meet eligibility criteria)
- School security improvements
- ADA-compliant upgrades

Note: HVAC reimbursement under standard grants is often restricted unless bundled with qualifying renovation work or justified as a health/safety emergency under CGS § 10-283(b).

Important Considerations

- Annual Recalculation: State reimbursement rates are recalculated each fiscal year. While Portland's current reimbursement is estimated at 51%, there is no guarantee that this rate will remain constant in future years.
 - Eligible vs. Ineligible Costs: Only specific expenses are reimbursable under DAS regulations. Routine maintenance, feasibility studies, and athletic facility enhancements are generally excluded.
 - Final Grant Approval: All projects must appear on the legislature-approved school construction priority list to receive funding.
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Addressing Community Concerns & Priorities

Portland voters expressed several concerns when they rejected the previous proposal to create a PreK–5 facility. The Committee believes that each of these concerns has been addressed, as outlined below:

Concerns About the Size of the Proposed PreK–5 Facility

The Committee recommends a PreK–2 configuration at Valley View Elementary School. Before 2015, Valley View operated successfully as a PreK–2 school. Currently, Gildersleeve serves grades 2–4; under the new plan, it would transition to a grade 3–5 school, maintaining a three-grade configuration.

Portland Middle School has sufficient space to accommodate sixth grade without significant renovation. Historically, Brownstone Intermediate operated as a 6–8 middle school, demonstrating the district's capacity to support these grade-level configurations.

The Committee's recommendations restore previously existing grade-level configurations in Portland, thereby addressing concerns regarding school size.

Traffic Impact

The community has prior experience with a PreK–2 facility at Valley View, and based on that historical usage, the Committee does not anticipate significant traffic challenges. While adding sixth grade to the Secondary School will result in a modest increase in pick-up and drop-off traffic, the Committee is confident that existing traffic patterns can accommodate this change without major disruption.

Uncertainty Regarding the Future Use of Decommissioned Schools

The Committee recommends that all existing school facilities be retained for educational purposes, except Brownstone. In the short term, the Committee supports continuing the Oak Hill lease and relocating town entities currently experiencing a space shortage such as Portland Youth Services, Portland Parks and Recreation Department, and the Portland Food Bank to the Brownstone building.

In the longer term, the Town should explore additional uses for the Brownstone facility, including municipal services, commercial development, or a hybrid of both. The Town may refer to the Land Use Committee report for additional recommendations.

Loss of Community Gym Space

Currently, Valley View Elementary does not have a gymnasium. The proposed renovation includes the construction of a new, full-sized gym, which will expand opportunities for both school and community use, addressing concerns about the loss of recreational space.

Cost and Mill Rate Concerns

While the Committee’s full set of recommendations exceeds the cost of the previously proposed PreK–5 facility, it also includes critical investments that the earlier proposal omitted, such as needed renovations to the Secondary School and plans for the reuse or transition of decommissioned facilities like Gildersleeve and Brownstone.

To ensure long-term financial sustainability, the Committee recommends that the Town engage a financial planner to develop comprehensive projections, including:

- Growth in the Town’s net grand list
- Current and future debt obligations
- Expiring and expired bonding commitments
- Potential cost savings from facility consolidation

These projections should be incorporated into a long-term debt repayment schedule that clearly outlines the anticipated impact on the mill rate.

Communication and Outreach Challenges

The Committee acknowledges the complexity of its recommendations and recognizes the importance of clear, proactive communication. It recommends that Town officials begin public education efforts during the upcoming municipal election cycle. These efforts should focus on:

- Describing the infrastructure needs facing the Town
- Outlining the scope and rationale behind proposed capital improvements
- Clearly explaining the anticipated costs and benefits

This public outreach should lay the groundwork for a future bonding proposal, ensuring that voters are well-informed and prepared to make an educated decision at the next referendum.

In addition to addressing the concerns raised during the previous PreK–5 bonding proposal, the Committee also affirms its commitment to the following community 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

The planned renovations and alterations at Valley View Elementary School and Gildersleeve Elementary School will be guided by detailed educational specification plans. These plans will ensure that all faculty, staff, and students have access to high-quality, ADA-compliant learning spaces and environments that support a positive and inclusive school culture.

The educational specifications will also prioritize health and safety, incorporating rigorous standards for indoor air quality and comprehensive security infrastructure to ensure a safe and secure learning environment.

All new construction and renovations will be designed with energy efficiency in mind. At Gildersleeve, the Committee recommends an alterations plan that maximizes usable square footage, thereby providing flexibility for future enrollment growth. Additionally, the Committee notes that retaining the available acreage at Valley View offers the potential for future expansion should enrollment needs increase.

Finally, the plan includes the construction of a new, full-sized gymnasium at Valley View. This facility will expand gym space for both school and community use, while preserving all existing fields and arts spaces.

Suggested Timeline for Implementation

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.

Fall 2025 – Winter 2025-26

Conduct the following tasks concurrently:

- 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.

Spring 2026

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

2026–27 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.

Phase One – 2027–28 School Year

- 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.

Phase Two – 2028–29 School Year

- 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.

Phase Three – 2029–30 School Year

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

Conclusion and Supporting Documents

Below is a list of all documents referenced and discussed during the Committee’s deliberations, which began in January 2005 and continued through June 2025.

Committee members unanimously acknowledge that there is no simple or inexpensive solution to the challenges currently facing the community. Every available option carries its own set of advantages and disadvantages. The age of the facilities, decades of deferred capital investment, and a historical reluctance to make difficult decisions have together contributed to the present situation.

One point on which the entire Committee agrees: this problem can no longer be ignored.

The following is a list of supporting documents referenced or discussed during Committee deliberations.

[Resolution Establishing Committee](#): The Portland Board of Selectmen established the Strategic Capital Improvements Committee in November 2023

[Committee Meeting Agendas and Minutes](#): Links to all of the Committee meetings, special meetings, and minutes collected during the meeting.

[Committee Meeting Recordings](#): All Committee meetings are recorded and available for viewing on the Portland YouTube channel.

[Sightlines Report](#): This is the original facility analysis conducted by Gordian in 2020.

[Friar Facility Analysis](#): This folder contains a comprehensive assessment of each school facility and cost estimates associated with the identified needs.

[PreK-2 Education Specifications Plan](#): This is a draft preliminary PreK-2 education specifications plan developed for Valley View Elementary School. This plan will need to be fully developed and approved by the Portland Board of Education if the community elects to move forward with the renovation of Valley View and creation of a PreK-2 school.

[PreK-2 Blocking Diagram](#): Using the draft PreK-2 education specification plan, Friar Architecture developed this blocking diagram to show what a renovated Valley View could look like.

[Land Use Committee Report](#): This report was created by the committee tasked with identifying potential uses for Brownstone if it is decommissioned as a school.

[Demographic Study](#): The Portland Public Schools commissioned two demographic studies to determine enrollment trends in the district. The committee recommends a third demographic study.

[Conceptual Order of Magnitude Budget](#): This is the budget developed by Friar Architecture and Downes Construction with cost estimates for the PreK-5 Valley View. If the community moves forward with a PreK-2 Valley View, a similar budget will need to be developed.

[Reimbursement Rate](#): This document outlines how the State of Connecticut calculates reimbursement rates for school construction and renovation projects.

[SLAM Escalation Calculations](#): This letter provides an opinion from SLAM Architects on projected escalation costs associated with capital projects.

[Explanatory Text on November 2024 Bonding Resolution](#): This is the explanatory text developed for the November 2024 bonding resolution. A similar text will need to be developed for any future bonding resolutions.

[Financing Explanatory Text](#): This document outlines the repayment schedule for the PreK-5 resolution that was defeated in November. A similar analysis would have to be completed for any future borrowing associated with Committee recommendations.

