

CONTRA COSTA TIMES

Kickoff nears for sweeping changes to Pittsburg High School

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PITTSBURG — A massive overhaul of Pittsburg High School is slated to begin this summer, the most costly construction project in the history of the school district.

Pittsburg voters approved an \$85 million general obligation bond just more than 18 months ago to help fund the work, which will involve replacing most of the original buildings with a larger complex of multistory structures as well as adding a gymnasium and, for the first time, several on-site playing fields.

The new, 243,000-square-foot high school will be able to accommodate an estimated 2,800 to 3,000 students, said Tim Galli, director of new construction.

By contrast, the existing high school was designed to hold no more than 1,000 students, which is why the district for decades has used two neighboring sites to house the overflow, Galli said.

Pittsburg High School had 2,399 students enrolled at the beginning of the current school year.

The new classrooms will be significantly more spacious, a plus considering that not only have class sizes increased since the 1950s but teens are physically larger these days, Galli said.

The 55-year-old campus has other limitations, he added: It's less energy-efficient than it could be, and the wiring can't handle additional electrical power.

Pittsburg Unified School District plans to start work in July or August by demolishing classrooms on one of the high school's two satellite campuses.

Most of the new high school will be on this east campus, eliminating the need for students to cross School Street to get to their cars in the parking lot, which can be dangerous, Galli said.

Not only was a student recently injured in a hit-and-run on School Street, he said, but nonstudents easily can slip onto campus unnoticed when so many teens are walking back and forth.

The construction project will include installing mechanical gates or short posts that close off School Street to through-traffic during school hours, he said, and the design of the

new campus will prevent students from coming and going as they please.

Construction is scheduled to start Dec. 1 and finish in fall 2011. Students are expected to start classes on the main campus in fall 2010, however.

Galli hopes the state Department of Architecture will approve the drawings within the next month so the district can start soliciting bids.

The new Pittsburg High School will consist of seven, two-story buildings, including a science facility, one housing computer classes as well as courses focusing on automobile and construction technology, and another building dedicated to art.

All that will be left on the main campus is the Creative Arts Building, gymnasiums — the two that are there now along with a new one — and the football stadium.

As for the brick building just north of the main campus that students have been using, the rear half will be torn down to make room for a baseball field and two softball fields. Until now, teams have practiced and competed at Pittsburg's City Park.

The front of the structure will remain largely intact, although three wings will be demolished to create room for more student parking.

The district also will use some of the \$85 million in bond revenue to move Riverside Continuation High School, possibly to a site it owns near the intersection of Stoneman Avenue and Loveridge Road.

Once it gets the green light from the state to build there — something Galli is hoping will happen by the end of July — the district will start architectural drawings.

"It would take more money to remodel (the high school) than to rebuild it," he said.

What happens to the old school building remains to be seen; trustees might decide to sell or lease the property, or perhaps offer it to the city in exchange for another property, Galli said.

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