

Grant High School modernization on tap

By: Kent Hohlfeld in Architecture and Engineering June 15, 2017 2:51 pm



The plan for modernization of Grant High School calls for demolition of 30 percent of existing structures as well as construction of a two-story common square featuring an eatery and a community gathering space. (Courtesy of Mahlum Architects)

The revitalization of **Grant High School**, in Northeast Portland, took a step forward with a ceremonial ground-breaking event last week.

The \$116 million project will include demolition of five non-historic expansions and new construction to expand academic areas. The money came from a \$482 million bond approved by Portland voters in 2012.

“Currently we are in construction documents,” said Alyssa Leeviraphan, project manager at **Mahlum Architects**. “We will start the construction in July, as soon as the students are out.”

Students will spend the next two years at the **Marshall High School** campus and return when the improved building reopens in fall 2019.

Grant High School was built in 1923; expansions were built in the 1950s and '60s. Approximately 30 percent of the structure will be demolished and 70 percent modernized. Originally there was discussion of demolishing the entire structure and constructing an entirely new one. But the school’s historic nature and the substantial cost to build anew prompted the current plan.

“There was a lot of discussion around demolition,” Leeviraphan said. “There was a design advisory group that met over seven months. Through that process, the history of the building was a focus of the community.”

Now, the plan is to preserve historic portions.

“One thing that was important to Grant was to keep the auditorium intact,” Leeviraphan said. “So we are doing a full upgrade.”

Portland Public Schools officials focused on cost. Modernizing a school rather than building a new school can save the district millions of dollars.

“We look at building envelope,” said Jerry Vincent, PPS’ chief operating officer in charge of school modernization. “If the slab, roof and walls are good, we save ourselves about 20 percent of the cost by modernizing.”



Construction on a \$116 million modernization of Grant High School in Northeast Portland will begin next month. (Courtesy of Mahlum Architects)

Cost isn't analyzed strictly in terms of dollars spent on the structure. Vincent said that the price per square foot and the time involved with demolition versus modernization are also taken into account. Officials also must account for facilities' historic nature.

"Some of these buildings are on a historic list or (are considered) historic as far as the community was concerned," he said.

The educational needs of today forced the designers to come up with new uses for some parts of the school. For instance, the existing gymnasium will be converted into a visual arts complex that will house all of Grant's art programs.

"I would say providing students with a 21st century learning facility has been a challenge," Leeviraphan said.

"Not knowing entirely what is there until we get to work on site is a challenge," she added. "Just having to detail the building on drawings that aren't always accurate is tough. We have to figure out how to make it work."

A two-story common square will include a student eatery and a community gathering space. A new 1,700-seat gym, an auxiliary gym and a weight room will be added to athletic facilities.

"A lot is happening with the building," Leeviraphan said. "The way we designed the building, we have given them flexible learning spaces."

Designers dumped the existing unconnected basements in favor of below-grade classrooms with sunlight exposure and access to the outdoors.

However, interior renovations aren't the only changes planned. Exterior alterations will include new outdoor learning spaces and courtyards.

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