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Optimism abounds as Dover High School construction begins

DOVER – Years of debating, questioning, discussion and planning have finally led to tangible progress on the new Dover High School building project.

Ground was officially broken Friday on the new school, located next to the current building on Alumni Drive. Construction crews have been on site preparing for work for weeks, but the official ceremony was delayed until Friday afternoon.

“It’s very exciting,” said Deputy Mayor Bob Carrier, who chairs the city’s committee in charge of overseeing the project. “There are so many people who did a lot of hard work, really put a lot of thought into this, and we’re excited to have it all coming together so smoothly.”

The \$87.4 million project is on track to be completed in time for the 2018-19 school year. A definite construction timeline for has not yet been established, but bids are currently coming in for almost every aspect of the building.

“It’s going to be tight,” Carrier said. “But we’ve planned for everything, done our due diligence and don’t expect to hit any major obstacles. ... There are always a few glitches, but we’re confident they will be minor ones.”

The Dover High School/Career Technical Center Joint Building Committee (JBC) was formed in April 2014 to begin exploring options for a school that was aging and in need of significant renovation.

The existing structure dates back to 1967, with the Career Technical Center added in 1989. The building falls short of several updated state and federal regulations, and also runs the risk of soon being unable to support a rising number of students.

The JBC originally looked at renovating the building to bring it up to code and better equip it for students and educators. But after several studies, it was determined that a new building would cost just a small amount more and would serve the district better for a longer period of time.

Carrier, who chairs the JBC, says there will be no significant disruptions to students, faculty or staff while construction is being done.

“We won’t have any major equipment being brought in during bus or pickup times,” Carrier said. “There may be some traffic because of construction, but it shouldn’t be too bad at all.”

Because the new facility will be constructed completely before the current building is torn down, there will likely be no significant disruptions for classes.

“The worst case scenario is we’ll have to find a different room for a few of the language classes (which are closest to the construction zone,” said Superintendent Elaine Arbour. “If it becomes too disruptive, we’ll have no trouble finding another classroom for them to use, but no students or classes will be displaced by construction.”

Some athletics may have to be moved to different fields, but sports will not be significantly affected either.

Of the \$87.4 million total, \$13.5 million is expected to come in the form of state funding to support the Career Technical Center (CTC) portion of the building. In order to qualify for that full amount, about 24 percent of the total square footage of the building had to be devoted to CTC space. Carrier said this originally presented some obstacles, but the committee was able to reach that number in order to receive full state funding. The total cost of the CTC portion of the project is \$18 million.

The project is currently right on budget.

The JBC is now receiving bids for countless construction parts of the project. Some of those bids, including for concrete, are expected to be considered at the committee’s next meeting on Tuesday.

“We’re saving money on bids, which is great,” Carrier said. “Moving forward that may give us a bit more room with the budget.”

HMFH Architects out of Cambridge, Mass. was selected as the project’s architect and PC Construction of South Burlington, Vt. is the construction manager.

There are currently about 1,375 students at Dover High School. The new building will allow for 1,500 to fit comfortably, with the ability to expand a bit to accommodate more.

The JBC is exploring fundraising opportunities, including naming rights to several parts of the school and athletic fields, in order to raise money for parts of the project that are not covered by the budget.



From left, Bob Carrier, Amanda Russell, Mark Geuther, Sarah Greenshield, Jason Gagnon and Matt Severson attend the groundbreaking ceremony for the new Dover High School. Photo by John Huff/Fosters.com

