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Public Law
123rd Legislature
Second Regular Session

Chapter 578
H.P. 1468 - L.D. 2082

An Act To Preserve Successful Historic Neighborhood Schools

Emergency preamble. Whereas, acts and resolves of the Legislature do not become effective until 90 days after adjournment unless enacted as emergencies; and

Whereas, historic school buildings have provided an educational foundation for many of the State's current and past leaders and added significant value to Maine communities; and

Whereas, deliberations about the future of historic school buildings across the State are in progress, including deliberations regarding the 100-year-old Nathan Clifford School in Portland, designed by renowned architect John Calvin Stevens; and

Whereas, in the judgment of the Legislature, these facts create an emergency within the meaning of the Constitution of Maine and require the following legislation as immediately necessary for the preservation of the public peace, health and safety; now, therefore,

Be it enacted by the People of the State of Maine as follows:

Sec. 1. 20-A MRSA §15908-A, as enacted by PL 2003, c. 497, §2 and affected by §5, is amended to read:

§ 15908-A. School energy efficiency standards rules

1. Definition. For purposes of this section, "substantially renovated" means any renovation for which the cost exceeds 50% of the building's current value prior to renovation.

2. Rules. The state board, in consultation with the Department of Administrative and Financial Services and the Public Utilities Commission, shall by rule require as a condition for state funding for construction that, except as provided in subsection 4, all planning and design for new or substantially renovated schools or school buildings subject to state board approval:

A. Involve consideration of architectural designs and energy systems that show the greatest net benefit over the life of the building by minimizing long-term energy and operating costs;

B. Include an energy-use target that exceeds by at least 20% the energy efficiency standards in effect for commercial and institutional buildings pursuant to Title 10, section 1415-D; and

C. Include a life-cycle cost analysis that explicitly considers cost and benefits over a minimum of 30 years and that explicitly includes the public health and environmental benefits associated with energy-efficient building design and construction, to the extent they can be reasonably quantified.

The state board shall adopt rules pursuant to this section by July 1, 2004. Rules adopted pursuant to this section are routine technical rules as defined in Title 5, chapter 375, subchapter 2-A.

3. Requirements for approval. Except as provided in subsection 4, the state board shall withhold approval of a state-funded new or substantially renovated school or school building if the local school authority proposing the project can not show that it has duly considered the most energy-efficient and environmentally efficient designs suitable in accordance with rules adopted pursuant to this section.

4. Renovation of historic school buildings; waiver. The state board may, in consultation with the Public Utilities Commission and the Executive Director of the State Historic Preservation Commission, grant a waiver from the requirements of this section on a case-by-case basis for instances of substantial renovation of a historic school building. For the purposes of this subsection, "historic school building" means a school building that is on the National Register of Historic Places, eligible for nomination to the national register or designated as a historic building by a certified municipal historic preservation ordinance.

A. The state board shall grant a waiver request if, in the board's opinion, the local school authority proposing the renovation project has demonstrated that renovation of the historic school building would not compromise the public health and safety requirements of this chapter and that 2 or more of the following circumstances exist:

(1) Renovation of the historic school building is in substantial compliance with the energy efficiency standards required under this section as determined by the Public Utilities Commission;

(2) Renovation of the historic school building provides substantial energy efficiency as determined by the Public Utilities Commission and also provides education, social or environmental benefits as determined by the department over alternative proposals, including, but not limited to, any proposals to construct a new school on an alternative site; and

(3) Adherence to the energy building standards would result in irreparable damage to the historic character of a historic school building as determined by the Executive Director of the State Historic Preservation Commission.

B. An application for a waiver from the requirements of this section must be submitted to the state board in accordance with requirements established by the state board by rule pursuant to paragraph D. The waiver application must include documentation to substantiate the conditions of this subsection. If the request is denied, the state board shall communicate the reasons for denying the request to the applicant.

C. The state board shall render a decision on an application for a waiver from the requirements of this section within 60 days of the receipt by the state board of a complete application for a waiver. In rendering a decision, the state board may place conditions upon the granting of a waiver. Failure on the part of the state board to render a decision within the 60-day period constitutes approval of the request for the waiver.

D. The state board shall adopt or amend rules to implement the requirements of this subsection. Rules adopted under this paragraph are routine technical rules as defined in Title 5, chapter 375, subchapter 2-A.

Emergency clause. In view of the emergency cited in the preamble, this legislation takes effect when approved.

Effective April 8, 2008.