

Published: 12/17/2005

## Decision time for vocational school

By Nelson Benton  
Staff writer

Ask almost anyone in business North of Boston about their major concerns for the future and they'll likely mention the shortage of skilled workers. Yet the heart of this region – the North Shore and Cape Ann — is the only area of the state still without a comprehensive vocational school of its own.

Young people who might like to learn a trade and become an electrician, for instance, or a plumber, have nowhere to go for that training. Vocational programs at local high schools are extremely limited in scope, and there are four applications for every spot available in the freshman class at North Shore Regional Technical School in Middleton.

There's a plan for remedying that situation that calls for the consolidation of North Shore Tech with the

Peabody vocational program and the Essex Agricultural and Technical School at the Aggie campus in Danvers. What's needed now is a major political push to free up the estimated \$100 million this project will cost.

It sounds like a lot of money. But the cost of not doing it, in terms of opportunities denied and loss of business activity, will be much greater. At a recent meeting involving some local municipal officials and directors of the North Shore Chamber of Commerce, there was plenty of sentiment for doing whatever is necessary to make the new school a reality.

Brian Cranney, who runs a major HV AC firm based in Danvers, said it is absolutely shameful that the region does

Not offer its kids the type of programs – many of which provide a path to rewarding, well-paid careers – that can be found in other parts of the state. He's gone so far as to donate equipment to North Shore Tech so it could offer electrical courses to at least a few of its students.

Danvers Town Manager Wayne Marquis who with Beverly Mayor William Scanlon, has spent many years pushing for a more comprehensive regional program, said pressure must be brought to bear on Beacon Hill to provide a major share of the construction funding. But cities and towns in the area will also have to do their part.

As has been noted before, however, this is an effort the North Shore can't afford to let fail.