

School Department mulls options for renovating Reading High

BY KELSEY SCIASCIA
ADVOCATE STAFF

Proposals includes measures to correct gender inequities in athletic facilities

An architect hired to develop feasibility plans for renovating Reading Memorial High School has recommended a \$35 to \$40 million plan that includes enlarged classrooms, inter-building links and a new girls locker room.

Gene Raymond, an architect with the firm Strekalovsky & Hoyt, told the School Committee last week that safety and gender parity issues would be covered under his recommended plan and that building a new school is unnecessary.

Raymond presented the School Committee with six options ranging from mere administrative changes to building the new school. The plans are all based on a future enrollment of about 1,600 students, a figure projected by the New England School Development Council for 2009. Currently, Reading

High houses just under 1,100 students.

While the total cost of the project could top \$40 million, Raymond said the project is eligible for up to 66 percent reimbursement by the state School Building Assistance Bureau (SBAB). The town's share of the cost is approximately \$16 million.

One of the key elements of the plan is upgrading the Hawkes Field House to include a girls locker room and a link to the main high school building.

Raymond said the current locker room situation, which forces girls to travel to the field house after changing into their gym attire, is "untenable."

School Committee member Timothy Twomey, who is also on the School Building Committee, requested a legal reading on all of the options in respect to Title IX, a federal law that requires

parity for boys and girls in facilities and programs.

The link between the school and the Hawkes Field House could be eliminated to shave about \$2.5 million from the cost of the project, but Raymond said he does not recommend doing so.

"There are currently spaces within the building that are not on a traffic path. This could be a safety concern," he said.

The cheapest plan, one consisting only of administrative changes, would not be eligible for reimbursement from the SBAB because it does not address educational and program deficiencies within the building, Raymond said. The plan he recommends could be done in phases, creating a minimum of disruption to the school's activities.

The cost of building a new school would go even higher than \$16 million

when demolition and site preparation costs are factored into the project, Twomey said. He noted that would be an increase to the town of about 33 percent over the option recommended by Raymond.

Russell Graham, chairman of the School Building Committee, encouraged the School Committee to reach a decision quickly on which option it intends to pursue.

"The data is before you to make a decision — either to build or renovate," he said.

Graham said keeping the option of constructing a new high school on the table could cause confusion in the community and lead to allegations that the School Committee is considering a plan that is not cost effective.

Reiterated Raymond's statement, Gra-

ham said there is no real need to tear down the existing high school since it is structurally sound.

The School Committee was wary of dismissing any of the options until counsel had a chance to evaluate them in light of Title IX and until they had a better grasp of the merits of each of the options. They also wanted to present all of the options to SBAB for final approval and judgment on reimbursement.

High School Principal Frank Orlando said that in 2003, the New England Association of Secondary Schools and Colleges would again visit Reading for an accreditation evaluation. During the last visit, in 1993, the committee raised concerns about the school's ability to meet the needs of the town and the growing student population.

Orlando said he hopes a project will be implemented prior to that date. The School Committee will discuss the plans further at its May 10 meeting.

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ADVOCATE

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Girl's gymnasium boosts high school construction costs

BY NADINE WANDZILAK
STAFF WRITER

What changes at Reading Memorial High School could cost a total of just under \$60 million?

A new gym at the fieldhouse, which also allows for a full 200-meter indoor track; a three-story "bridge" connecting the older school building and the newer addition behind it; a new mini-auditorium in the old girls' gym; a larger cafeteria; reconfigured classrooms; upgraded building systems and a complete upgrade of all finishes.

The project would cost just over \$38 million, in 2004 dollars, to build; plus 33 percent more for

"soft costs" such as design and furniture; plus four percent per year for four years, 2000 through 2003, for inflation, according to Richard Radville, a member of the School Building Committee studying the high school.

Radville and school building committee member Joseph Lupi recently reviewed a RMHS school space needs study by Strelakovsky and Holt for the high school and updated the cost figures in that report. The cover page of the report is dated April 13.

The school committee retained Strelakovsky and Holt in the summer of 1998, the report states, to provide the high school space study, and to review a prior study

dated Feb. 21, 1997. The new study lists several options; the School Building Committee is considering option "C-3."

New construction would cost \$12 million for the project; according to Radville; renovations; another \$23 million

The motivating factor for the new gym, Radville said, is Title IX, the federal law that mandates support for athletic programs for women. The committee had considered a bridge from the existing girls' lockers to the fieldhouse, according to Radville. But a bridge costs so much per square foot that you're better off to build new lockers and a new gym, he said. New

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Renovations, new construction

and inflation drive up costs

■ SCHOOLS, FROM PAGE 1

athletic facilities for girls would also open up the old girls' gym for a drama center, he added.

Part of the project would be reimbursable through the state School Building Assistance program. New funding regulations are being implemented now. "We're 'in' at 55 percent," School Superintendent Dr. Harry Harutunian told the School Building Committee at its most recent meeting. Those rules give more reimbursement, three percent on top of the base percentage computed for each community, for innovative community use of

space, Radville said. Both the new gym and new performance space would qualify for the extra points, Radville said.

The bridge and stair towers would improve circulation, communications and safety in the building, Radville said.

The whole project is ultimately based on a growing high school enrollment, Radville said. With about 1,100 students, the high school houses about 100 more students now than graduated in June, he said. And classes get bigger, he said, moving down the grade ladder, back toward kindergarten. In 2004, he said

estimates project a freshman enrollment of more than 400 students. In 10 years, RMHS could house about 1,550 students.

School officials have said the project would be done with a capital exclusion. Residents would have to vote to approve a capital exclusion.

At the last School Building Committee meeting in September, committee members discussed how to time a recommendation on the high school given the town's projected shortfall of about \$2.5 million next fiscal year. Individually, several com-

mittee members recommended reporting to Town Meeting next month about their work to date. Committee member Jeff Struble suggested adding \$500,000 for architect's fees for schematic design for the high school, and \$18,000 for the Killam School, to whatever form of financial relief the town looks to for the \$2.5 million. Those design fees are reimbursable, Struble said, if the state approves the project.

Committee members seemed to prefer making a report to Town Meeting, and not asking for money now. Even if Town Meeting does not endorse the

building committee's recommendation, the buzz after Town Meeting would give the building committee a sense, School Committee and School Building Committee member Timothy Twomey said, about whether people are ready to open their wallets for the high school.

Supt. Harutunian said he argued to build space for Reading elementary school students first. "That worked," he said, "until this year." He worked on the premise, he said, that after all the other town schools were done, "everybody goes to the high school." So people would "get

behind" plans for the high school. That approach assumed that everything the schools had then would remain, Harutunian continued. "We assumed what we had, we'd keep."

Harutunian suggested that the school administration and RMHS Principal Frank Orlando map out a conceptual plan of things that need to be done at the high school. "We need a list of tasks," Harutunian said.

Based on input from high school staff, 99 percent of what's wrong with the building is conceptual and visual, not educational, Harutunian said.



SBA tells Building Committee to scale

State agency says cafeteria, field house, auditorium space 'already exceed the state

BY NADINE WANDZILAK
STAFF WRITER

The state agency in charge of the purse strings for school building projects has given town officials a new, scaled-back blueprint for parts of a high school renovation project.

The town's School Building Committee still plans to go to Town Meeting in just under three weeks for permission from Town Meeting to ask town voters for \$500,000, probably this spring, for schematic drawings for a high school renovation project. The Building Committee has costed out a \$60 million renovation option.

The Building Committee scheduled two meetings

before Town Meeting to align its renovation options with the state agency's so-called blueprint. Town officials anticipated that the state School Building Assistance (SBA) would reimburse the town more than half of the \$60 million.

The state agency could not justify state aid to reconfigure the "old" gym into a small auditorium "at this time," according to the blueprint, a letter from SBA administrator Christine Lynch to school Superintendent Dr. Harry Harutun-

ian. Members of the School Building Committee got their first look at the letter, dated Oct. 1, at their meeting Tuesday night.

Nor could Lynch justify expanding the cafeteria to maintain two seatings, the letter stated.

"You currently have an auditorium that seats approximately 1,100 students," Lynch wrote, and "most districts in the state maintain three lunch seatings." State aid "could not be provided to support additions to a building designed to enlarge spaces

To evaluate the need for renovations, Lynch said the state agency would also need 10-year enrollment projections and inventories of all existing school space.

back plan allowance'

such as a cafeteria, field house and auditorium that already exceed the state allowance," the letter states.

Lynch asked school officials to reconfigure some other spaces that the School Building Committee has discussed changing, such as the field house, for example. Under the plan priced out by the committee, a new gym and girls lockers would be added to the RMHS Hawkes Field House. Lynch said the state bureau "would be interested in other reconfigurations to accommodate the desired athletic program within existing space before we could support new space."

She also proposed that school officials analyze the space that would be available if non-instructional





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School Building Committee told to scale back high school plans

■ **SCHOOL**, FROM PAGE 1

activities such as administrative offices and the Reading Extended-Day Activities Program were to move out of the high school. Until then, "we could not justify approving an addition" to RMHS, she said.

To evaluate the need for renovations, Lynch said the state agency would also need 10-year enrollment projections and inventories of all existing school space.

The committee will go back to the drawing board and meet on Nov. 1 and 7 to align its renovation options with Lynch's written comments. The committee will meet on Nov. 1 at the Parker Middle School library and on Nov. 7 at RMHS, in the superintendent's conference room. Both meetings are scheduled to start at 7:30 p.m.

In spite of what Building Committee Chairman Russ Graham

described as new rules of the game for the high school project, the committee voted 8-2 to support the fall Town Meeting warrant article that would ask voters for \$500,000 for schematic plans a high school renovation. The article gives no dollar figure. Several members of the building committee calculated the cost, this past spring, at \$500,000. The fall warrant article was based on an instructional motion made at spring Town Meeting.

Building Committee members said they had to sell the idea of the \$500,000 not only to Town Meeting but also to voters.

The projected cost on the interest for a \$500,000 debt exclusion, for the owner of an "average" house in Reading, priced at \$320,000, would be \$3.11 a year, according to figures reportedly prepared by Town Treasurer Collector Elizabeth Klepeis.

Building Committee members

will meet with the Board of Selectmen this coming Tuesday to discuss the high school renovation warrant article. The selectmen have said several times that they wanted to talk to the building committee about such an article. The Building Committee never discussed the high school renovation warrant article, according to several members.

Complicating any high school renovation blueprint, the state School Building Assistance Bureau is laboring under new regulations, and with less money, according to Building Committee members. So the state agency will be even more critical, local committee members said, about funding projects.

Several school officials met with the SBAB last month to get answers to reimbursement questions, according to Harutunian. The Building Committee received Lynch's letter in response to those questions.

Casey loses Reading to Donovan

■ **REDISTRIC**, FROM PAGE 1

four, the population difference is small. Precincts 1 and 7 in Woburn have about 10,500 people, while the four precincts she picked up have about 13,000 people. "The difference is not that significant," said Mernin. "But we have some research to do."

The Monday debate took

against the measure. Should the plan pass muster in the Senate and receive the approval of Acting Gov. Jane Swift, the new arrangement will be tested during the Nov. 5 election in 2002. Lawmakers who win seats in that election will start new terms in January of 2003.

District lines for state Senate, House and U.S. congressional

to keep communities within a single district. After the 1990 U.S. census, the Congressional districts that were drawn divided 13 state communities. In comparison, the redistricting for the 2000 U.S. Census divides only one: Boston.

The state has divided the state into 10 districts that vary by no more than 0.53 percent.

The state's spokesman Charles

Read notes

Halloween parade

The Reading Jr. Woburn Library at 1 p.m., Saturday after haunting the neighborhood. Admission is free, but non-perishable food will be accepted at the library meeting room.

Finagle a kids' sh

Finagle A Bagel at 22. Locally renowned restaurant to entertain children on Monday morning, from 9 to 11 a.m.

League selling raf

The Young Women's League is selling raffle tickets including one grand prize of a maximum of six hundred dollars.

Tickets may be purchased at the Reading Jr. Woburn Library. The winning ticket holders need not be present.

The Young Women's League members. Funds by the library, the Fire and Police departments, and individuals and groups.

Business card exc

The Reading/North Reading Chamber of Commerce on Tuesday, Nov. 6 at the business card exchange for their businesses. Reservations: Box 771, Reading 01061.

Outstanding Citiz

The Chamber of Commerce is having a bash at the Thomaston. The Chamber also has a meeting at the North Reading, and

Preservat

Reading

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10/15/96

Letters to the Editor

To the Editor:

What's this in the Oct. 11 *Daily Times Chronicle*? The Reading School Department is thinking of forming yet another administrative committee, this time to help the superintendent develop a plan to rehabilitate the schools. And there's even a question about whether or not this hand-picked ad hoc committee should function in the Open???

If the School Department is contemplating public funding of projects, respecting the public's Right to Know would be a welcome start. Even if (as a committee formed by the Administration versus one formed by

School Committee) this new committee legally doesn't have to follow the Open Meeting Law, the School Department should want the committee to conduct its business in the Open because it is ethical, moral and makes good common sense. What is there to hide? Hatching a master plan behind Closed Doors to be sprung on a weary public at the "appropriate moment" is not the way to go if one will be looking for funding ... or public trust... And there should not have to be a law for town servants and officials to do the right thing: keep accurate records and respect the taxpayers' right to attend meetings and obtain accurate information.

Just contemplating conducting this committee's business in private is outrageous, but typical of the mindset that has pervaded School Department actions during the past year. Reading taxpayers are not stupid. They are just beginning to look below the surface at what has been happening and they are not happy. Don't ask the taxpayers for any more money

until the School Department's attitudes and actions toward the public change.

Kendra Cooper
20 Covey Hill Rd.

Botticelli...

Continued from Page 1
commitments prevented his attendance.

Ms. Botticelli received several floral bouquets, and red roses. She was awarded the Woman of the Year Certificate, and a gold Woman of the Year pin.

Ms. Botticelli requested that in lieu of personal gifts, a fund be established toward the purchase of a park bench for the beautification of downtown Reading. She received several contributions to the "Bobbie Botticelli Bench Fund."

Martha Weston, former owner of Weston Florist of Reading, the senior member and past president of Reading Business and Professional Women, also attended.

Other special guests were Mass. State President-Elect Maria Coviello of the Downtown Boston Chapter, Barbara Wood, State Vice President of the Sudbury Chapter, Caroline Coscia, President of the Wakefield Chapter, and Pamela Schwartz, President of the Cape Ann Chapter.

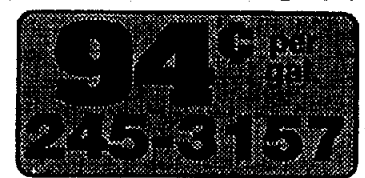
The Reading Chapter of

Continued from
up a significant portion of the district's political power. In the last presidential election, North Reading voted for Clinton by 4%, while Reading voted for Clinton by 12%. Overall, the vote went to Clinton.

The district towns have a similar demographic profile. Median incomes are similar. In North Reading, the median income is slightly higher than the state median of \$36,952. The district income is in the upper \$60,000 to \$70,000 range.

The district has been represented by members of the Board of Selectmen over the last 20 years. Nordberg (R), represented the district for 10 years from the late 60's to the late 70's. Barrett (D), represented the district from 1978 through 1994. Later, he became a state representative and a successful candidate for the 351st district in 1994. Geoffrey Beckwith succeeded Barrett as district director of the Municipal Association, a resource and lobbyist for the 351st

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Accreditation report notes progress at RMHS

BY LAWRENCE M. WALSH
ADVOCATE STAFF

Innovative programs, expanded academic offerings and creative approaches to education helped Reading Memorial High School earn laudatory comments on its recent accreditation review.

The New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) recently completed its review of the high school's five-year progress report and decided to continue Reading's accreditation. In issuing its decision, NEASC noted several academic, administrative and capital areas that impressed the review board.

"This (report) is telling us that our five-year progress report is accepted and that we've done what they've asked of us," said School Superintendent Dr. Harry Harutunian.

Every 10 years, NEASC conducts a comprehensive review of its member schools, evaluating them on everything from curriculum, academic performance and administration, to athletics and the state of their physical plant.

From this, the review board rates the school, reports areas of excellence and concerns, and makes recommendations for improvements. It also decides whether to grant accreditation to the school — which Reading has consistently obtained.

"What this tells colleges is that we meet a standard set by the New England Association," Harutunian said.

It is during the two- and five-year progress reports that NEASC

reviews the progress made on its recommendations and the areas of concern.

The progress report contained several positive aspects, but NEASC was particularly pleased with the following: ~~\$200,000~~

- plans to complete the upgrade of science rooms and laboratories by the end of the summer;
- the addition of five interdisciplinary courses;
- the hiring of five new teachers;
- efforts to address concerns related to class size;
- the inclusion of career guidance activities and services as part of the school's development guidance program;
- the positive impact of the School-to-Work program;
- the ongoing work of the professional staff in the use of a variety of assessment practices and the use of assessment results in curriculum development;

• the allocation of \$1.8 million for repairs and improvements to the school's physical plant;

- the hiring of additional custodial and maintenance staff;
- the addition of two new science courses and one math course to meet the ability levels of interested students;
- the creation of computer labs in several departments;
- and, increased course requirements for all students.

While the report is positive, NEASC is requesting a special progress report be filed in December updating progress on the implementation of the technology plan, confirming the introduction of

high-speed Internet access in the library, details on the progress made in resolving facility needs, and efforts made to improve the upkeep and maintenance of equipment in the art room.

NEASC is also asking for additional information on plans to ren-

ovate the existing high school or constructing a new building.

"These are the kinds of things they ask me to respond to," said high school Principal Frank Orlando. "I feel very confident that we'll fair well in addressing these other areas."

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