

District cuts back on expansion project

by David Rosenfeld

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After costly delays, the board votes to cut two classrooms and scale back the library to meet \$800,000 shortfall.

In what may be the second-to-last step toward finalizing plans for a new multipurpose building at Hermosa Valley School, the Board of Trustees scaled back the project — almost six years in the works — in hopes of erasing an estimated \$800,000 budget shortfall.

The board decided 4-1 Wednesday to maintain plans for a large gymnasium while scaling back a proposed library and eliminating two proposed classrooms, reducing the footprint of the building to about 7,200 square feet.

The move by the Board of Trustees called for architect Brain Dougherty to “massage” square footage out of the building planned for the southwest corner of the campus, and ruled out plans for additional parking.

The board had previously trimmed \$1 million from the project by declining to build it into the adjacent hillside. The total cost after the most recent reductions should be about \$6.6 million.

At the same time, work crews began this week on a roughly \$7.3 million modernization project, which will include revamping decades-old electrical systems.

The construction and modernization projects are funded mostly by Hermosa’s \$13.6 million Measure J bond and \$1.9 million from the state’s Proposition 55 in March.

Cutbacks to the design would not be necessary had the district completed its plans a year ago, before the costs of building materials rose dramatically and the bidding climate exploded.

Construction is expected to begin in June 2005. The multipurpose building will include a finished floor gymnasium, library, changing rooms, bathrooms, two science labs and two classrooms.

Community asset

Board members expressed support for renting the gymnasium to sports leagues to raise money for the district.

The gym will hold two courts for either volleyball or basketball and seat about 100 spectators around the main court.

Several nearby residents complained that sports activity might crowd further the already impacted neighborhood adjoining the school.

Board member Lance Widman said he always assumed the gym would be a community asset. “It makes all the sense in the world to have the gym available in the evenings with reasonable restrictions,” Widman said.

The Civic Center Act, under the California Education Code, requires the district to provide its space to qualified youth groups if no other space is available at a fee worth no more than the cost to the district.

Linda Beck, the only ‘nay’ vote on the board, said she would have supported downsizing the gymnasium to fit a single basketball court and saving, perhaps, a classroom and library space, even if that meant the gym could not be rented.

Board member Greg Breen said he supported the large gym but would not support additional parking at the school because, “Less parking gives incentives to walk. We’ve got a car problem in our culture and a lack of physical exercise.”

Paramount reasons

“P.E. is the only subject that has the potential to affect how people will feel every day of their lives,” said Physical Education teacher Mary Delk. “We have a national obesity problem. Education leads to fitness for life.” Delk said the gym would greatly improve her classes and give students a place to change their clothes. She suggested a large gym gives more options and greater control to her classes.

Superintendent Sharon McClain cited statistics from the Centers for Disease Control that report close to 400,000 people die per year from obesity and lack of physical education.

Photo & Video

Cutting into the night

Debate at the school board meeting went on for about four hours without regard for meeting procedures and speakers' time limits.

Dougherty, the architect, estimated the building would have to be reduced by about 2,900 square feet to make up the \$800,000 shortfall. PCM3, consultants to the school district, estimate each square foot costs about \$275, compared to \$235 a year ago.

In saving the gym, the district decided to eliminate two classrooms that could serve as a weight room and a dance room. Instead that space will house the new library, which is designed to make use of sunlight and provide a comfortable setting. The space also could be converted into two classrooms at a later time, officials said.

After the most recent design changes, the school will net an added two classrooms campus-wide. The two classrooms will make space for a music program and accommodate special needs students who had previously been bused out of the district.

Principal Linda Cohen said she expects the student population to rise every five years by about 50 students. The district currently has 1,055 students. The state's class size reduction effort mandates that K-3 classes have no more than 20 students and classes above fourth grade no more than 32 students.

Fate of technology

Out of the Measure J \$13.6 million bond, \$800,000 was earmarked for upgrades to technology. So far \$200,000 has been used for new computers and \$350,000 has been stripped to pay for construction costs associated with technology labs.

Technology director Terry Tsosie said the school is in desperate need of new hardware. She gave the board a \$520,000 wish list for the next three years and begged the board to return the \$350,000 to the fund for hardware improvements. Doing so would create need for an added reduction to the gym building, nearly 50 percent more than the board directed, some officials said.

"Really we have no other money. Any money we have came from grants, and the state doesn't want to give much money for hardware," Tsosie said.

"We're paying more money to constantly repair them then I think it would be worth to buy new ones," Tsosie said. ER

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