

NEWS

HIGH SCHOOL PROJECT

Tour group looks at aging building

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Large buckets gather drips from ceiling leaks in one of the science labs, where doors remain open to the adjacent science room to balance the age-old heating system, which leaves one room icy and the other overheated. Leaks in the gymnasium two weeks ago forced the cancellation of a basketball game. And because of an electrical problem three weeks ago, the entire industrial arts building now runs on a temporary generator, which pumps heat into the classroom, along with the engine's roar.

"These are the types of failures we'll continue to pay for dearly," said Peter Badalament, principal of Concord-Carlisle High School. "Everywhere you turn, there's failing infrastructure."

CCHS offered a tour to parents and residents of both Concord and Carlisle Feb. 3, to give people an up-close look at the 50-year-old building, which school officials say is in danger of losing accreditation if they continue to do nothing to remedy the current situation.

School Committee member and CCHS Building Committee Co-Chairman Jerry Wedge led a crowd of roughly 30 concerned residents through the hallways, to discuss the failings and obstacles which they hope to overcome with a proposed overhaul of the building that currently houses 1,224 of Concord and Carlisle's students.

School officials and Building Committee members propose to renovate CCHS in a three-year phased process that would cost between \$85-\$98 million. A large number, agreed officials, but one that would be partially reimbursed by the state, via the Massachusetts School Building Authority.

Proponents of the reconstruction efforts argue renovation is the most fiscally responsible approach to the failing building. Otherwise, replacement infrastructure costs alone would be \$20-30 million, said Badalament.

As of last August, former MSBA Chairman Tim Cahill, in a tour of the high school, agreed a major renovation would make more sense than many smaller projects. Cahill gave the preliminary go-ahead for renovations, which initiated the process and broke ground on designs for master plans.

At the meeting on Feb. 3, CCHS Building Committee member Michelle Ernst echoed Cahill's response.

"We have known since the

'90s that Band-Aiding the high school is no longer cost effective," said Ernst. With the state to offer a possible 30-plus percent reimbursement of costs, met with low renovation costs due to a staled economy, officials say there is no better time to restore CCHS.

The tour group gathered for an informational forum after the tour to see a history of the project and visualize plans for the future. Questions and comments centered on specifics related to the new building, such as what the actual cost will be, how the building will be structured to last 75 years into the future, what the new building will look like, and what it will offer.

There are no solid plans as to what the new building will offer. One idea is to follow the green design at the new Willard Elementary School — whose recent renovations use solar panels and south-facing windows to counterbalance electrical costs.

The new building will work to repurpose several areas of the building that are in good standing in its overall concept to provide space for a maximum of 1,225 students.

Essential to the plan is a vote at Town Meeting by both Concord and Carlisle residents, said Ernst.

"If we fail to get support at any of these meetings, all bets are off," said Ernst.

In an estimated timeline of the process, the Building Committee hopes to have a design by summer 2011, approval of state funding by next winter and construction to last from fall 2012 through 2016. Community members can see details of plans and follow the process at CCHSmasterplan.org.

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