

School expansion, fixes before Easthampton board

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EASTHAMPTON - The School Committee tonight is expected to discuss plans to expand the overcrowded Easthampton High School when it meets at 6 p.m. at White Brooke Middle School.

Schools Superintendent Deborah Carter said a representative from the Massachusetts School Building Authority, an architect and an engineer each evaluated the need for renovation and additions at Easthampton High last week and she will report their findings.

Among their findings: a new technology wing and auditorium may be planned for by December, according to Michael Buehrle, chairman of the School Building Committee.

"Hopefully we'll be invited to apply for a project," Carter said. "It's a process that is unbelievably slow and cumbersome."

The project will cost nearly \$20 million, 65 percent of which the state will pay for up front, Buehrle said.

"We've been in this process since 1998 so hopefully we're coming to the end here soon," Buehrle said. "The education that kids get these days is much better than people realize. I think the biggest drawback is the age of the building."

Easthampton High Principal Jeffrey Sealander and Maintenance Director Pete Roy were also present for the three-hour evaluation.

"We basically gave them a tour of the upstairs, downstairs, every closet, every school room, every storage room and power plant," Buehrle said of the 1960 building. "They were surprised we didn't have a big auditorium. Plus the fact that we have World War II bleachers in our gymnasium. We have one elevator that's not accessible to the entire building. They were surprised that all the windows were aluminum and not double-insulated. They were very receptive and took lots of notes."

Other topics for the scheduled two-hour School Committee meeting include:

- * afterschool programming for English and math and a late bus at White Brook Middle School;
- * the replacement of a part-time afterschool program director to organize elementary afterschool programs;
- * discussion of the school department's adequate yearly progress from the state;

Carter said much of the agenda had been scheduled for the previous two scheduled board meetings. Those were not held because some board members didn't show. "I don't recall ever having a meeting that's scheduled to be this long," Carter said. "It's three meetings worth of stuff."