

LETTERS

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Reading 'renovation' costs aren't a closed book

By Globe Staff, 9/18/2003

When considering the \$54.9 million (plus \$48 million in interest) "renovation" of Reading Memorial High School, keep a few facts in mind ("Renovation plans aired," Globe NorthWest, Community briefing, Aug. 31).

- Upon completion of this proposed project, the high school's capacity will have been reduced from 2,000-plus students to roughly 1,400 students.
- The "renovation" actually consists of the complete demolition of the original, structurally sound 1953 high school. This includes the cafeteria, the 1,100-seat auditorium, the gymnasium, locker rooms, enough classrooms to teach 1,200 students, plus some of the 1970s addition. The existing 1970s library space will be gutted along with the entire math and science wing and the field house. A four-story addition will re-create those science and math classrooms and build smaller core facilities.
- The 1953 Reading Memorial High School was built to honor World War II veterans and represents the later architectural work of Adden, Parker, Clinch and Crimp, known across the state for school and public building design. Several members of this Boston firm were Reading residents. Prominent examples of their work are Reading Town Hall and the American Mutual Building on Wakefield's Lake Quannapowitt.
- Despite this significance, the Reading Historical Commission wrote in a May 2003 letter, as part of the project reimbursement submission to the state's Small Building Assistance program: "We are not presently aware of any historical or culturally significant features of RMHS that would preclude the additions or renovations for this project as approved by Town Meeting."

Voters approved the \$54.9 million at the February 2003 special election based on sketches and promises. The actual project plans, created by the fourth architect involved in the high school to date, Design Partnership of Cambridge, were revealed

only recently and represent the first concrete design information released to the public. The voting public was misled by a feverish pitch to "do it for the children," unaware of the history, viable alternatives, true costs, and extensive demolition. Reading has requested from the Legislature permission to stretch payments over 30 years.

If state reimbursement is delayed 20 years (or does not occur at all), Reading taxpayers will pay the full \$103 million for this project. Our children's children could be paying for future repairs and renovations on the new "renovated" Reading Memorial High School while still paying off the 30-year debt. How sad.

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