

Visitors to Brewer school project impressed

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BREWER - The school building committee members who spent the last couple of years making decisions about a new elementary and middle school got a tour Monday of the Parkway South construction site.

"It doesn't look big outside, but in here it looks big," said Amanda Bost, a Brewer school committee and building committee member, as she stood inside what will be the entrance of the pre-kindergarten through grade eight school.

"It's 540 feet from one end to the other," Lester Young, the owner's representative for the school district, said of the front of the building. The new facility is officially known as the Brewer Elementary-Middle School Campus.

Steel framing is up for most of the 156,000-square-foot school, and floors have been laid in two of the four wings, which will divide the age groups. The hope is to enclose the structure before cold weather hits, project manager said Steve Pedersen of WBRC Architects-Engineers of Bangor.

"We're a little bit ahead" of schedule, he said. "One of the things we're shooting for is to get ourselves all enclosed, this wing and that wing, so we can continue to work throughout the winter.

"I think the fact that we started when we did was perfect," he said.

Because the Maine Department of Education decided last fall to delay construction bonds for the new school by six months, local school leaders decided to secure interim financing to start the work this spring and avoid delays, Superintendent Daniel Lee has said.

If all goes as planned the new school will be complete in early June 2011.

WBRC designed the school and local construction company Nickerson & O'Day was hired to build the estimated \$33.4 million school, "which is \$6 million less than the original estimates" of \$39.5 million, Young said.

In addition to the reduced school construction costs, the local costs to build the 500-seat performance arts center dropped considerably from \$2.7 million to \$2.4 million, Young said.

The new school will have 71 classrooms and house 1,050 students. It will have separate wings for the age groups with

shared areas in the middle of the building for such things as the cafeteria and media center or library.

Once complete, the new two-story school, which will replace four aging elementary schools and Brewer Middle School that were built between 1926 and 1962, will be the largest elementary-middle school in the state.

Jill Simpson, a project designer from WBRC, said she is most proud of the amount of natural light the plans include, and the themed wings.

"The pre-K wing will have light tubes that bring light down into the back of the classrooms," she said. "It will be really neat. And as you go older, each wing will be different" and offer different types of lighting, color schemes and themes.

The themes are based on Brewer's history and include the river; ice, paper and brick making; and maritime.

About half of one outside wall and portions of others already have some brick covering laid, Lee said.

"They did their best to match it to Brewer [made] brick," he said.

A new eight-lane track and soccer field that is big enough to accommodate state-level track meets is being built adjacent to the new school. The new school campus will have 293 parking spots, which should be large enough to handle track meets and crowds at the locally funded performance arts center, Lee said.

At the end of the tour, new school committee member Nancy Roberts, who lives nearby, said, "My kids are raring to walk and ride bikes to school."

Placing the new school in a residential area gets it away from busy Wilson and State streets, where the Middle School and State Street School now sit, and adds to the sense of community, Lee said.

"It will be nice to see kids walking to school again," he said. "It makes the community much more residential."

"It looks good. I'm impressed," City Councilor Joseph Ferris said at the end of the tour.

Several aerial photos of the school construction project have been posted on the school department's Web site, brewerme.org.

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