

Finding and funding facilities is one of the biggest challenges for charter school programs. Renovating an existing building is often the most cost effective solution for temporary or permanent quarters. Every potential building will have positive and negative features, each with its own associated cost savings or price tag. Often just bringing a building to code in terms of safety and mechanical issues, and insuring basic functionality of layout, can take up much of whatever money has been set aside for renovation work. Having a clear sense of your spatial and programmatic needs can help you to select a suitable, adaptable building.



High Tech Middle renovation

Following is a list of questions to consider when looking at potential buildings.

1. Building Structure and Systems

Structural integrity: What structural work, if any, will be required to meet building and seismic codes?

Building configuration: How well do the existing layout, window treatment, and level of accessibility lend themselves to your needs with a minimum of structural or demolition work? Rectangular space.....

Mechanical systems: How much work will it take to adapt existing electrical, plumbing, heating, ventilation, and air-conditioning systems to both your needs and the local building code?

Natural light and building orientation: How much natural light does the building have access to? How is the building oriented with respect to sun, wind, and potential outdoor spaces and amenities?

Distinctive entry (not shared with other entities): Is the building accessible through a private entry that enables visual surveillance of people who enter?



2. Compliance

Fire safety and egress: Does the building have direct and enclosed means of exit with adequate stairway capacity? What fire safety systems are presently in place?

Handicapped-Accessibility Requirements: How many level changes occur at ground floor entries? Will ramping be required? Is there adequate elevator access to upper level spaces?

Zoning: What is the building's occupancy classification? Will it need to be changed? Changing a building's usage requires either a change of zoning or Change of Use (CUP) Permit, both of which take time to obtain.

Seismic: In areas where there are earthquake considerations, will structural remediation be necessary to bring the building up to code?

Historical designation: Is the building registered as a historic landmark, or does it have significant historical or aesthetic value that will need to be preserved in the renovation work?

3. Capacity

Building Size: Does the building have enough usable square footage to meet your short- and long-term needs? HTH recommends allotting roughly 100 square feet per student, (not including cafeterias, auditoriums, and gymnasiums) when you consider building size.

Lot Size: Does the size of your lot limit the amount of buildable square footage that you can add or renovate? Does it permit for future expansion?

Room Size: Do the present room sizes and configurations lend themselves to your needs, or will substantial demolition and reconstruction be required?

Rest Room Capacity: Do the present restrooms have adequate numbers of toilets, urinals, and sinks to meet your needs, or will more fixtures need to be added? Plumbing can be costly.

Parking: Are there a sufficient number of parking spaces (or potential parking spaces) to accommodate the number that that you desire or that will be required to have by code?

Outdoor Space: What kind of outdoor space is available for instructional or recreational use? How does orientation and land slope effect the usability of there areas?

4. Costs

Site: In addition to the acquisition costs of your site, what other costs will be incurred for demolition, site preparation, and soil remediation?

Building: What will the per-square-foot cost of your building be when projected renovation costs are factored in?

Renovation: How extensive a renovation will the building require? What elements of the building could remain relatively unchanged, thereby reducing renovation costs?

Maintenance: How much will utilities and equipment maintenance cost per month and year?



High Tech High LA site and renovation model



Mirta Ramirez Computer Science Charter School proposed site



New Bedford Global Learning Charter School site



High Tech High renovation



High Tech Media Arts site



High Tech International proposed renovation and site