

RUHS to receive new 'front door'

by Mark McDermott

Published June 26, 2008

Redondo Union High School is getting a new front door.

The 102-year-old campus was at the forefront of Measure C, the \$145 million bond measure that voters passed with 66 percent voter approval at the Feb. 5 election. The 56-acre RUHS campus is slated to receive \$95 million in improvements through a vast overhaul that will drastically reshape its athletic facilities, install new landscaping, refit its aged electrical systems, and rebuild the school's library.



But perhaps the most dramatic change will be the completion of a new Student Services building at the very top of the

hill at the center of the campus along Diamond Street. The proposed two-story, 17,000 sq. ft. building will house school administration, counselors, a teachers' lounge, conference room and a new career center for students. But most importantly, the building – a conceptual rendering of which was unveiled for the first time at Tuesday night's Board of Education meeting – will become the main entrance for a school that has had no such focal point in more than a half-century.

"This is huge," said Superintendent Steven Keller, who noted he has frequently fielded a question about RUHS: "Where is the front door to this school?"

"I think this is going to be very powerful to this community in showing our high school, because right now we don't have a front door," Keller said. "So this is exciting."

Nathan Herrero, an architect with the firm that is designing the campus, MVE Institutional, told the school board that one of the primary design goals was that the Student Services building harmoniously fit with the other buildings along Diamond Street – the Industrial Arts and Science Buildings – while simultaneously serving as both "a portal and a termination" for those buildings.

"We really see that building as not just a stand-alone entrance to the campus, but part of a long connective whole along Diamond...that forms an identity to Redondo Union High School," Herrero said.

Construction of the building is expected to begin in July 2009 and finish by June 2010 at a cost of \$5 million. The Science and Industrial Arts buildings are likewise going to receive vast overhauls, with \$5.5 million and \$4.2 million in work scheduled to be completed for each building, respectively. While the tentative plan is for the buildings to have a matched color palate similar to what exists now – a sort of rusty brown and off-white – there is some sentiment afoot to brighten up their appearances.

“Redondo colors are red and white,” said RUHS parent and PTSA President Kathy Swift. “Why do we have that god-awful color, and why are we going to put it on these? Why not do it all in red instead of that dirty brick maroon awful color?”

“Why red? Why not earth tones?” asked Georgette Gantner, president of the Redondo Beach Art Group. “I mean, red is a hard color. Who paints their house red?”

Keller said the board “should have a conversation” about paint at some future date. “No matter what color, in my experience, I have put on buildings, I have taken flak for it,” he said.

Architects also showed the board a plan for the new small gymnasium and aquatics center. Both current facilities will be replaced entirely, and the scheme Herrero presented would combine the projects so that the aquatics center is moved from its current location to just west the new gymnasium, taking advantage of a less dramatic slope and combining some locker room functions.

“The big revision that has happened here is the small gym and aquatics pool have been combined in one single project to take advantage...of the site and schedule,” Herrero said.

The combined 28,000 sq. ft. facility would include a pool, a full-sized gymnasium, a fitness center, dance and physical education classrooms, offices, locker rooms, and a trainer’s facility. Construction is scheduled to begin in August 2009 and be completed in August 2010.

The aquatics center as currently planned would feature a large outdoor, heated pool, possibly heated thermally through a passive solar system, one of several environmentally “green” features currently under consideration for the campus.

School Board President Todd Loewenstein and trustee Drew Gamet Tuesday inquired about the possibility of making the pool area at least partially indoor/outdoor, perhaps through the installation of a retractable roof. Loewenstein has argued that would make the pool more functional for community groups, such as seniors, for year-round use.

“We need to know if that is a possibility, and what it would look like,” Gamet said. “You know, I realize this is a building on campus that primarily serves the high school, but it also needs to be responsive to the community.”

Architect Bob Simons on Tuesday said that a retractable roof would add \$5.5 to \$6 million in costs to the facility, which is currently budgeted for \$6.6 million.

The architects also unveiled plans for the new visitors’ bleachers and field house at Sea Hawk Bowl. The current structures, Herrero noted, are essentially unsalvageable and will need to be replaced entirely. Construction is scheduled to begin in November 2009 and finish in August 2010. The track and field are also being replaced, meaning that graduation ceremonies that year will have to be held elsewhere.

RUHS Principal Mary Little said that administrators are looking at alternative sites for graduation

ceremonies, such as El Camino College, in what will be one of several temporary inconveniences that students and the community will need to endure during construction. She said the possibility of sharing Mira Costa high school's aquatic facilities for a season is another possibility under consideration

"Everybody at some point is going to be inconvenienced, but we are working together to make it work," Little said, "because obviously the outcome – all those magnificent facilities we are going to have – will make it worth it." ER

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