



A ceremonial groundbreaking was held on Friday with an army of officials including the mayor, school leaders, state officials, past mayors and superintendents and the construction, architect and consulting teams.

## Ground Broken For New Taconic High School

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**Treasurer Deborah Goldberg said the new building will reflect the educational excellence being taught by the teachers.**

PITTSFIELD, Mass. — There have been three mayors, five superintendents, 30 city councilors, 20 School Committee members, 50 School Building Needs Commission members, three state treasurers, and three directors of the MSBA involved in building a new high school over the last decade.

On Friday, that effort came to fruition as city and state officials gathered to celebrate the groundbreaking [of the new Taconic High School](#).

The \$120.8 million project is expected to be completed in 2018.

"We are embracing as a community this milestone because we are investing in our future. We are building our new Taconic and we are saying to our community and the community at large that we here in Pittsfield invest in our children," state Rep. Tricia Farley-Bouvier said.

Friday's ceremony was inside because of heavy rains and was attended by the entire School Committee, many city councilors, a former mayor and former superintendents, and Taconic staff members. Briefly, the entire group dug golden shovels into the dirt to commemorate the start of the project.

The new school will be constructed across the entry road from the current 1968 building, which will be torn down after the new school opens.

The Massachusetts School Building Authority is reimbursing the city \$74.2 million for the project. Gilbane Construction was chosen as the construction manager at risk to oversee the subcontracts and work. Early contracts have already been awarded and site work begun.

"We are mission driven and we have a job to do. We have to make sure that these kids are given opportunity, opportunity to have the buildings they can access with their teachers and the 21st Century skills that will result in jobs for them in this state," Treasurer Deborah Goldberg, who chairs the MSBA board, said.

The school's design is based around an educational program and vocational offerings adopted by the School Committee. School officials envision boosting the advanced manufacturing and other skilled trade programs with the building.

"What has it taken to get here? Blood, sweat, and tears. When I think about the tears, this is what came to mind and the School Committee members may agree with this. I thought the tears were really from the School Committee during the lengthy period making sure the right vocational programs were selected," said School Building Needs Commission Chairwoman Kathleen Amuso, who is also a current city councilor and past School Committee member.

"It was a long process, a lot of meetings, a lot of community support, but it was well worth those tears and the work that we did."

Student Taylor Hebert, president of the school's SkillsUSA chapter, said there is plenty of expertise among the teachers but when competing with students across the state, Taconic's technology is way behind. After high school, those same students will be asked to compete in the job market with others in the state who have had both instruction and a "state of the art" facility.

"While I am certain the new building will be beautiful, this project is not about cosmetic upgrades. It is about giving students a place to learn where the temperature won't change 15 to 20 degrees in each classroom, where sopping wet ceiling tiles won't come crashing down around us, and where students with disabilities will have access to all areas of the building," Hebert said.

"Most important, it is about putting students at Taconic on equal footing with their peers across the state."

Creating that pool of skilled workforce is what Farley-Bouvier believes will ultimately boost the city's economy. The Pittsfield Democrat said when talking to businesses, "their greatest need,

quite frankly, isn't lower taxes. It is a well-educated workforce. That is the greatest need and this is one of the things we are doing to help make that investment."

Further, she said when families move to an area the greatest concern is for the education of their children.

The city of Pittsfield is in a tough financial shape currently and the early estimates for the bonding is anticipated to require between \$2.6 million and \$3.1 million payments each year for the next 25 to 28 years, figures which will raise taxes by at least \$70 per \$100,000 of assessed value and commercial owners about \$356 more per \$250,000.

Such a large expenditure at this time made the City Council and the School Committee's decision difficult but the unanimous vote of both is something Taconic Principal John Vosburgh appreciates.

"In a community where a project such as this is often met with a lukewarm reception, you all took a chance to seeing this project through and approving this for the betterment of the city," Vosburgh said.

"I'm old enough to remember the no votes for the baseball stadium and the mall. I want to thank you for having the courage to take this huge step and the confidence that this investment will be one of the pillars of this community for years to come."

The project was first thought of 11 years ago and has been championed by three mayors, including the current Mayor Linda Tyer. The mayor says the city's financial situation is even more of a reason to build the school.

**State Rep. Tricia Farley-Bouvier has been a longtime champion of the project.**

"It is tempting sometimes to think that when communities fall on difficult financial times to dial back the investments. I happen to believe that is precisely when you should invest," Tyer said.

"It is now we need to build this school for our future learners. What we are doing today is laying the groundwork for future academic success of our city's most precious resource, our future learners and leaders."

Taconic is a "long look forward of how teachers teach and learners learn in the age of technology," she said, that will ultimately help the city's youth find prosperous careers in those skilled trade professions the city hopes to grow.

Superintendent Jason McCandless agreed, saying "the education of young people is indelibly tied to the health of the community, to the robustness of our economy, and to the overall well-being of our city, of our state, and of our nation."

The MSBA funds just 15 projects year with close to 100 applying. Taconic's project was approved last year.

Going through all of those steps as a selectman in her hometown years ago, Goldberg said she understands how important it is "to be here today and to know how much the city of Pittsfield went through and how many people were involved and know that you made it, that we are going to put that shovel into that wet ground and soon the building will match the incredible teaching that goes on in here."

"We have to make these things happen because it is about creating a great, economically stable state for everybody," Goldberg said.