



**City of Biddeford
City Council**

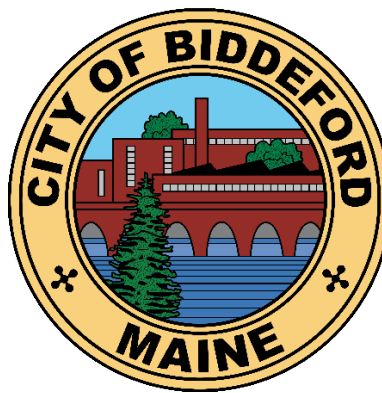
September 9, 2025 at 5:30 PM

JFK School

64 West Street, Biddeford, ME 04005

1. Roll Call
2. Pledge of Allegiance
3. Presentation
 - 3.a JFK School Site Walk with Superintendent Ray
4. Adjourn

**AD HOC JOHN F KENNEDY SCHOOL BUILDING
RE-USE COMMITTEE**



January 2025

Committee Members:
Councilor Marc Lessard, Chair
Councilor Norm Belanger
Paulette Bonneau
Rebecca Henry
Carolyn Schmidtke
Max Zakian

Executive Summary

On November 7, 2023, Biddeford residents approved the consolidation of elementary schools, leading to the future decommissioning of the John F. Kennedy Elementary School. The Biddeford City Council established an ad hoc committee in April 2024 to explore reuse or disposition options for the site, expected to be available no later than September 2025.

The committee evaluated various known capital needs, including police and fire facilities, community center renovations, sewer infrastructure, and downtown parking. However, two primary areas emerged as top priorities: affordable housing and recreational facilities.

1. Housing Needs:

- The committee identified a pressing need for affordable housing, particularly for municipal employees and lower-income families.
- Potential for 70–100 housing units on-site, with 30–40 units possible within the existing JFK building.
- Development would require zoning changes and possible MSHA tax credits, delaying construction to at least 2027.

2. Recreational Opportunities:

- Options include relocating the Community Center, creating a mixed-use facility, or building outdoor amenities such as a destination playground, splash pad, skate park, and pickleball courts.
- Estimated costs for a new recreation facility range from \$11M to \$16M, depending on size and scope.

3. Other Considerations:

- The site currently supports Biddeford Little League and provides critical parking for surrounding recreational areas.
- The committee does not recommend relocating Little League but emphasizes maintaining shared parking access.
- Additional ideas include incorporating a daycare for municipal employees and a resource hub for community services.

Introduction

On November 7, 2023, Biddeford residents voted to support the consolidation of the elementary schools. One of the outcomes of that vote, the John F. Kennedy Elementary School would no longer be actively needed by the Biddeford School Department at the completion of the construction. Pursuant to State Law, the building and land is returned to the City. The expected date for the building to be turned back to the City is no later than September of 2025. However, delays in the construction of the project appears that the date may be moved back.

In April of 2024, the Biddeford City Council voted to create an ad hoc committee. As an advisory committee to the City Council, it was tasked with making “a recommendation to Council for either re-use or disposition of the property.”

It should be noted that all costs used in this report are merely estimates and not prepared professionally. They were generated in the spring in 2024 and have not been updated. Depending on the sources, it is projected that building construction costs have increased between 2.5% to 3.0% in Maine since that date. The costs were prepared to merely give an approximation of the impact of the various alternatives.

Property History

The JFK School was constructed in 1965 on an 11.67 acre site. Located at 64 West St, the property has frontage on both West and Hill Streets. The gross square footage of the building is 44,083. It served the grades K, 1 and 2.

The facility is a full use school with an active use by the community when there is availability. In addition, approximately 1.9 acres of the site is exclusively used by Biddeford Little League diamond. An additional 1.7 acres of the site is used for parking and respective vehicle movement to support the field. The majority, if not all of the improvements that exists on the site were funded by private sources for the benefit of Little League.

During the winter months, the parking that is closest to the Little League field is used for alternative parking during snow parking bans.

Along West Street and in the immediate area of the school itself is 85 parking spaces. These spaces are widely used during off school hours to support activities that take place at the three adjacent recreational areas, namely St. Louis Fields I & II as well as Waterhouse Field.

Explored Opportunities

The Committee members explored all of the known needs of the City that could be addressed by the site. Recognizing the financial limitations of the City, it also took into consideration the other significant capital needs that could not be addressed by the location.

In no particular order, these included:

- Addressing the needs of the Police department for updated and/or new station.
- The capital needs of the J. Richard Martin Community Center have been identified for nearly a decade. There has been no definitive plan to address the needs, resulting in very short-term decisions being made by the community.
- The identified need for an Eastern Fire/EMS substation.
- The next phase of work that needs to be done at City Hall.

- The existing recreation offerings are limited by both the building they are housed in as well as the outdoor space. Most of the recreational space is dated and lack investment. There has been no significant investment for decades.
- Sewer infrastructure, which has been paid for, in part by general fund property taxes, is facing multimillion dollar investment requirements.
- Federally mandated CSO (combined sewer overflow) has an estimated price tag that may reach \$50,000,000 over the next ten to fifteen years.
- Investment in parking in the downtown will continue to be a need.

The main focus of the members was in two primary areas: housing and recreation. The two choices have a significant difference. The land for housing is generally deeded (or very long-term lease) to another entity outside of the municipality. Land for recreational facilities remains owned by the City.

The City does not actively run any housing programs. The official housing agency of the City is the Biddeford Housing Authority (BHA). BHA is a quasi-municipal organization with indirect ties back to the City. The City also has partnered with other entities to meet housing needs as well.

There was also much discussion about trying to address both needs on the site as well.

Types of Housing Needs

The primary concern of the Committee members was affordable housing. At the beginning of the process, there was only one publicly announced affordable housing project (BHA's Adam St). At the time of this report, the City has at some level, endorsed six different affordable housing projects, of which one was recently awarded Maine State Housing Authority (MSHA) funding. The following chart identifies those projects.

DEVELOPER	STATUS	TYPE	UNITS	1BR	2BR	3BR	4BR
AVESTA	City Approved	Senior	46	46			
WDC BARRA 1	City/MSHA Approved	Family	40	20	12	8	
WDC BARRA 2	City Approved	Senior	36	36			
WDC PEARL1	In PB Process	Senior	45	45			
WDC PEARL 2	In PB Process	Senior	45	45			
BATEMAN PTRS	In SRCC Process	'Workforce'	60				
BHA ADAMS	Under Construction		39	13	17	8	1

In addition, BHA has recently been awarded by the State of Maine the former Courthouse on Adams St for the purpose of providing additional affordable housing consistent with their mission.

There was also interest in addressing the housing challenges for both school and municipal employees. The increased cost of housing within the community is impacting recruitment

of many of the public safety employees and especially new teachers. The statewide and national shortages for candidates allows the desirable candidates to select communities to work for not only based on the compensation plans but also the cost of housing. Biddeford housing costs have risen dramatically over the last five years, far out pacing most regions in Maine.

Increasing housing inventory at all market levels is generally accepted as one of the tools to assist affordable housing. Blending projects that also include a mixture of housing is seen as a desirable housing strategy.

Recreational Alternatives

There is a range of recreational alternatives that were considered by the committee. These included in no particular order:

- Moving the entire recreational headquarters from the J. Richard Martin Center (aka Community Center) to the JFK site. This would include all of the space that is ‘rented’ by community/civic groups that are not under the direct operations of the Recreation Department.
- Moving only the actual recreational operations to the JFK site. The community/civic space would remain at the community center space. Their future would be determined when the community center future is determined.
- Create outside recreational space, including the potential for:
 - Destination playground
 - Splash pad
 - Skate park
 - Pickleball courts
 - Outdoor ice facility i.e. Kennebunk’s sheet

Other Considerations

While the Committee was primarily focused on housing, recreational opportunities and the combination of the two, there were a couple of other uses that were suggested.

- One item that was discussed with some enthusiasm is the ability to bring some sort of day care for municipal and school employees as a recruitment tool (with any slots not utilized to be available for the Biddeford families) within any indoor recreational facility that might be created on the space.
- A suggestion to bring a ‘resource hub’ to the site was discussed. As presented at a very high level, a hub would serve as a centralized location where advocates and/or service providers would be available to assist individuals that are disadvantaged.
- A part of the site could be used as a ‘community garden’. This would be an expansion of the current program that has been successful in the community through the hard work of volunteers.

Future of Little League Use of Site

Biddeford Little League currently uses approximately 1.9 acres of the site. This represents 17% of the total land area. Nearly all of the improvements to the site have been made through private donations by the Little League. In addition, another 1.35 acres is used as shared parking and driveway off from Hill Street that connects to the parking at the School. Besides serving as the primary parking for the Little League, it is used by the public to access the school playground outside of school hours and as a location for winter parking during snow bans.

The committee explored opening up this land for other use during its deliberation. That discussion would explore improvements to ballfield at the Middle School (located 1/3 mile southernly on West St.). The rough estimate for the relocation was \$400,000 to \$500,000 range. This cost was not formally explored and should not be considered to be accurate without further work.

During the committee meeting on August 28, 2024, the members expressed a strong preference to not relocate the Little League. The committee is not recommending that option.

Importance of Parking

Three of Biddeford's most used and well-kept recreational space is in very close proximity to the JFK site. St. Louis Fields I & II as well as Waterhouse Field are arguably dependent on parking at the JFK site. The site currently has 85 +/- formal parking spots. During any major activity on these sites, including when La Kermesse holds its annual festival, the parking spots are utilized. The committee is recommending that any redevelopment of the site strongly continues the shared parking. Failure to do so would push parking further into the neighborhoods within the area.

Combining the Two Major Choices

It is predictable that combining some of both desires is also an alternative. Finding solutions to the demands on government when resources are finite will often result in good people compromising. Taking achievable bites of the collective challenges is politically acceptable, rewarding and the path of least resistance.

Isolating complicated issues to immediacy of the challenge placed before a group can often lead to 'inside the box' solutions. Without the ability to go outside the scope of the committee's work, the potentials presented within the report are framed by the limitations.

Notwithstanding the above-mentioned dialogue, the committee members did receive some concepts from Leah Schaffer, a civilly active community member and architect by profession to demonstrate how the site could be used two address both needs. Those concepts are included within the Appendix.

The Details of Alternatives

- Existing JFK Building: the existing 1965 building consists of 43,659 square feet. Typical of schools constructed in that era, it has a two-story wing (approximately 30,500 square feet) dedicated to standard classrooms. The balance of the building is primarily an elementary size gymnasium, kitchen facilities and administrative space.
- Acreage: the total acreage of the site is 11.67 acres, including the land that is used by Biddeford Little League
- Estimated cost to demo the building: there are known asbestos and oil tank removal that is necessary within the building that needs to be addressed. The early 2024 estimate for that work was \$100,000. The actual demolition was estimated at that time to be another \$100,000 on the low end to upwards of \$250,000.
 - *Conversion to housing*: With a zone change, the entire site¹ could support an estimated 70 to 100 apartments/condominium type units. Time frame once a decision was made to use the site for this purpose could be between 18 to 36 months depending on when the business deal with the private entity is finalized.
 - *Units within JFK building envelope*: based on average unit size of 800 sq. ft. it is estimated to be 30 to 40 units.
 - *Affordable housing opportunities*: It is nearly impossible to construct affordable housing in Maine (meaning where eligible the units would serve 60% to 80% of the AMI Average Median Income) without the awarding of tax credits for MSHA.
 - *MSHA Tax Credits*: If MSHA tax credits are necessary to create affordable housing units, the first potential application would be in the fall of 2025. However, that would seem highly unlikely. Even if possible, it would compete against the other projects (listed earlier) already in the pipeline. It is more practical that the project would not be available until fall of 2026 round of funding, putting any construction off to the spring of 2027 at the earliest.
 - *Employee housing*: At this time, there are no known state or federal programs to support employee housing for public employees. The time frame for construction would be similar to above. The challenge is to find the funding in order to have the new units constructed.
 - *Recreational Uses*: the potential uses for the site are in two distinct categories; outside facilities and indoor facilities
 - *Indoor space*:
 - *Moving all Community Center operations to JFK*: Moving all current uses of the Community Center to a new facility at JFK which is estimated to be 45,000 sq ft. The estimated cost for a new facility

¹ When 'entire site' is used, it means the entire 11.67 acer lot.

of this size, based on \$325 to \$375 per sq ft cost is in the range of \$14,625,000 to \$16,875,000.

- *Moving only the recreational space to JFK:* This would reduce the size of the building between 5,000 sq ft to 10,000 sq ft by leaving those community/civic groups that 'rent' space at the community center. An alternative would be to create sharable space in the new building that would be used by the groups without their own private space. Using the same cost range above, the estimated cost would be:

<i>Building Size</i>	<i>@ \$325 per sq ft</i>	<i>@\$375 per sq ft</i>
<i>35,000 sq ft building</i>	\$11,375,00	\$13,125,000
<i>40,000 sq ft building</i>	\$13,000,000	\$15,000,000

- *Outdoor space:* the following is a list of potential outside recreational opportunities on the site that could be considered.
 - *Splash pad:* a basic splash pad would cost around \$200,000. A somewhat upgraded pad could cost upwards of \$450,000. Splash pads can be designed and built with expansion opportunities.
 - *Destination playground:* depending on the scope and design, the cost can run in the \$250,000 to \$450,000 range.
 - *Pickleball courts:* On the low end, it could cost in the \$15,000 range to construct a pickleball court. On the high end, it could run in the \$50,000 range
 - *Skate park:* the report includes a cost estimate to build a replacement skate park at this location. A decision on whether this location was the correct one was not made. It simply is included for benefit of the Council in the event this might be a good location to replace the one that was decommissioned in Rotary Park. On the lower end of the scale, one could be done for \$100,000. On the upper end of the scale, it can exceed \$500,000 and potentially reach over \$1,000,000.
 - *Cost of outside ice rink:* the size of the rink will drive the cost. Technology has progressed where synthetic ice is also an option. This issue was not discussed by the committee but presented in the report as information only. Annual operation costs would also need to be evaluated. The capital investment could range in the \$250,000 to \$1,000,000 range depending on size and where the ice was real or synthetic.

- J. Richard Martin Community Center Information: Appendix A includes the report issued in March 2020 of the Ad Hoc Committee that evaluated the existing facility.
 - *Building:* The 1888 public school has been used as a community center and home to the recreation department since 1993. The gymnasium was added in the 1930's. It is approximately 43,000 sq ft. Little capital has been invested into the facility that was not either mandated (ADA) or necessary because of repairs or failure.
 - *Known capital needs:* Based on 2019 numbers, the report identified \$1,677,750 of 'immediate needs' to continue to use the building as is.
 - *Enhancements and improvements:* there has not been a comprehensive analysis of the costs to do a true upgrade to the facility in order to convert the space for effective use by the recreation department for the next 25 to 40 years. It is expected that it would be multi-million capital project.
 - *Land:* the total land area is 1.75 acres,
 - *Current uses of the building:*
 - Recreation Department Offices and Programs- including after school and summer camp programs
 - Biddeford Adult Education classes
 - Meals on Wheels for York County- distribution center
 - St. Louis Alumni office
 - LaKermesse Office
 - Biddeford Cultural and Heritage Center Office and artifacts preservation
 - 50+ Club / Ross Center
 - Alcoholics Anonymous
 - Girls Scouts
 - TOPS of Maine
 - BHS Project Graduation
 - SMAA lunch through Meals on Wheels – free lunch
 - Biddeford Youth Football
 - Biddeford High School
 - TDK basketball
 - Port Sports Volleyball
 - Firecracker basketball
 - Biddeford Youth Cheering
 - Altrusa
 - *Alternatives:* Based on the same 800 sq ft per unit size, 65 to 70 residential units could be built in the community center, using the only the daylight basement portion of the building, leaving the gymnasium and other space for other uses. Additional units could be constructed if those spaces were included in the redevelopment.

Other Thoughts

Harold Samuel, who founded Land Securities in 1944, is one of the most unrecognized, yet often quoted real estate professionals. "Location, location, location" is often spoken when

a person is articulating the perceived value of land. The two primary choices that have emerged through the process (recreational center and housing) are impacted differently by location.

It is understandable that the City Council will need to consider the ongoing operational cost impacts of the recommendations made. The Committee did not do that work. It is recognized that housing is predominately a private sector activity. The location seldom has direct impacts on the operations.

On the other hand, recreational operations are an ongoing operation of the City. Decisions about where facilities are placed do have different impacts the operational costs.

Observations and Recommendations

The following observations and recommendations are made by the committee:

1. There are two easily identified primary needs within the City, namely
 - a. Additional housing, especially affordable housing; and
 - b. Improved and new recreational facilities, including both outside recreational offerings as well as the facility the department is housed in.
2. The committee does not recommend the relocation of the Biddeford Little League diamond from the site to a different location.
3. The committee strongly recommends that the final use of the site must continue to allow the public access to the parking to support the activities at the three recreational sites on West Street. The parking should be available for this purpose when the activities have traditionally occurred.
4. Confidentiality requests by local developers will delay the public release of potential developments within a community. This was the case during the work of the Committee. At the beginning of the process, members did not have all of the information about active affordable housing projects under development. No less than six new affordable housing projects were endorsed by the City (272 total units) were announced at some point after the beginning of the work of the Committee. In addition, the Adams Street Courthouse has been given the Biddeford Housing Authority for housing as well. The Committee recommends the continued advocacy of additional housing at all levels and recommends this site remain as a possible location for additional housing. It also advocates that affordable housing for entry level school and municipal employees should be among the highest priority.
5. The site is well positioned to connect the school facilities and the recreational facilities together in a seamless transition between the two. Re-use should continue that connectivity.
6. The City should not make a decision regarding the JFK Building/Site re-use without some understanding/plan, even if tentative, of the future of the J. Richard Martin Community Center.

7. The redevelopment of the JFK School site is a rare opportunity for Biddeford. The committee encourages the Mayor and Council to be thorough and comprehensive as they consider this report.
8. The integration of outside recreational space on the site is a desirable outcome .
9. The Council is encouraged to consider the overall pressing capital needs within the community, including any school needs, as it deliberates the options being presented.
10. To support the changes on the site, the Committee encourages the integration of non-automobile transportation to serve the site, including having a designated bus stop.