

## **School Department Presents Capital Plan to School Committee**

By Michael Connelly, Director of Finance and Operations

At the September 8, 2014 School Committee meeting, school officials presented their updated five year large capital improvement plan. The process of reviewing and making updates to the school's capital needs takes place during the fall each year by school department officials. The School Committee's role is to listen to input from school officials, evaluate the projects listed in the plan and decide which priority capital projects will move forward to the Capital Improvement Planning Committee (CIPC) for consideration. The purpose of the capital plan is to identify short and long term capital projects for funding to move the district's educational objectives forward and to continue to provide a safe and healthy learning environment for students and staff.

The school's capital plan projects fall into 3 major categories: vehicles, technology and facilities. The school department currently maintains a fleet of 4 vans used by our student services department for daily student transportation. The priority in this category for next year is to replace a model year 2005 student services van, which has over 110,000 miles on it. In addition, the plan includes a new request for a multi-function activity bus for the athletic department. A multi-function activity bus can hold up to 15 passengers, and would be used by the athletic department to transport teams to and from their athletic events. Currently, the school department uses an outside contractor to meet its transportation needs to all athletic and extra-curricular events. These costs have been steadily increasing, and it is estimated the school department could experience significant savings by using their own multi-function activity bus for several trips throughout the school year, as opposed to contracting out for these services.

In the area of technology, the priority capital request for next year includes a \$90,000 request to fund the replacement of two computer labs at the Hood and Little School. In addition, six additional chrome book carts are needed (2 at each elementary school), for student use in the classroom. Funds are also needed over two years to update the data and management software. Upgrades to this software will allow the district to meet state reporting requirements more efficiently. The school district's plan is to request funds to upgrade its wireless infrastructure at the elementary schools in the second and third year of the capital plan.

The final category is facilities. The capital plan for next school year includes a request to replace the Hood School boilers which are over fifteen years old. The facilities department would like to replace the boilers with high efficiency condensing boilers which would significantly save energy. The second priority is to repave the Hood School parking lot, playground and walkway area which has begun to erode and deteriorate. The full capital plan and presentation can be found on the district website at [www.north-reading.k12.ma.us/budget](http://www.north-reading.k12.ma.us/budget).

The School Committee is expected to discuss the five year capital plan in more detail at their September 22<sup>nd</sup> meeting. A vote is expected to take place at this meeting on what projects the School Department will be putting forward to the Capital Improvement Planning Committee (CIPC) to review. The CIPC determines the guidelines, funding strategies, and policies to provide the foundation to guide

the communities' capital decisions. The nine member Capital Improvement Committee consists of all major stakeholders, including members of the Board of Selectman, Finance Committee, and School Committee, as well as Town and School officials. All town wide departments will be submitting their capital needs not only for next year but over the next three years to the CIPC this month. The CIPC will then begin meeting to review and gather all relevant information to properly review each request.