



GO TO: [Local News Section] [More Community Stories] POST TO: **Your two cents**

3.10.99 07:09:55

## Panel to vote on new schools tomorrow

■ The City Council's Finance Committee scrutinizes a proposal to build an elementary school and a middle school on a 10-acre site at Hartford Park.

By KAREN A. DAVIS  
Journal Staff Writer

PROVIDENCE -- The City Council Finance Committee is scheduled to vote tomorrow on a proposal to build an elementary school and a middle school on a 10-acre site at Hartford Park.

The committee met last evening to hear school administrators and city developers discuss why the two new schools are needed and how much the proposal would cost the city.

The plan calls for a 450-pupil elementary school and an 800-pupil middle school to be built at Springfield Street and Hartford Avenue. The two schools would be housed in separate buildings but would probably share parking spaces, an indoor gymnasium and an outdoor ballfield or recreation area.

If all goes as planned, construction would begin next month and the elementary school would be finished in time for the start of the new school year next fall.

The middle school building is expected to contain two separate mini-schools housed in two separate wings of the building -- much like the B.Jae Clanton Elementary School constructed last year in South Providence. One wing of the middle school, along with the office and cafeteria, would be ready in time for the start of school, with the remaining work to be completed shortly afterwards.

The total cost of design and construction of the two schools is estimated to be about \$30 million.

City officials also want to make about \$3 million in repairs and renovations on aging schools.

The state would reimburse the city for 80 percent of the total construction costs.

While City Council members recognized the need for more classrooms to accommodate the school system's burgeoning enrollment, the proposal did not avert scrutiny.

Councilwoman Balbina Young questioned why city and school officials are building new schools without first repairing the badly maintained existing schools.

Robert Troiano, executive director of the Providence Public Building Authority, said his office had been working to put together a schedule and cost estimate for school repairs. However, they had to drop that project when former School Supt. Arthur Zarrella notified the city in November that the School Department would need more elementary and middle school classrooms.

Troiano said the conservative cost of repairing existing schools would be about \$115 million. He promised to return to the city council within five months with an "aggressive" plan to restore the aging city schools.

Mark V. Dunham, chief operations officer for the School Department, told council members that the school system is currently operating at 98 percent capacity. He said a few seats are available in the fourth and fifth grades only. The School Department plans to open up two makeshift classrooms at Pleasant View Elementary School next week to accommodate newly enrolling students.

The lack of space and a need for new schools has plagued the city school system in recent years. The system has seen a 3 percent growth in population each year for the last decade, beginning at the elementary level and working its way up to the middle schools.

Since the greatest growth of the school-age population is occurring on the West Side and South Side, school officials have sought to build new schools in those neighborhoods.

Councilwoman Patricia Nolan praised school officials for providing a report that details projections in population growth.

The school report -- which was based on a demographic study compiled by the Providence Plan and Brown University -- also recommends that the city build another 450-pupil elementary school next year on Gordon Avenue, on the city's South Side. That school would be built to house the Bailey Elementary School, which is currently located in an aging, leased facility in Fox Point.

Dunham noted that only three Bailey students live close enough to walk to school; the rest are bused in from the South and West Sides.

Several council members praised the efforts to create more neighborhood schools.

Still, the proposal to locate two schools at Springfield Street and Hartford Avenue has not gone without criticism.

The announcement last month of the city's plans to build at the 10-acre site there drew calls to The Journal from residents who questioned whether the land would be environmentally safe to build on. They said the land was the site of a former city dump that could be contaminated.

In fact, stories Journal stories in May of 1973 describe a portion of the site as a city landfill. At the time, city officials maintained that

only city-collected bottles and cans were dumped at the site; neighbors contended that garbage was also dumped there by the city and other rubbish was dumped there illegally by others.

Alan Sepe, acting director of public properties, said the site has undergone extensive testing to determine whether the land is contaminated. The results of those tests are expected by the end of the week.

Sepe said he has been invited to share those results next Tuesday at two meetings -- a Planning Department meeting and a 6 p.m. community meeting at the Silver Lake Community Center.

If the tests come back showing some form of contamination or other problems, Sepe has said, the city would not move forward with plans to build there. Sepe said he met Monday with two Hartford neighborhood residents to assure them that the project would not encroach on their backyards.

When asked by Councilman Joseph DeLuca about a complaint that city officials were already moving forward and have cleared dozens of trees off the site in recent days, Sepe said preliminary work is being done there.

"Every year they ask us to build a school in four or five months," Sepe said. "We couldn't do it [without doing some preliminary work]. It's almost impossible to wait."

**Add ~~Your two cents~~ on this topic**

**[Back to top](#)**

Copyright © 1999 The Providence Journal Company  
Produced by [www.projo.com](http://www.projo.com)