

MSBA

Several M.A.S.S. members have inquired about the status of MSBA and how “Letters of Intent” will be addressed. The following is a letter from MSBA Executive Director Katherine Craven. As well we have included a recent article from State House News.

Dear Superintendents,

As you know, the new school building grant program will be a competitive grant program, under which the MSBA will award grants based on **the greatest and most urgent need** pursuant to 8 statutory criteria. The MSBA is limited in the amount of funding for school construction projects with a cap of \$500 million in FY2008. The first step for a community, if you have not done so already, is to submit a Statement of Interest to the MSBA. This Statement of Interest will identify from the local perspective the deficiencies in a school facility. The deadline for submitting a Statement of Interest is July 31, 2007. When completing a Statement of Interest, communities should outline what they believe are deficiencies in an existing school facility and demonstrate how those deficiencies fit the statutory priorities for funding. Communities do not need to seek professional assistance to complete a Statement of Interest. To date, the MSBA has received 173 Statements of Interest from 88 Districts.

Districts submitting a Statement of Interest will be visited by a team of design professionals hired by the MSBA who will perform an assessment of building conditions and local school maintenance practices. For the last few months, the MSBA has been working closely with STV, Inc. on designing and developing the Facilities and Maintenance Assessment. The Facilities and Maintenance Assessment will include detailed on-site evaluations of buildings, systems, major building components, and the maintenance of the building. These evaluations will be performed by qualified and credentialed assessment professionals. The information and data collected during the Facilities and Maintenance Assessment will enable the MSBA to critically and fully assess the deficiencies identified by local districts in their Statements of Interest to determine what facilities have the greatest and most urgent need. In April, we are scheduled to initiate assessments on a pilot group of schools and fully deploy assessment teams shortly thereafter. The MSBA will soon be contacting all Superintendents for which a district has submitted a Statement of Interest. There is some information and documentation that we will be requesting you submit prior to the site visits by the assessment teams in an effort to conduct the assessments as efficiently as possible and to minimize on-site disruption. A checklist of information and documentation that we will be requesting will be sent to you shortly.

Selection of which school projects receive a grant from the MSBA in the new program will be a collaborative process during which the MSBA and the local community will work together to confirm the deficiencies identified by the community in a Statement of Interest and develop a solution that makes educational and financial sense for everyone.

We look forward to working with you and assisting with your school facility concerns.

Katherine P. Craven
Executive Director
Massachusetts School Building Authority

STATE HOUSE NEWS SERVICE

BOSTON, MARCH 28, 2007After cutting deeply into a backlog of projects and drafting new eligibility rules, the state Massachusetts School Building Authority is getting ready for a major change in July, when it will start accepting new requests for local construction projects after a four-year moratorium.

So far, the authority has received 173 "statements of interest" for new school construction projects but before issuing any payments to help the communities pay for new educational facilities, each district will have to comply with a new set of stricter guidelines.

"It's a very exciting moment for us," authority's Executive Director Katherine Craven said after a meeting today.

Applications for new projects are due July 31. As part of the new guidelines, the authority will be limited to spend up to \$500 million a year on new school construction projects. The authority's reimbursements will range from 40 to 80 percent of the construction costs. Currently the average state contribution is about 72 percent, said Craven.

At the meeting, authority staff said communities remain "skeptical" about how the new guidelines will benefit them once the moratorium ends.

Under the new guidelines, districts need to provide comprehensive data about the current facilities' status. According to authority chief engineer Joe Buckley, districts seeking funds from the authority needs to explain the school's problems or deficiencies and provide information on building maintenance. After assessing all the information, the authority will determine whether schools meet the state's funding priorities.

Buckley said he already tested a new computer software program at Norwood High School and in an elementary school in Concord. The software allows contractors to provide information requested by the authority and then have the information posted on the authority's web site so communities can check the status of their projects. Despite "minor" computer glitches, the new software was successful, said Buckley.

Board member Jeff Wulfson, the designee of the education commissioner, said he would like the board to enforce regular maintenance as a condition of reimbursement to the districts.

Buckley said he is collecting school building information from all districts to create a benchmark

on what is considered proper school maintenance.

Craven said districts need to commit to maintaining facilities regularly before the authority approves projects.

Besides receiving a share of the state's sales tax to fund projects, the authority also plans to rely on bond sales to pay for projects, said Craven. The authority is on track to secure its full 20 percent share of the sales tax revenue in 2011. For Fiscal 2008, the Authority is earmarked to receive 85 percent of its full share or \$634.7 million.

In March, the authority issued its latest bond sale for \$1.5 billion, which will help authority pay \$129 million in debt and for projects pending on a waiting list. Craven said she plans to issue another bond sale in late 2008 to help the authority pay for new projects.

Craven said she has been addressing concerns from communities on the new guidelines for the past three years by talking to groups of superintendents and school committee members and briefing legislative aides about how to fill out the Statement of Interest forms.

"We feel that a lot of people know about it," Craven said.

She said she is not surprised by the number of projects that have already been submitted as part of the new phase of the authority's program.

"We knew, after four years of a moratorium in place, that there would be a lot of demand," said Craven.

Also, the authority continues to clear its waiting list for current projects. According to Andy Cherullo, the Authority has issued payments for 428 projects, of which 250 projects have been cleared from the list already.