

St. Paul gymnasium project takes shape

Written by STEVE OSTERMANN

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Congregation set to build \$1.4 million addition that will double space for activities

After more than a half-century of wear and tear on their school gymnasium, members of the St. Paul Lutheran Church in Grafton decided several years ago they needed a new facility.

The dream is expected to become reality in 2012 when the gymnasium will be renovated and expanded, more than doubling its size. The 5,076-square-foot, single-story addition will be built on the northeast corner of the school, 701 Washington St.

“It will be a great addition, a first-rate athletic facility. It’s a chance to enhance our ministry to the students and to the community,” said School Principal Michael Yurk, a member of the church building committee overseeing the project.

In addition to a new basketball court, plans for the \$1.4 million expansion call for the installation of new lighting, heating/air conditioning and sound systems. Gymnasium seats will be reduced from 335 to 273, but the new layout places all seats at floor level, eliminating use of the balcony.

Yurk said the gymnasium’s original 54-year-old floor will be replaced by a multipurpose court for basketball, volleyball and other sports as well as physical education classes. The expanded space will allow school teams to hold concurrent practices, eliminating many evening workouts.

“For years we’ve had students practicing at 8 and 9 p.m. because there just hasn’t been enough room during the day,” Yurk said.

Another much-needed part of the project is the creation of additional storage space in the balcony and by converting a furnace room, Yurk said.

Locker rooms aren’t included in the work but will be upgraded as part of another improvement project, he added

Construction, which is expected to begin in March and be completed by late August 2012, will include raising the gymnasium ceiling from 18 to 25 feet.

The new gymnasium will be open from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. weekdays during the school year and evenings and weekends for practices and other events. Besides benefitting St. Paul students, the facility will be available to the community.

“We have been getting quite a few calls from groups, including basketball and volleyball clubs, interested in leasing space,” Yurk said.

“There’s a shortage of gym space throughout the area, and it’s something we should be able to help with.”

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The addition's exterior will complement other buildings in the St. Paul campus, including the adjoining school and church and nearby Providence Place, a senior housing facility to the east. The outside walls will be precast panels with a sandblasted finish and accent bands.

"I think it will be a great tie-in with Providence Place," said Yurk, noting resident seniors are expected to use the gymnasium for fitness classes and other programs.

The project was approved by the village's Architectural Review Board, paving the way for Plan Commission approval of a minor change in a planned-unit development this month.

Yurk said the addition is part of the congregation's \$2.2 million capital campaign, which also includes renovation of the church sanctuary and a deferred-maintenance fund. The sanctuary work will start in June.

"This is an exciting, bold move for our congregation," Yurk said of the gymnasium expansion. "When the gym was built, it was the Taj Mahal for schools of this size, but now it's time for a change."

Original plans called for the construction of a new gymnasium, Yurk noted. However, that project was changed when the economy took a turn for the worse.

"The congregation decided this was really a worthwhile project, and it didn't want to wait any longer," Yurk said.