

FAQ – Holman House Purchase - Final (10-20-2023)

1. WHY the Holman House now?

The most important “why” for this purchase is that student programming needs continue to grow at Mt. Blue Campus (MBC) and the current RSU 9 District Office space is needed for that programming. Foster Career & Technical Center has added important programs over the last decade and is now increasing its focus on outreach programming (apprenticeships & pre-apprenticeships), which are important to student success after high school and to business and community sustainability. More space is required to allow for the growth of these offerings (CTE Space is reimbursed by the State of ME). Mt. Blue High School has also added support for students over the last ten years and needs to add space for Alternative Education and Special Education programming for students with varied instructional needs. Increasing individualized programming makes moving the RSU 9 District Office off of Mt. Blue Campus a student-centered move. This proposed change falls in line with one of the RSU #9 Strategic Plan Goals, developed using community input, “to ensure adequate programming space for our students”.

2. How was the Holman Mission House chosen as the best option?

Board members, community members, and administrative staff have spent the past two years exploring a variety of plans for how/where to relocate the District Office. When we became aware that the Holman Mission House was going to be sold two years ago, we looked at it as an option because it provided adequate space, is centrally located, would enable us to improve confidentiality, while also giving easy access to parents and community members. The barn provides much needed storage space, which will free up some school school-based building space for student needs and provide a centralized location for our storage needs. It was also offered at a price that looked affordable. However, this option was not pursued earlier because the extra funds needed for potential repair and upgrade costs were not then available.

Over the last 18 months we continued to investigate other properties to purchase or rent. Purchasing any other properties of similar size would have cost twice as much as the Holman House and would have still required major renovations to meet our needs. Rental options involved some additional cost for upgrades and started out at approximately \$80,000 - \$90,000 on average per year, including utilities with long-term costs not able to be supplemented by Federal ESSER Funding and would need to come from the local budget.

We revisited the Holman House as a possibility this summer when we determined that a portion of RSU 9’s Federal ESSER funds, made available in 2021, would not be spent as originally planned. Some projects originally scheduled proved to be more costly than expected and some projects couldn’t be completed by the required timeframe (September 30, 2024). We currently have \$550,000 to be used for the purchase price of \$400,000 and the remaining \$150,000 to be used for electrical, heating, roof, technology upgrades and asbestos abatement identified in the building inspection. We have the necessary state level approvals to use these funds to make this purchase in order to increase space for MBC student use at no additional cost to RSU 9 taxpayers. If not used, we will be forced to return these allocated tax funds back to the federal government as they cannot be designated for new projects or go to other RSU 9 district costs. There is also potential for other ESSER funds from the allotment which came to RSU 9 after 2021 to become available for further work on the Holman House thereby reducing possible long-range costs even further.

3. What is the cost to the taxpayers?

The use of ESSER funds to complete this project means RSU 9 will not be taking on large, long-term expenses to the district for several years to come. The building along with the upgrades mentioned can be done without costing the district or tax payers any additional local tax money. ESSER funds need to be spent prior to Sept. 2024 or they are required to be returned to the federal government. This purchase and upgrade allows the district to have space to conduct district business without impacting or using space at any of our schools. There will be some additional costs to the district as we are increasing our total space-footprint. Based on our review we believe these costs will be for utilities, heating, plowing, and minor repairs etc. which we estimate to be approximately \$20,000 in year one (understanding that utilities costs fluctuate). Custodial, along with future, basic maintenance needs will be taken care of by current RSU 9 District Staff. Lastly, this purchase does not remove revenue from the tax base as it is currently owned by a church and taxes are not being paid on the property now.

4. What does the RSU 9 District Office do and what are its space needs?

The need for the RSU 9 District Office to have a permanent location has been recognized for years. It has been moved multiple times throughout the last 25 years around RSU 9 and its school buildings. Over the years these moves have not been inexpensive for the district. RSU 9 serves the varied educational programming needs of our 2,300 students as an educational organization/business within Franklin County. We are the second largest employer in Franklin County with over 500 employees. The RSU 9 District Office has 18 staff, which directs and manages RSU 9. Its responsibilities include: Business/Finance, Curriculum/ Professional Development, Human Resources, School Nutrition, Special Education Services, and State and Federal Reporting, District Operations, Communications, Strategic Planning, Policies & Procedures and Community Relations. Operating an organization of this size and complexity requires centralized district facilities to provide staff, parents, students, and the community with the best support possible. The present location does not include adequate work/meeting space to meet office and confidentiality needs. Records and program leadership are spread around MBC reducing efficiencies and sometimes delaying completion of district business which supports students, staff, and families. The District Office currently must use MBC student space for any meetings that involve four or more people and that space is not always easily available.

The RSU 9 District Office's last move to MBC was meant to be for five years to allow for time to develop a plan for relocating to a permanent location. Now in its ninth year at MBC, as planning and budget needs prevented the move from happening more quickly. All involved in the creation of the district strategic plan during the 2022 - 2023, including staff, families and community members named this as a priority given the need for increased student space.

5. Are district safety needs well served in the current space?

At the current location, if Mt. Blue Campus (MBC) goes into lock down, the possibility of the District Office being cut off from law enforcement and other outside agencies, as well as the district's Leadership Team, is a very real possibility. Cell phone connectivity problems make communication at times impossible, potentially leaving the district vulnerable at a critical time. The current location on the 2nd floor of MBC makes it difficult for parents & community members to engage and communicate in-person because of security procedures that must be followed. In addition, with our goal of maximizing student and staff safety, the location in the middle of a busy student hub makes it challenging to provide secure and confidential locations for parent and student meetings.

6. Why not use other school building space within RSU 9?

There is no adequate and suitable space to be found in RSU 9 that can be taken out of student programming to provide space for all the functions of our district office. The one building that has space with the potential for remodeling has no parking or land available to add parking. It also could take space away from unknown future student needs. Even if possible, major remodeling would be needed and would be more expensive and would not be less than the cost of moving the RSU 9 District Office to the Holman House.

7. How will district-wide Special Ed program needs be helped?

Special Education needs a central, secure space to improve coordination, communication, and program oversight. The present space is adjacent to busy school corridors making it difficult to maintain confidentiality and respect the personal needs of our students and their families. Having no dedicated conference room makes scheduling of IEP or parent/guardian meetings difficult as space must be “borrowed” from student space and options at MBC which are not always available.

8. Will turning the house into office space change the historical nature of the building?

We intend to maintain the beauty and integrity of the buildings so this historical community treasure will not be spoiled. One of the attractions of this location is that it meets the RSU 9 District Office needs with minimal changes.

9. Will the Holman House be a community fixture as in the past?

RSU 9 strives to be an active and supportive presence within our communities. Having the district office at the Holman Mission House will allow for additional community outreach. It will provide easy access for the community to district office staff. Events, such as Summerfest, 4th of July celebrations where Strawberry Shortcake was served from its porch along with other outside, community events will be something we intend to re-engage in to help keep Mt. Blue traditions alive and well.