Frequently Asked Questions

Portland School Consolidation and Renovation Plan

Q: What is the plan for school consolidation?

A: On May 11, 2026, Portland voters will be asked to approve a bonding measure that will:

- Renovate and expand Valley View Elementary School to serve Grades PreK–2
- Renovate Gildersleeve Elementary School to serve Grades 3–5
- Move Grade 6 to Portland Middle School, creating a Grades 6–8 middle school
- Replace roofs and upgrade heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems at Portland Middle School and Portland High School
- Turn Brownstone Intermediate School over to the Town for a mix of public and private uses

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Q: What is the current condition of Valley View Elementary School?

A: Valley View Elementary School was originally constructed in 1953, with additions completed in 1958 and 1992. Since 1992, the building has not undergone major additions, alterations, or renovations.

Two separate facility analyses identified deficiencies in the following systems:

- Architectural systems
- Structural systems
- Mechanical systems
- Electrical systems
- Plumbing systems
- Fire protection systems

- Lighting systems

The reports also identified concerns related to compliance with International Building Code and NFPA standards.

Q: How much would it cost to complete capital projects to address all facility needs at Valley View?

A: A Strategic Capital Improvements Committee reviewed both facility analyses and consulted with architects. The committee identified $12.3 million in capital improvements that are needed immediately.

Q: Why renovate Valley View instead of completing only capital maintenance projects?

- Capital-only projects would not create the space needed to add Grade 2 to Valley View. Without that space, school consolidation would not be possible, and the district would continue operating three elementary schools instead of two.
- Capital maintenance projects are reimbursed by the State at a lower rate than full renovation projects.

Q: Once completed, what will Valley View be like?

A: Renovations will create a fully modernized and expanded school building. The project will include the addition of a full gymnasium, something Valley View does not currently have.

Renderings and educational specifications for the renovated Valley View Elementary School are available on the Portland Public Schools website.

Q: How much will the Valley View renovation cost?

A:
Total project cost: $47.5 million
Estimated State Reimbursement of 73.93% on Eligible Costs: $33.3 million
Estimated Town of Portland share: $14.2 million

Q: What is the current condition of Gildersleeve Elementary School?

A: Gildersleeve Elementary School was originally constructed in 1964, with an addition completed in 1991. Since 1991, no major additions, alterations, or renovations have occurred.

Two facility analyses identified significant deficiencies in the following systems:

- Architectural systems
- Structural systems
- Mechanical systems
- Electrical systems
- Plumbing systems
- Fire protection systems
- Lighting systems

The reports also identified concerns related to compliance with International Building Code and NFPA standards.

Q: How much would it cost to complete capital projects and alterations to create a Grades 3–5 school at Gildersleeve?

A: A Strategic Capital Improvements Committee identified approximately $27 million in capital improvements and alterations needed to create a Grades 3–5 school.

Q: Why renovate Gildersleeve instead of completing capital projects and alterations only?

A: As with Valley View, a full renovation:

- Supports the district's consolidation plan
- Qualifies for higher State reimbursement than capital-only projects

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Q: Once completed, what will Gildersleeve be like?

A: Renovations will result in a fully modernized school building designed to serve Grades 3–5.

Renderings and educational specifications for the renovated Gildersleeve Elementary School are available on the Portland Public Schools website.

Q: How much will the Gildersleeve renovation cost?

A:
Total project cost: $52.2 million
Estimated State Reimbursement of 58.93% on Eligible Costs: $29.1 million
Estimated Town of Portland share: $23.1 million

Q: What work is needed at Portland Middle School and Portland High School?

A: No major renovations or additions are required.

Portland Middle School is large enough to incorporate Grade 6, creating a Grades 6–8 middle school.

Both the middle school and high school require roof replacement and HVAC system upgrades.

Estimated costs:

Total cost: $8 million
Estimated State share: $4 million
Estimated Town share: $4 million

Q: What is the total cost of all projects?

A:

Projected Cost to the Town of Portland

Valley View: $14.2 million
Gildersleeve: $23.1 million
Secondary Schools: $4 million

Total Town Cost: $41.9 million (*including financing costs)

Projected Cost to the State of Connecticut

Valley View: $33.3 million
Gildersleeve: $29.1 million
Secondary Schools: $4 million

Total State Cost: $66.5 million

Total Project Cost: $108.4 million (including financing costs)

Q: Are there overhead savings from consolidating schools?

A: Yes. The district projects approximately $900,000 in annual operating savings through consolidation, including reductions in:

- 1 school principal
- 1 school clinician
- 1 teacher
- 1 nurse
- 2 custodians
- 2 administrative assistants
- 2 paraprofessionals
- Health insurance and retirement liabilities
- 1 large bus

- Utilities

Q: How long will the project take?

A: The full consolidation and renovation plan is expected to take approximately five years.

Spring 2026
Present bonding referendum to voters on May 11, 2026. If approved, submit grant application to the State Department of Administrative Services (DAS) by June 30, 2026.

2026–27 School Year
Await grant decision (anticipated December 2026). Confirm reimbursement rates with DAS. Hire an architect and Owner's Project Manager. Conduct design conferences with DAS and continue detailed planning.

2027–28 School Year
Move Grade 6 to Portland Middle School. Temporarily relocate PreK–2 to Gildersleeve and Grades 3–5 to Brownstone Intermediate School. Begin renovations at Valley View.

2028–29 School Year
Complete the Valley View renovation and continue planning for the next phase. Begin secondary school capital upgrades on roof, HVAC system, and mechanicals.

2029–30 School Year
Move PreK–2 to the renovated Valley View building and begin renovation of Gildersleeve. Complete secondary school capital upgrades on roof, HVAC system, and mechanicals.

2030–31 School Year
Complete the Gildersleeve renovation.

2031–32 School Year
Move Grades 3–5 to the renovated Gildersleeve building.

Q: How much will the Town need to borrow?

A: The total projected Town cost of the project is:

- Valley View: $14.2 million
- Gildersleeve: $23.1 million
- Secondary Schools: $4 million

Total Project Cost: $41.3 million

While the Town's projected share of the project costs is $41. 3 million, additional funds must be included for bond issuance costs. These costs are similar to the closing costs homeowners pay when borrowing money for a mortgage and cover expenses such as legal, financial advisory, and underwriting services. Bond issuance costs are not reimbursable by the State.

Including these costs, the total amount the Town is expected to borrow is approximately $41.9 million.

Q: How will the Town of Portland pay for this project?

A: The Town would borrow funds in the same manner used to finance the renovation and expansion of the Secondary School in 2004. The Town would issue bonds and repay the principal and interest over time, similar to how a homeowner repays a mortgage.

Q: How long will repayment take, and what is the total cost?

A: The Town's financial advisor has projected a 25-year repayment schedule. The Town would borrow $41.9 million (including bond issuance costs) at an assumed interest rate of 4.5 percent.

Over 25 years, the total repayment, including principal and interest, is projected to be approximately $72.7 million.

Q: Will the Town refinance the debt?

A: Possibly. If interest rates decline in the future, the Town may choose to refinance the bonds. The Town refinanced the Secondary School bond twice during its repayment period.

Q: What are the annual costs to repay the bond?

A: Debt service payments are highest during the first ten years. Annual debt service payments during the first ten years vary. They range from a low of $1.1 million to a high of $2.8 million.

Q: How will the Town afford the bond payment?

A: Several offsetting savings and new revenue sources will help cover a significant portion of the cost, including:

- $900,000 in projected overhead savings from school consolidation
- $1.2 million in projected new revenue from the Brainard Place and Nordic Spa developments
- $500,000 in savings from the retirement of the secondary school bond

Together, these sources help offset the annual bond payment. The Town would still need to generate some additional revenue to fully cover the cost. The exact amount depends on factors such as the retirement of existing debt (for example, the Route 17 Park project) and growth in the Town's net grand list.

Based on current projections, the mill rate increase during the first ten years of the bond is expected to range from 0.08 mills to 1.65 mills, with a ten-year average increase of approximately 0.62 mills.

After the first ten years, the mill rate impact declines significantly because the net grand list grows at the same time that the bond's principal and interest payments decrease.

Q: Does the repayment schedule account for growth in the Town's net grand list?

A: Yes. The bond repayment projections incorporate anticipated growth in the Town's net grand list from both projected new growth and reevaluation.

Q: What is the impact on the mill rate?

A: The impact will vary over the bond's 25-year repayment period. During the first ten years, the mill rate increase is projected to range from 0.08 mills to 1.65 mills, with a ten-year average increase of approximately 0.62 mills.

After the first ten years, the mill rate impact declines significantly because the net grand list grows at the same time that the bond's principal and interest payments decrease.

Q: How solid are these numbers?

A: These figures are based on conservative projections, but they are subject to change. For example, the Town may be able to secure a lower interest rate on the bond, and additional overhead savings could be realized. Once the project is underway, a building committee will solicit competitive bids, which may result in costs lower than those reflected in the conceptual budget prepared by Downes Construction and Friar Architecture.

At the same time, costs could also shift in the opposite direction. Given the five-year timeline of the project, a range of factors may influence the final numbers.

The conservative projections were developed in collaboration with the Town's financial advisor, tax assessor, the superintendent of schools, First Selectman, Board of Education members, the Town Finance Director, architects, representatives from the Department of Administrative Services, and bond counsel. Based on the extensive deliberations, we are confident that the projections are reasonable.

Q: Where can I see the impact on my property taxes?

A: An online tool is available that allows residents to estimate the impact on their individual property taxes.

Q: What will happen to Brownstone?

A: Brownstone will be used as a school for the next five years while renovations take place at Valley View and Gildersleeve. This will give the Town time to develop a long-term plan for the Brownstone building.

If additional time is needed to design and finalize that plan, the building may be used by Portland Parks and Recreation, the Portland Food Bank, and other Town entities. It may also be possible to lease additional classroom space to Oak Hill.

Q: When is the bonding referendum?

A: The bonding referendum will be held on May 11, 2026, at Portland Middle School.

Q. What does the resolution look like?

A. Here is the bond language:

"SHALL THE TOWN OF PORTLAND APPROPRIATE $109,000,000 FOR THE RENOVATION AND EXPANSION OF VALLEY VIEW ELEMENTARY SCHOOL INTO A PRE-K-GRADE 2 SCHOOL, THE RENOVATION OF GILDERSLEEVE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL INTO A GRADES 3-5 SCHOOL AND VARIOUS CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS AT PORTLAND MIDDLE SCHOOL AND PORTLAND HIGH SCHOOL AND AUTHORIZE THE ISSUANCE OF THE TOWN'S BONDS OR NOTES IN AN AMOUNT NOT TO EXCEED $58,000,000 TO FINANCE THE APPROPRIATION, WITH THE BALANCE TO BE FUNDED BY GRANTS RECEIVED FOR THE PROJECTS?"

Important Note: The bond asks voters to authorize the Town to borrow up to $58 million. This higher authorization amount ensures the Town has access to the capital needed to complete the projects before full State reimbursement is received. Final payments, including the PreK bonus, Open Choice bonus, and special education bonus are typically distributed at the conclusion of the projects.

After the Town receives all anticipated State reimbursements, the final projected borrowing is expected to be approximately $41.9 million, including bond issuance costs.

Q: How many people need to vote?

A: Pursuant to Section 412 of the Town of Portland Charter, at least 20% of registered voters must participate in the vote. Based on Portland's 6,807 registered voters, this means that a minimum of 1,362 voters must cast a ballot.

Q: How can I vote?

A: For information on registering to vote, including details about absentee ballots, please visit the Portland Town Clerk's website at https://www.portlandct.org/town-clerk or contact Portland Town Clerk Michael Tierney at mtierney@portlandct.org .

Q: Budget Referendum & School Referendum Voting - is early voting allowed?

A: The Budget Referendum and School Referendum will be held on Monday May 11th from 6:00 AM – 8:00 PM at the Portland Middle School, 93 High Street.   There is no early voting for referendums.

The Portland Town Clerk's office will begin issuing absentee ballots for the referendum on Wednesday April 22nd.   Registered voters and property owners can obtain an application in person at the office, by calling (860) 342-6743, or visiting the Town Clerk's Page of the Town of Portland Website. Any applications or completed absentee ballots should be mailed back to the Town Clerk's Office at: P.O. Box 71 Portland, CT 06480, brought to the Town Clerk's Office in person, or left in the election drop box located by the rear entrance of the Town Hall. Completed absentee ballots must be received back no later than 8:00 PM on May 11th in order to be counted. Portland residents can also obtain a voter registration card at the Town Clerk's Office.

Q: Who can I contact with additional questions?
A:

- Charles Britton, Superintendent of Schools: cbritton@portlandct.us
- Mike Pelton, First Selectman: mpelton@portlandct.org