

School security upgrade sparks debate

Written by KRISTYN HALBIG ZIEHM
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Entryway addition to Lincoln School gets OK but only after commission questions if changes will enhance safety

An entryway addition to Lincoln Elementary School in Port Washington was approved last week by the city's Plan Commission, but not before a debate about whether the measure will provide a secure enough entrance to the school.

The new vestibule will have a receptionist's window where visitors are to identify themselves before being buzzed into the school through a locked door.

But commission member Earl Kelley questioned whether the glass used in the receptionist's window was adequate.

"If someone wanted to get in through that window, could they?" he asked.

The window is intended to be laminated glass, Mike Ehrlich of 6E6S Architects said, noting it would make it difficult, but not impossible, for anyone to shatter and gain entry to the building.

Someone would have to strike the window multiple times with a chair before it would break, he noted.

"How much more would it cost to make that glass so no one could get in?" Kelley asked. "Anything to slow them down and make our children safe."

Bulletproof glass would probably be the most difficult material to get through, Ehrlich said, but it is much more expensive than laminated glass.

The laminated glass would give school officials time to react to any intruder and call police, he said.

No window is unbreakable, commission member Bud Sova said.

"You can get through any window," he added.

The debate ended when commission member Rob Vanden Noven, the city's director of public works, noted that the type of glass used in the window isn't something for the panel to debate.

"I think that's a decision for the School Board to make," he said.

The new entryway to Lincoln School is part of a school security initiative launched by the Port Washington-Saukville School District in the wake of the Sandy Hook School shootings in Newtown, Conn., in December.

As part of the initiative, the School District spent \$11,100 to install electronic locking controls

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and video cameras at the main entrances to Lincoln and Dunwiddie elementary schools in Port Washington and Saukville Elementary School this spring.

The addition is planned at Lincoln School because it is the only elementary school where the main office is not adjacent to the entry, giving visitors immediate access to the school.

At Dunwiddie and Saukville schools, the entrances are next to the main offices, allowing secretaries to monitor who is entering the building.

The new 11-foot, 9-inch-by-17-foot entryway to Lincoln School will be created on the east side of the building, encompassing a portion of the green space next to the current entryway, Ehrlich said.

“The idea is to have this fit with the building,” he said, noting the materials and design will match those used on the existing structure.