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SCHOOL BUILDING COMMITTEE — NEW SCHOOL WILL BE “ON TIME, ON BUDGET”

MIDDLETOWN, R.I. (NOVEMBER 8, 2023) – The School Building Committee reaffirmed its mission Wednesday night to deliver a state-of-the-art middle-high school “on time” and “on budget.”

The day after a slim victory appeared to be in hand, the volunteer school building board met in the basement meeting room of the Oliphant administration building to talk about what was next.

Before the conversation got too deep, there were congratulations and thanks to all involved, especially the voters who approved the \$190 million bond by what appears to be 125 votes.

Throughout, board members stressed the new school would move Middletown to the next level and be a rallying point for students, educators and the community itself.

“This is where we can’t mess up,” School Building Committee Co-Chair Charlie Roberts said. “We have to do this right. We have to do this on budget. We have to stay on schedule.”

“Sitting at the table for the first time since the bond was approved, it’s exciting,” Town Administrator Shawn J. Brown said. “There’s a lot of energy in the room, a positive energy that will propel this project forward and deliver the school that was promised and on time and on budget.”

Opening the meeting, the School Building Committee heard from Matt LaRue of HMFH Architects about the aggressive design work plan. He said the community would submit its latest plans for the project to the state for review by mid February 2024.

It included discussion of work that was on the schedule for the next month on everything from more soil testing to schematic designs and furniture.

“We have 14 weeks from now until the submission of our Stage 2 application (to the Rhode Island Department of Education)...” School Building Committee Co Chair Ed Brady said. “I think we need to make certain, on our side, that we’re decisive answering any questions and making any decisions that are necessary.”

The need for a new school has been the subject of discussion going back at least two decades.

The issue hit a boiling point with the November 2021 findings from DBVW Architects that about \$190 million in work was needed to the district’s four schools before a ceiling or wall were opened. Visit <https://mdl.town/DBVW> online for more. Earlier this year, the state seconded those conclusions in the <https://mdl.town/FCI> report online.

After planning and design work, groundbreaking is slated for the spring of 2025, with construction expected to take two years.

The 200,000-square-foot building will go just north of Gaudet Middle School on fields where the Starlight Drive-In was once located at 1225 Aquidneck Ave.

There are unique entrances to the middle school and high school in the designs. This allows the student populations to be separated, but have access to a 12,000-square-foot gymnasium, cafeterias, an auditorium and other state-of-the-art amenities.

The school building board contracted with Colliers International to lead the project, with HMFH and DBVW architectural firms assisting. CIVIC was retained to make sure the educational needs of local students and teachers drove the design.

Those involved have stressed the new building must represent Middletown and showcase its immense pride. The school strives to be “Net Zero Energy-ready” while guaranteeing fresh air, daylight and quality views in at least 90 percent of all occupied spaces and sustainability throughout.

With the middle-high school as the centerpiece, the bond opens the door to converting Forest Avenue School into a pre kindergarten through first grade early learning center. The plan also transforms Middletown High School into a grade two to five learning center along with offices for school administrative and maintenance staff.

Supporters have said the new school will be less expensive than “Band-Aid” repairs to the existing buildings. They also said student learning would not be impacted by the ongoing work and costly temporary classroom trailers would not be needed.

Once construction and renovations were finished, Gaudet is expected to be torn down to make way for athletic fields to replace the ones lost to the new school.

Affordable housing is planned for the former Oliphant School property at 26 Oliphant Lane, now used for school administrative offices and tee ball. The building home to Aquidneck School on Reservoir Road would be repurposed as a community center, plans funded through grants and other non-tax dollars.

The next meeting for the School Building Committee is Nov. 21 at 4 pm from Oliphant. To date, the School Building Committee has had close to 100 meetings to discuss how to improve the community’s schools. Visit <https://mdl.town/NewSchool> for the latest news and updates.

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