



## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE NEW BETHEL PARK HIGH SCHOOL PROJECT

*Below are answers to some of the most-often asked questions regarding the construction of a new Bethel Park High School. Please check back, as we will continue to update this page as the project moves forward.*

### **Overview**

In 2002, the Bethel Park Board of School Directors established an Ad Hoc Committee, comprised of administrators, board members, teachers and parents to study all of the district's facilities, enrollment and housing trends to make recommendations for improvements to our facilities. The Board took those recommendations, hired an architect to look at those recommendations, and in the summers of 2006 and 2007 the district completed the following projects:

- Roof replacements at Independence Middle School, Neil Armstrong Middle School, Franklin Elementary School, Lincoln Elementary School, Penn Elementary School and Memorial Elementary School.
- Roof repairs to Washington Elementary School
- Vestibule/Skylight replacement at Independence Middle School and Washington Elementary School.
- Foundation Work at Memorial Elementary School, Franklin Elementary School and Neil Armstrong Middle School.
- Mechanical Upgrades at Penn Elementary School.
- Electrical Upgrades at Neil Armstrong Middle School.
- Removal of the Modular Classrooms at Lincoln Elementary School, Franklin Elementary School and Memorial Elementary School, and the creation of four classroom additions at Lincoln and Memorial, and reconfiguring space at Franklin to create four new classrooms.

These projects were completed for approximately \$6.5 million. Once these projects were completed, the district turned its attention to Bethel Park High School.

### **Why do we need a new High School?**

The current Bethel Park High School opened its doors to students in the fall of 1959 as a five-building, campus-style high school. Additional buildings were added over the years, and currently, the campus is home to eight buildings (350,000 square feet) on an 80 acre campus. The last major renovation of the high school was a multi-phase project that was completed in

1996 and included renovations to Buildings 1, 2, 3 and 4, the Media Center and the Physical Education Building.

The 50 year old buildings are at the end of their life expectancy and are in need of renovation/repair. Three years ago the Bethel Park Board of School Directors began looking at three options for the high school, which included:

- Renovating the existing buildings;
- Building an academic wing that would connect the auditorium/cafeteria building with the physical education building to create a one-building school;
- Constructing a totally new building.

The School Board sanctioned a group of resident volunteers to serve on an Ad Hoc Facilities Committee to study the current high school and the three options. The Committee issued a final report, where a majority of its members endorsed the construction of a new Bethel Park High School.

The School Board hired the architectural firm of Weber Murphy Fox in August 2007 to look at the recommendations of the previous architects, further study the options and make recommendation to move the project forward.

The cost of renovations and additions for the first two options actually exceeded the cost of constructing a new facility, making renovation/repair a less cost effective option. On February 28, 2008 the Bethel Park Board of School Directors authorized the architects to proceed with the schematic design phase of constructing a new Bethel Park High School, which will be located where the practice fields and tennis courts are currently located, in front of the existing campus along Church Road.

One of the advantages of the current design is that the new building can be constructed without interfering with the educational process, as it can be built while students use the existing campus. Once the students occupy the new building, the old buildings can be demolished, with minimal disturbance to the educational process. The current plan calls for the existing campus to become a new softball field, football/soccer practice fields, tennis courts and student/event parking lot.

Educationally, the current eight building campus configuration does not support the district's educational philosophy and makes it difficult to deliver a world-class educational program that will prepare students for their futures. The current buildings no longer meet our needs in terms of classroom structure and size. New, larger classrooms will be fully outfitted with technologies that will allow for flexible use and interactive instruction. A single building will provide an environment that fosters collaborative learning, which actively engages students in

the learning process. By having all of our educational programs housed in one building, an environment will be created which maximizes instructional support and provides an optimal climate for student achievement/performance.

Currently the district has to allot additional time between class changes to allow students enough time to get across campus. With a single building, the district looks to decrease the amount of time between class changes, allowing for more instructional time.

A single building will also improve security, as students will be housed in one building where all outside doors can be secured during the day and monitored by a camera and buzzer system to let visitors into the building.

### **Where will the new school be located?**

The new Bethel Park High School will be located on Church Road, across the street from the current campus. If you are traveling on Blackhawk Drive toward the Stadium, when you get to the bend in the road by the South Gym, the front door of the new school will be located on the other side of the road, where the farthest practice field is currently located. The new school will necessitate the relocation of a couple of the practice fields and the tennis courts.

### **What is the cost of constructing a new Bethel Park High School?**

At a Special Meeting held on Monday, January 5, 2009, the Bethel Park Board of School Directors set a "maximum project cost" of \$98,800,000 and a "maximum building construction cost" of \$81,440,423. The difference between these two numbers is that the maximum project cost includes "soft costs" such as architectural fees, construction management fees, engineering fees and site work, etc. These costs include the demolition of the current campus and the construction of new athletic fields and parking lot where the current campus is located.

On Thursday, August 11, 2009, the Board awarded bids for the construction of the new school in the amount of \$73,312,745, which were \$15 million under projections. When the Act 34 Information Package was developed in January 2009, construction bids were estimated to come in at \$85 million. When the bids were opened on Tuesday, August 4, the base bids totaled \$70,594,855.

Because the base bids were under projection, the Board was able to enhance the project by awarding an additional \$2,717,790 worth of alternate bids, bringing the total cost to \$73.3 million. Twenty-five alternates were added back into the project, including an additional synthetic practice field, two more tennis courts (bringing the total to eight), terrazzo flooring instead of linoleum, equipment for a television studio, new lighting at Bethel Park Stadium and

a daylight harvesting system for the classrooms, that would reduce lighting costs by reflecting more natural light into the classrooms.

Bids include not only the cost of constructing a new high school, but also include the demolition of the eight-building campus once the new school is open. These bids do not include fixtures and furniture (estimated at \$2 million) and technology (also estimated at \$2 million). The total cost of the building will be \$88 million, which will also include “soft costs” as outlined above.

The total cost of the project will be financed with a 25 year bond issue, which requires an annual payment of \$6.1 million. This is a fixed cost and payments will not increase for the life of the bond issue. The district has built the annual payments into current and future budgets to be able to fully fund the project without additional tax increases.

On June 15, 2009 the Bethel Park School District borrowed \$94,290,000, with an interest rate ranging from 1.15% to 5.10%, on a 25-year bond issue that will pay for the construction of the new Bethel Park High School. This will be the only bond issue needed to pay for this project.

### **What is the time table for the project?**

The district will break ground in September 2009 and we anticipate moving into the new school in August 2012. ***The current Bethel Park High School will NOT be demolished until 2012 when everyone—staff, students, furniture, equipment—has been moved into the new school.***

### **Is it true that the new high school has fewer classrooms than the current facility?**

No, that statement is false. The new school will contain 94 classrooms, a 1,300 seat auditorium, a 2,350 seat gymnasium, an eight-lane swimming pool, large group instruction room/small theater, television studio, band room and cafeteria with a connecting outdoor courtyard.

### **Why does the auditorium have fewer seats than our current facility?**

A smaller auditorium reflects a slight enrollment decline, which is projected for the district in the near future. Even though it will have fewer seats, the new auditorium will be designed to provide optimum viewing of the stage from all seats. Since the auditorium is rarely filled to capacity, the smaller size is more appropriate. If a larger venue is required (for assemblies or an indoor graduation due to inclement weather, for example) the gymnasium will seat 2,300

or more, depending on the organization of the seating, which is 600 more seats than the current auditorium contains.

### **How wide are the proposed hallways vs. the current hallways?**

The new plan indicates that hallways will be 12 feet wide, which will allow for lockers in the hallways, leaving 10 feet for student and staff circulation between classes. The current hallways are mostly 8 feet wide.

### **Will the new building be LEED certified?**

While the building will not be LEED certified, it will be built with an eye toward incorporating as many LEED standards as possible, including efficient heating and cooling systems, high efficiency lighting, daylight harvesting system for the classrooms and a high performance building shell. The Board felt the additional costs the district would have to incur to obtain LEED certification were not in the best economic interests of the taxpayers; however, a concerted effort will be made to incorporate as many LEED ideas into the building as possible.

### **What will happen to the current campus once the new building is completed?**

One of the advantages of the new high school design is that the new building can be constructed without interfering with the educational process in the existing buildings. Once the new building is completed, students can occupy it, and the old buildings will be demolished, again, with only minimal disturbance to the educational process. The current plan calls for the existing campus to become a new softball field, football/soccer practice fields, tennis courts and student/event parking. This plan will save the district significant costs which are associated with purchasing/renting temporary facilities and re-creating portions of the existing site development. The proximity of the high school to Independence Middle School will allow the district to continue joint bussing, again producing a savings in annual transportation costs. ***The current Bethel Park High School will NOT be demolished until 2012 when everyone—staff, students, furniture, equipment—has been moved into the new school.***

### **Will Purkey Field be relocated in the new design?**

No, Purkey Field will remain where it currently is located. Several early designs had Purkey Field re-located, but after consideration of the pros and cons, the Board decided to keep Purkey where it is currently located.

### **Why must we build all of these athletic fields?**

There is a growing demand for additional athletic facilities for both students and from the community, as a result of several issues, including Title IX, which requires equal facilities for women as men (i.e. a separate softball field from the baseball field). These athletic facilities will be open to the community, as many groups use these facilities year-round.

### **Is there a facility in the new High School for the Rifle Team?**

Yes, a Rifle Range, including a locked gun and safe room, will be a part of the design. Several earlier conceptual design schemes did not show a Rifle Range, because the intent is to locate the Range in an area of the school's foundation, and those areas were not defined in earlier stages of design.

### **What will happen to the bell and the smokestack, which have been landmarks of the campus for years?**

The bell will be re-located to a new, prominent spot within the proposed design. The smokestack, unfortunately, will have to be demolished to make way for the new athletic fields within the proposed design.

### **Is the new building located on top of a watershed?**

There is a significant vertical drop contained within the roughly 80 acre site. The size of the site and the slope does create the need to control storm water (rain) runoff in order to eliminate any possible impacts downstream. The current plans will reduce the amount of impervious surface (roofs and parking lots) and will upgrade the existing storm water management systems in accordance with regulations. The net effect will be to improve downstream conditions. Test borings have been taken on the site and shows there is no evidence of a "watershed."

### **How does the district plan to address the issues of mine subsidence/fill?**

There is currently 250 feet of cover over the coal mines, which results in a medium to low risk of subsidence. This is an almost universal condition in Allegheny County and there are acceptable engineering practices to mitigate any structural concerns. To ensure a proper foundation, the district has hired Construction Engineering Consultants to perform core boring samples to determine the safe requirements for the building's footer, and a final design will be developed based on those results. We will have deep foundations, resting on rock. Additionally, the design will minimize any new fill required and deal with the fact that much of the site consists of un-compacted fill. There is some construction cost associated with these structural issues, but the savings realized by using the existing site and associated site development far outweighs these costs.

### **What is PlanCon?**

PlanCon is an acronym for Planning and Construction Manual, which is part of the process required by the Pennsylvania Department of Education, which monitors the design and construction of all school projects throughout the state. There are 11 parts to PlanCon which must be prepared and submitted to PDE in order for the school district to proceed with the project. Part A is the Project Justification, which documents the need for the project and the reasons for the selection of the particular scheme being developed. It includes basic program information as well as projected costs, which must all be in agreement with the standards established by PDE. Part B is the Schematic Design, consisting of a preliminary set of drawings, including site plan, and simple building plans, which have translated the space program developed by the school district into an architectural diagram of how the building might be organized. The district has received approval on PlanCon Parts A, B, C, D and E. PDE comments on submitted PlanCon documents help to improve the plan.