



Groton School Facilities Initiative

August 20th,
2015
SFITF
Meeting





Introduction

- House Keeping – Communications
- Legislative Changes
- Public Outreach Approach
- A Deeper Look into the Public Opinion Survey
- Next Steps...



Recent Legislative Changes

➤ Public Act 15-3 & what it means for SFITF

The bill also allows DAS to place a project on the school construction priority list before local approval of the local share of the cost, provided the applying town schedules a referendum to approve the local share with the referendum results to be submitted to DAS before November 15 of the year of application. [The reimbursement percentage for a project covered by this subsection shall reflect the rates in effect during the fiscal year in which such local funding authorization is secured.]

- Opens up possibility of June 2016 Grant Application & Fall 2016 Referendum
- 2016 Preliminary Reimbursement Percentages
- New Construction – 44.29% (2015 – 48.57%)
- Renovation – 54.29% (2015 - 58.57%)



Community Survey

Digging Deeper into Survey





Statistical Validity

- The sample was collected by randomly generating telephone digits that fall within Groton, including cell phones and landlines.
- Statistically, a sample of 386 surveys represents a margin for error of $\pm 4.96\%$ at a 95% confidence level.
- The survey represents a snapshot in time, and results could be expected to shift in response to concerted public relations or information campaigns.



Ballot I Question

Ballot Question I (Question 7) gave respondents the framework of the plan, and then asked “...if a referendum was held today, how would you vote?”

- 36.5% would Definitely or Probably **Support**
- 44.6% would Definitely or Probably **Oppose**
- 18.9% were **Unsure**



Reasons for Initial Support

Those who supported the Plan were asked why. The top three reasons were:

- Outdated facilities are in bad shape/need to upgrade/modernize/aging (39.1%)
- Well thought-out Plan/right thing to do/trust them (22.7%)
- Quality education is important (13.6%)

Recommendation: Continue to build on these strengths.



Reasons for Initial Opposition

Those who opposed the Plan were asked why. The top three reasons were:

- Taxes already too high/the cost (21.7%)
- Don't need it/a waste (18.0%)
- Renovate/don't build – maintain current buildings/not needed (11.8%)

Recommendation: Address these specific perceptions through public outreach.



Support Increased

After brief conversation with the researcher conducting the survey, respondents went from:

- **36.5%** support on Ballot Question I to
- **51.8%** support on Ballot Question II.



Initial Opposition: Cost

“If the investment in Groton's school facilities cost was \$250 for the average property owner in increased annual property tax, how would you vote on the plan?”

➤ **51.8%** support on Ballot Question II.

Finding: Most people thought \$250 was a fair price.



Initial Opposition: Cost

- Three income groups (\$0-\$40k, \$40-\$100k, \$100k+) were equally opposed to Ballot II.
- Those making \$0-\$40K were the most UNSURE.
- Support jumped to 66% when cost lowered to \$150. Did not make a big difference for other income groups.

Finding: For those making less than \$40k, the \$250 is a cost barrier to support even if they believe in the program.



Initial Opposition: Cost

- \$250 is the average annual cost to a homeowner with a median home value of \$247,000.
- The lower quartile Groton house value is \$180,100, for an average annual cost of \$191.

Recommendation: Publicly discuss the average cost and how it is calculated, especially that it will be lower on less-expensive houses and no cost for renters.



Initial Opposition: Not Needed

Question 21 asked: “Would the following make you more/less likely to support Groton 2020 Plan? The Plan addresses five schools that are, on average, 60 years old.”

- Overall, **51.3%** said **More Likely** to support
- 18.4% said Less Likely to support
- 20.7% said Makes No Difference
- 9.6% said Unsure

Finding: Age of Schools resonate with people. Most people would support upgrading 60+ year old schools



Initial Opposition: Not Needed

Question 13 asked: “Agree or Disagree? The Groton 2020 Plan, as a long-term fix supported by taxpayers through a limited term bond, makes more sense than spending \$55M in immediate short-term repairs needed.”

- **54.2%** said Strongly or Somewhat Agree
- **26.9%** said Strongly or Somewhat Disagree
- **18.9%** said Unsure

Finding: Most people would support a long-term solution vs. short-term repairs



Who Changed Their Minds?

- Nearly half of people who had originally been “Unsure” or “Probably Opposed” became supportive.
- Even some (about one in eight) people who had been “Definitely Opposed” changed their minds and became supportive, with a few others changing to “Unsure/Don’t Know”.



The Unsure

- **Finding:** People who were undecided for Ballot I had higher levels of choosing “Unsure/Don’t Know” for most of the questions.
- **Recommendation:** This group may need more information. They get info from local printed papers and directly from the school system. Over half use Facebook.
- The Unsure are “More likely to support”
 - Eliminating the need for racial balance redistricting (53.4%)
 - The Plan address five schools that are, on average, 60 years old (43.8%)



Supporters & Opposition

Quality of Life questions were asked before the Ballot questions:

- Supporters are much more satisfied with Groton as a place to live (94% Somewhat or Very Satisfied) than Opposition (64.4%)
- Supporters have a better standard of living today compared to two years ago (85.5% Improved or No Movement but Good) compared to Opposition (54%)
- Supporters are more likely to be Very or Somewhat Interested in the planning process for the Groton 2020 Plan (85.9%) compared to Opposition (58.2%)



Wedge Issues

- Opposition sees new construction instead of renovation as a negative (58.3% said “less likely to support”), while Supporters see it as a positive (57.5% said “more likely to support”).
- Opposition does not see school improvement as an economic driver (63.1% Strongly or Somewhat Disagree), while Supporters think it will have a positive impact (88.7% Strongly or Somewhat Agree)



What Everyone Agrees On

- **Pre-K Education is Important** (80.5% Agree among Opposition, 89.8% among Supporters)
- **Groton should include in-town Magnet schools** (59.6% Agree among Opposition, 66.9% among Supporters)
- **GPS facilities should be modernized** (57.8% Agree among Opposition, 95.4% among Supporters)
- **Groton Schools were never properly maintained or re-invested in** (66.4% Agree among Opposition, 62% among Supporters)



Demographic Breakdown

Who was generally supportive?	Who was on the fence?	Who was generally least supportive?
Lived in Groton less than 20 years; male residents with facts	City of Groton	Lived in Groton more than 20 years
Mystic residents	Town residents	GLP/Noank residents
18-44 year olds	People over age 45	People earning less than \$40,000 (@ \$250)
Navy Base area	People earning over \$100,000	
People earning \$40,000 - \$99,999		

*Can be significant overlap between and within these groups



Getting the message out...

- Residents became more supportive when they knew more facts – give them facts!
- Residents in general get the most information from local printed newspapers and directly from the schools – prioritize these media.
 - Op-ed pieces in The Day
 - Send info home with kids from school
 - Keep info clear, focus on big topics
 - Address cost and need



Next Steps...

- September 9th Joint meeting.
- Schedule – does PA 15-3 change SFITF's timeline?