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The New Trier News

VOL. XCV, No. 1

NEW TRIER HIGH SCHOOL, 385 WINNETKA AVENUE, WINNETKA, IL 60093

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 2014

Referendum prompts changes, debate



A rendering of the front of the Winnetka campus, post referendum and construction in 2017 | New Trier website

by Julia Patton

Most students at New Trier have heard about the \$100 million referendum, also known as the Winnetka Campus Facilities Project, which is set for a vote on Nov. 4.

Last year there was plenty of preliminary discussion about the feasibility of this renovation project and its plans, but now it is time for the community to have a say.

The referendum, if passed, would consist of the demolition of three buildings on the Winnetka campus and the construction of

several new facilities, including a library and cafeteria and new spaces for the art, music, theater, and speech programs. Twenty-seven standard classrooms would be added for English, social studies, and math classes, along with three new science labs.

"I think that this is a great project because it makes efficient use of the space on the west side of the campus," said New Trier Superintendent Linda Yonke. The current buildings proposed for demolition take up a total of 125,000 square feet, and the renovations would use this same

space to create buildings which bring that total to 268,000 square feet.

Aside from the extended space, the renovation would provide students and staff with many other perks. "The project would make the whole campus accessible for students, staff, and visitors with disabilities – something that is a huge challenge in the current buildings," said Winnetka Campus Principal Denise Dubravec.

In addition, the buildings would provide more energy efficient heating and cooling systems, better fire safety with sprinklers, and more secure entrances to the school.

As with any large project, there are concerns. Of the proposed project's cost of \$100 million, \$11 million would be taken from New Trier's reserves. This leaves township taxpayers to cover \$89 million in bonds. According to Yonke, the impact on individual taxpayers comes out to about \$16.67 per \$1000 of taxes. These tax increases will be active for twenty years.

Another concern with the project is how the construction will influence student life. Construction is proposed to take place over two years, 2015-2016 and 2016-2017, with some displacement of students and their classrooms.

There will be trailers and temporary classrooms with suitable conditions and workspaces, but these spaces will mostly be used by tech arts and art classes. Many students will not be displaced by the construction at all.

Throughout the planning of this project, safety has been widely considered. According to the administration, student safety is a top priority, and many precautions will be taken. "The construction area will be completely barred off from students and constantly monitored for noise and air quality. Basically, we

will try to make school life as normal and comfortable as we possibly can while still building a new building," said Dubravec.

According to the administration the construction company chosen for this renovation is also experienced in these types of projects, where they must do such major construction while still allowing people to work nearby.

Many underclassmen at New Trier today will have to live through the construction if the referendum passes, but the main question right now is whether it will pass or not. Leaders of the project want to make sure that everyone is as informed as possible.

"We welcome questions, presentations, anybody who would like for me or someone else to come in and talk about the project," said Yonke. "We want to make sure people have accurate information about what the project is, why we're doing it, and how much it costs."

Anyone can find out more about the referendum through New Trier's website under the link "Winnetka Campus Facilities Project."

New Trier improves ADA accessibility

by Lydia Wuorinen

New Trier's Northfield and Winnetka campuses are undergoing renovations.

Renovations began at the Winnetka Campus over the 2014 Spring Break, and they are scheduled to be complete by mid-October of this year.

All of the construction began as "part of a capital improvement plan," explained Denise Dubravec, Winnetka campus principal. "Each year, the school district identifies areas of need, and so there's a process the plan must go through."

Steve Linke, facilities manager, said, "The Superintendent, Dr. Yonke, formed an ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) committee. That committee consisted of community members, Physical Plant services, faculty, and administrators. We toured the whole campus, and looked at areas that we did not think we were going to do major renovation to, or tear down," said Linke.

"We took all those deficiencies to the Facilities Steering Committee. That committee looked at them all and decided what would be the most beneficial to do, and what the district could afford."

The Gates Gym and Gaffney Auditorium were found to be

excellent candidates for renovation. "There were ways for people to access those spaces, but they weren't convenient," said Dubravec.

The board had many considerations to take in account when approving the project. One was the project's estimated price tag. "For many years, there's been a discussion on providing easier access for students with disabilities, or students who are in need of using the elevator for injuries," Dubravec stated. "This was just a time where there was money set aside."

Nicholas and Associates, a construction management firm, is responsible for overseeing the ongoing project. New Trier's PPS staff is responsible for overseeing the firm.

The project, which includes construction at the Northfield campus as well as the Winnetka campus, was given a budget of, "a little over \$1.9 million."

"We are well within that budget right now," Linke assured. This budget covers the cost of the management firm, materials, and the tradesmen and laborers.

The scheduling of such a massive undertaking is complex, and the amount of people working on the project, said Linke, "varies by day, because we have different trades here by different times.



New elevator construction during the ADA renovation process, near field house entrance | Minturn

I would say if you took every person that worked on the project from start to finish, probably 80 people. It really is a large project. We have masons, ironworkers, carpenters, electricians, plumbers, HBC technicians, demolition workers, general laborers, and cleanup workers."

All of the renovations at the school this summer were part of the ADA project, according to Linke, including the addition of a ramp to the Gaffney Auditorium to get into the building. In the auditorium a ramp was added to get from the house to the stage, and four accessible

restrooms were added in the south lobby, said Linke.

"For the Gates Gym, we're working on a five-stop elevator that will hit every level of that building," Linke added.

The new construction will benefit students with disabilities who will gain easier access to all floors.

Community members who come to New Trier's Winnetka campus will experience increased mobility as they arrive for performances in the Gaffney, or for games in the Gates Gym.

The administration believes the ongoing construction will promote

the referendum for a replacement of the cafeteria, tech arts, and the music buildings. "It sends a message that it's important for our students to have access to the facilities, and to feel comfortable with participating in all the different programs that operate in each of those areas," Dubravec said.

While there were a few hiccups along the way, "there was nothing that didn't allow us to continue to use the facilities. Overall, I feel that it is a successful project in that the end result is giving us, and giving our students access to facilities that they may not have had as easily," said Dubravec.