

Gymnasium's second floor saved by board

by Robb Fulcher

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Despite concerns over a tight construction budget, the Hermosa School Board has decided not to ax the second story of a gymnasium-library building that is under construction at Hermosa Valley School.

At a special meeting on Tuesday, the board voted to postpone accepting contractors' bids for some minor work on the project, but rejected an option that would have omitted the building's second floor, where two science classrooms are to stand.

The vote was 4-0, with board member Linda Wolin absent.

"We have to make the decision now or we're losing the second floor," school board member Cathy McCurdy said.

"I'm very nervous but I agree," member Linda Beck said.

"Its nerve wracking, but I think there is a consensus to build the science classrooms," school board President Greg Breen said.

As board members continued to monitor the project's costs, the approach they took on Tuesday aimed to keep the price tag near the \$10.8 million mark that consultants have estimated.

With that approach, board members also plan to complete the two science rooms rather than leave their interiors temporarily unfinished, as they had earlier planned as a money-saving measure.

The hard-fought construction project is the subject of a lawsuit by school neighbors and others who have lost in Superior Court but hope to continue fighting the project in an appeals court. The board in December 2005 voted to begin construction, three years after Hermosa voters approved school bonds that are being spent for the project.

Over those three years construction projects have soared, forcing the board to ax four classrooms from the project and agree to spend at least part of the school district's \$1.2 million reserve fund if necessary. The reserve fund is made up of proceeds from the sale of school district properties, and by law can be used only for construction and other capital improvements, district officials said.

Donor search

McCurdy said progress was being made in a search for private donors to aid the construction work. She said she no donors had yet been secured, but added, "There are some very generous folks out there who are starting to see this as an opportunity."

Board members said they might have to revise upward the figures contained in their formal pricing policy for naming school buildings after private donors.

Under the current guidelines, a donor can have his or her name on a building, area or piece of furniture at a school for:

- \$1 million – gym/multipurpose room
- \$200,000 – library
- \$500,000 – ball field
- \$25,000 to \$150,000 – courtyard
- \$25,000 – classroom
- \$1,000 – bench

The formal policy also allows the school board to name pieces of a campus after people "who have made outstanding contributions to the community."

Board members said large donors could have their names on buildings for longer than seven years.

The policy also allows donors of \$75,000 to have their names on yearly endowment programs for elementary language arts, math, science, social science, fine arts and physical education.

Cathy Barrow, an eighth grade teacher at Hermosa Valley School, said she came to Tuesday's sparsely attended

meeting to encourage the board to push forward with the gymnasium-library-classroom project.

"I'm very, very frustrated with the lawsuit and the delays because of it," she said after the meeting. She said she was also disappointed that delays had caused classrooms to be cut from the project.

The lawsuit contended that the school board did not properly address concerns about noise, traffic and parking near the campus on Valley Drive north of Pier Avenue. The lawsuit also contended that the 2002 ballot measure for the school bonds did not include the gym in a list of projects to be funded.

Gym opponents also have said they would push a separate action in Superior Court, challenging the school board's plans to use \$1.5 in special state funds for the construction project. ER

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