

## Proposed Norwalk Physical Education & Competition Center (NPECC) Construction Project & Special Bond Election, Article #2

By: Kate Baldwin, Executive Director of Administrative Services

January 23, 2020

Last week's issue of the North Warren Town & County News included the first of a series of three articles regarding the proposed bond issue to construct the Norwalk Physical Education & Competition Center (NPECC). In the first article I discussed the history of how the need has been considered through parent surveys and why the project has been deferred for nearly 20 years due to a lack of sufficient capital project funding. This article focuses on the actual project scope, to inform the public of how proposed facilities will benefit the students and the community.

What components will be constructed with the new NPECC (gymnasium addition) costing \$24 M?

1. A new gymnasium with sufficient square footage to provide three court areas for multiple PE classes and athletic practices

**PE Instruction:** The current secondary campus has two gyms, one at the HS and one at the MS. The HS gym has adequate square footage to be divided into two areas for PE instruction and the MS has limited capability to be divided into two areas for PE. As enrollment has grown over the years, the need for more PE classrooms has reached a critical level. Currently the HS gym is being divided into three areas to serve three PE classes nearly every period of the day and the MS gym is being divided into three PE classes during some periods. This overcrowding of students has reached safety and quality of instruction concerns.

**Athletic Program:** Gym space is even more critical on the athletic side of the equation. The HS gym can be divided into two practice courts. During volleyball season the HS program has 4 teams needing space for individual practices. During the winter season, the HS boys' basketball program has 3-5 teams, girls' basketball program has 2 teams and the wrestling program has 2 practice levels. The MS gym can be divided into two smaller practice areas. The MS volleyball program currently has 80-90 students divided into 9 teams, boys' basketball has 90-110 students divided into 10 teams, girls' basketball has 45-55 students divided into 5-6 teams and wrestling has 35-45 students, competing at various levels. The District utilizes Lakewood, Oviatt and the new Orchard Hills gyms to supplement volleyball and basketball practices. Coaches schedule practices as early as 6:15 am to accommodate the limited gym space. In addition to school sports programs, the School District is pressed to provide practice and game gym space for local Norwalk Parks and Rec programs and the growing AAU youth sports teams.

The need for more gym space is across the board—both on an academic and an athletic basis. A few MS coaches have voiced concerns that the high number of student participants and restricted practice opportunities is discouraging student participation. Team sports and physical activity are key to student maturity and building healthy lifestyles. The NPECC will provide six new practice courts and three dedicated wrestling practice areas to complement the current gym space. This additional PE classroom and practice/competition space will meet current student

program needs and future student enrollment growth for the next 20-25 years.

2. A new wrestling room that will provide space for three practice and competition event mats.

As I stated above, the need for wrestling practice and competition space is critical. The boys' and girls' basketball and wrestling share the same season. With growing programs the need to provide separate areas designed for wrestling practice and competition events is critical to build a successful program and accommodate more student participants. Providing equity among our athletic program areas involves hiring a sufficient number of coaches as well as providing sufficient program space. The NPECC addresses this objective.

3. Locker rooms to accommodate PE and athletic uniform changing and other personal needs.

As PE and athletic teams expand and we provide more gym space to accommodate, so does the need for locker rooms to meet personal hygiene and privacy. Students need sufficient space to change, shower and secure personal belongings. Locker rooms are an integral part of all athletic gyms. Based on enrollment numbers and architectural standards, the NPECC design has five locker rooms.

4. A full walking track at balcony level around the gymnasium parameter.

Student wellness and mentoring students to lead healthy lifestyles has advanced significantly during the past decade. We all know the importance of living active lives. The walking track will enhance the PE program as well as fitness training for student athletes. The cost of adding a walking track is minimal compared to the benefits it will bring to our students.

5. A new training room with weightlifting, stationary bikes, treadmills and other physical fitness equipment.

The HS program currently has a training room across from the current HS gym that was formerly two classrooms. The current space is extremely undersized to meet the growing need for student wellness and agility training. Personal safety is always a concern when spaces become overcrowded. The training room is also used for PE instruction and year-round for student fitness. The training room size has not increased since the 1990's but HS student enrollment has almost doubled (535 in 1993 to 937 in 2019).

6. A new concessions stand to accommodate the new competition spaces (gym and wrestling).

The current concessions stand is not large enough to meet the public demand for event food concessions. In addition to competitions scheduled from late afternoon on, with MS events starting at 4 pm, spectators and students often utilize the concessions at meal time. In addition, the gym complex hosts all-day tournaments across many athletic programs. These 8-12 hour events demand food production. The current concessions stand is not adequately sized or equipped for meal prep. The new concessions stand will be designed to serve larger crowds, provide space for safe food storage and commercial equipment to meet food service safety

requirements. Concessions is a large source of revenue to fund student athletic program supplies and expenses. Without this vital source of revenue, the District would be responsible to supplement the Student Activities budget.

7. Renovations of existing training room into three regular classrooms for growing enrollment

As shared in item 5 above, the NPECC construction will include a new training room. The existing training room will be renovated back into three classrooms. These classrooms can offset the need to construct new classrooms for regular instruction. No space will be wasted. If the District is able to reconfigure classrooms out of existing space, this reduces the need to construct new classrooms.

8. Construction of a new multipurpose room large enough to provide additional cafeteria space with a future intent to be renovated into additional classrooms as needed

The NPECC will be constructed as a building addition to the south of the existing gym. A connecting corridor will be constructed to link the NPECC to the hallway near the Eastview Cafeteria. This “connecting link” will provide a direct pathway for Eastview and MS students to quickly access the NPECC. The area between the new corridor and the existing exterior of the HS will be enclosed as a building addition. The new square footage can be used as overflow cafeteria space, large group instruction, meeting areas or constructed into 6 – 8 new classrooms to meet enrollment growth.

9. Installing a fire protection sprinkler system to the old gym and existing classrooms wings near the old gym

The southwest portion of the HS that includes the current gym, current training room and six classrooms to the east do not have a sprinkler system for fire protection. The District installed sprinkler systems in remaining areas of the HS during the 2007, 2011 and recent 2019 construction projects. This area of the HS has not received major renovations since the mid 1980’s. Per Iowa fire safety code, the District will be required to install a sprinkler system in this remaining area should the District complete any major renovations or additions.

10. Reconfiguring hallways near the old gym to comply with fire safety egress requirements

Construction of a new exit corridor near the current gym to meet fire-life safety building evacuation is another Iowa safety code requirement. In July 2018 the District was cited for non-compliance. The District was not prepared with sufficient funds to correct the issue immediately. The State Fire Marshal granted a three-year waiver to complete the renovations. If the NPECC bond issue does not pass, the District will be required to defer other scheduled building maintenance items to construct the new corridor. The cost is estimated to be approximately \$150,000.

11. New activities office, coaches meeting rooms, storage and public restrooms.

The current HS and MS gyms areas do not have sufficient space for PE teacher offices, areas for coaches to meet, officials to conduct their business, or meeting rooms for teams. Secured storage of PE and athletic equipment is critical to protect equipment from being damaged or used improperly. These auxiliary spaces are a common component to support the essential functions of the PE and activities program.

#### 12. Paving of remaining gravel drive south of the Middle School

The final focus of this project is paving of the MS drive serving the south side of the MS, as well as the baseball and softball complex. This drive is a very rough gravel road that requires continual maintenance leading to an ongoing expense to install more gravel, dust control, and grading. The drive also presents a safety issue as student drivers come and go to practices and games throughout the day and night. The dust control treatment is only so effective. During summer months, the dust is so thick visibility on the gravel drive is severely limited, creating a safety hazard not just for drivers but also student and parent pedestrians as they cross the road.

#### **When is the special bond election?**

- March 3, 2020 at St John the Apostle Catholic Church, 7:00 am to 8:00 pm