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Finally, School Will Make Building Additions and Upgrades



Rendering of a birds-eye view of the high school, new commons area, gymnasium, auditorium, walkway from the elementary school and Atkinson Elementary.

By: Michael Stein

After several years, countless board meetings, dozens of plans developed and introduced only to be scrapped, three bond referendum votes, and twice returning to the drawing board, the Barnesville School District will finally begin a major construction and improvement project this spring.

The long and winding road ended in August 13, 2019, when district voters approved a \$28.5 million referendum. It was the third attempt to pass a referendum. Previous questions went down to defeat in 2016 and 2018.

The primary ballot question, which asked for \$24.5 million, included a new auditorium, gymnasium and classrooms. It also addressed deferred maintenance projects and the repair, remodeling, upgrading, equipping and construction of improvements to the existing Atkinson Elementary

School and Barnesville High School.

Voters also passed two additional questions; one adds a balcony to the auditorium with additional seating, and the gymnasium will have an elevated platform or track that can be used by all elementary and high school classes as well as the public.

The third voter-approved question means the elementary school will be joined to the new middle block expansion by an overhead connecting link.

The vote came shortly after the retirement of Superintendent Scott Loeslie and the hiring of Dr. Jon Ellerbusch as his replacement.

“I think everyone will see how much better served our students and teachers will be,” Ellerbusch said. “I’ve been through it in other districts I’ve worked for. This is going to take Barnesville students forward for many years. And it will help move the community forward as well.”

The elementary school plan

to improve learning and address security, space and maintenance needs calls for the following:

Eight new classrooms: Preschool and 6th grade students will be moved to the elementary school.

Special education and Title I designs to better meet the needs of students with emotional, mental, physical, and social challenges.

New administrative office area near visitor parking for security to include reception area, conference room, nurse’s room and elementary principal’s office

New commons/flexible learning area

New bathrooms

New overhead connecting link to provide for safe, secure, and quick access between buildings and improved daily efficiency

New high-efficiency boiler

New ventilation and humidity control

New dropdown ceilings and lights for 1955 addition

Remodel some existing bathrooms

Repair exterior brick

Upgrades to life safety and ADA

Fire sprinkle remainder of Elementary School

The High School plan to improve learning and address space and maintenance needs calls for the following:

Remodel agriculture and technology education shops

Remodel science classrooms

Remodel areas for special education and student support services

New music classrooms for band and choir

New auditorium for theater and musical performances

New gymnasium space to accommodate physical education classes as well as to meet school-time, extracurricular, and community needs

New commons and concession area, locker rooms and bathrooms

Four classrooms freed up by moving preschool and 6th grade students to the elementary school

Repair exterior brick

Upgrades to life safety and ADA

Fire sprinkle remainder of high school

The first visible signs of construction are showing up in the middle block between the two schools. Of the seven buildings--homes and garages--that need to be removed by March 15, two of the garages had been taken out as this edition of Streetlights was going to print.

The buildings were sold in an online auction last November.

Construction of the new gymnasium and auditorium will begin with site preparation almost the moment the school year ends in May.

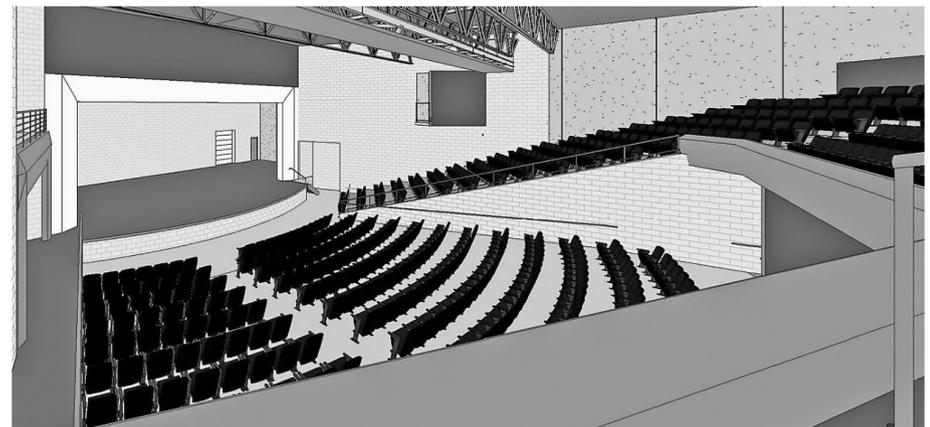
The first bid package was opened on Thursday, February 27, and contained about 31 percent of the total cost of the building and improvement project.

Ellerbusch, who took over as superintendent in July 2020, brings previous experience with school construction.

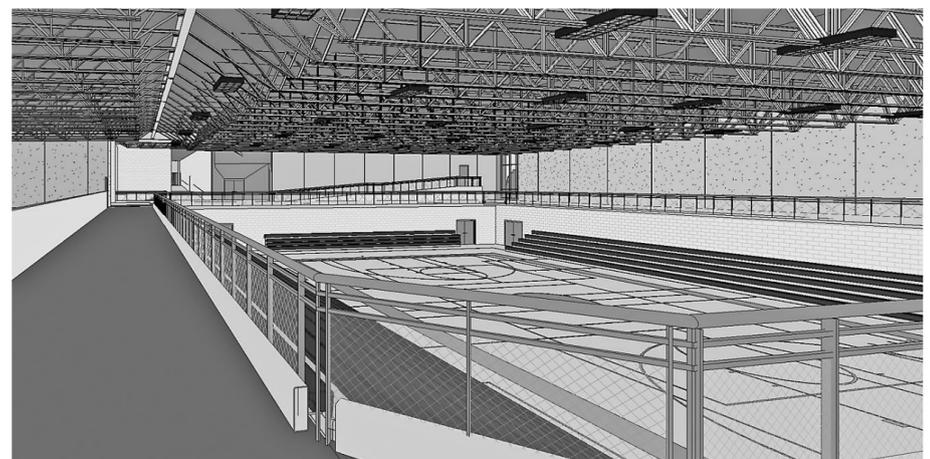
“This is my fourth experience working with a building improvement project,” Ellerbusch said. “One was a \$15 million project as a principal, one was \$30 million as a superintendent, and one was a \$75 million project as director of finance. Part of my job with this project will be to make sure the project stays within the budget.”

With 20 years of school administration experience in his portfolio, Ellerbusch was selected in March to succeed Scott Loeslie

as the district’s superintendent. He had been the director of finance and human resources for the North Branch (Minn.) Area Public School District. Prior to that, he served 10 years as a principal and eight years as a superintendent in Royalton, Minn.



Interior view of the auditorium looking toward the stage.



Interior view of the gym looking southeast from the upper level track.



Interior view of the high school commons area looking north.



New Barnesville School Superintendent Jon Ellerbusch, along with the district staff. From left are Chris Ellefson, Brooke Fradet, Dr. Jon Ellerbusch, Jodi Samuelson and Sara Lien.

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