

# SECTION I

## HIGH SCHOOL RENOVATION/ADDITION UPDATE

After many years of debate, controversy and study, the long-awaited physical renewal of Wachusett Regional High School will commence this spring. The start of construction is the result of a formal process of study and debate that began in 1995 with the release of the first architectural study conducted by HMFH Architects of Cambridge. This study detailed the deterioration of all key systems in the current building. Subsequent studies by Tappé Associates of Boston further chronicled the poor building conditions and offered a number of solutions to our communities. These solutions were rejected in a series of votes taken by the Member Towns. Finally, in the fall of 2002, Strekalovsky & Hoit of Hingham, the architect contracted to once again review the high school, released a series of Master Planning options. One of these options, which involved the renovation of and addition to Wachusett, was approved by an overwhelming majority at town meetings, the last of which was held in December of 2002. District and high school staff has worked with the High School Building Committee since that time to finalize a phased construction plan that will yield a high school which the communities can be proud of and in which the students will receive a first class high school education.

The additions and renovations to Wachusett will significantly add to the total square footage of the

school and allow the school to meet the programmatic demands of increased enrollment. Organized architecturally and programmatically around a lower and an upper school, Wachusett will incorporate current research regarding the creation of small learning communities to institute a house plan that will personalize the education of each of the students. The architecture of the lower school will support a house plan that allows each of the ninth and tenth grade students to access five major subjects within classrooms that are adjacent to one another. Moreover, students will work with the same team of teachers for two years, thus personalizing their experience and maximizing the staff's ability to address any educational need that might arise. Such an approach is necessary considering the physical scope of this project and the enrollment of the school. The existing facility occupies 265,000 square feet and the new school will grow to 390,500 square feet. Of this square footage, 230,500 square feet will be new construction, while 160,000 square feet will be renovated space in the original building. The school will plan to accommodate 2000 students in the newly renovated facility.

Currently the construction process is in the transitional phase between planning and full construction. TLT Construction of Wakefield has been awarded the construction contract and the firm is busy locating construction trailers on site and



Main Entry

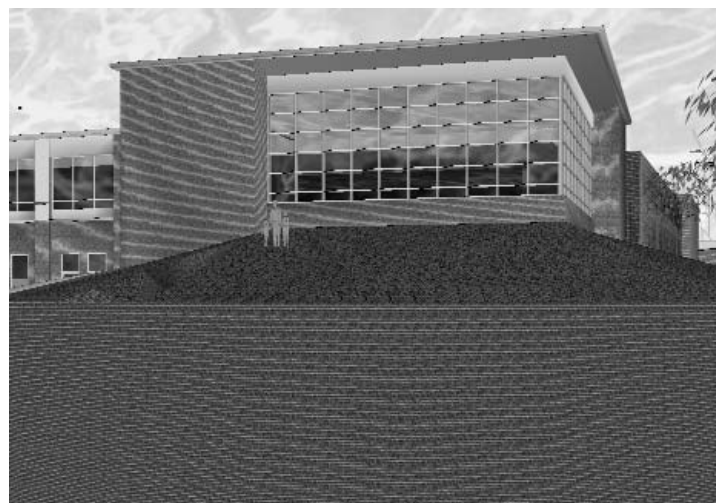
completing the final preparations of the site, including the erection of construction fencing and environmental barriers to protect the extensive wetlands, so that full-scale site work can begin in April. From that point the project will follow a very aggressive schedule that requires all work to be completed prior to the 2006/2007 school year. To accomplish this with 2000 students and staff in the building will be challenging but within the school's capability. While flexibility and resiliency will be necessary, the education and safety of the students will be of paramount importance at all times.

The project will be executed in three phases. Each phase will bring a necessary and desirable facility upgrade to the school; however, each phase will present the community with a particular challenge.

**Phase One** will occur between April of 2004 and August of 2005. During this phase most of the Physical Education and Athletic spaces will be demolished and a new gymnasium, boiler room, and physical education spaces south of the existing gym will be built. Also in Phase One new art, music, business, special education and family and consumer science spaces west of the gym in the existing parking lot will be built. Finally this phase will feature the construction of a new Media Center wing on the northeastern corner of the building that overlooks Route 122A. Each of these enhancements will add important dimensions to the school. From the new boilers, which will allow the flexibility of utilizing either gas or oil from a modern and efficient power source, to the new gymnasium, which will feature demand ventilation that will activate and disengage pumps and fans based upon the number of occupants in the space, the building is being designed to save energy and, thus, operating costs. Moreover, the new gym, art and music spaces will allow the high school to provide superior new facilities to programs that run day and night because it features both full school day and extensive after-school components. Again, there is an emphasis on efficiency. Finally, anyone who has visited the Media Center will not be surprised by the plan to replace it with a modern Media Center whose location in the plan will place it as the hub of research due to its adjacency to major academic areas. This

Media Center's location will also allow the school to replace the displeasing glass wall that dominates the "Main Street" façade with an attractive and modern structure that will be a source of pride to the community.

In this and in all phases, to gain new spaces sacrifices will be made. In this phase, the school will lose a gymnasium, a weight room and all of the locker areas. This will place a significant burden on the physical education and athletic programs that will be mitigated through the creation of a temporary structure in the courtyard adjacent to the auditorium. This structure will house temporary locker spaces, a weight room and teacher offices. In that this space will be dramatically smaller than the existing locker areas, students using the area will be required to remove their things from the locker areas after each use. Moreover, this and subsequent phases will have an impact on both commencement exercises and athletic programs. The significant demolition and construction in the back of the building has prompted graduation to be moved to Worcester's Centrum Centre for the next two years. Also, several athletic teams will lose fields to construction and will be forced to find new homes. Presently, lacrosse, tennis, field hockey, and softball are all affected and other teams may be added to the list as the project unfolds.



Media Center

**Phase Two** of the project will begin in July of 2005. During this phase, a new Science wing will be built and the south and east classroom wings will be renovated. There will also be a new kitchen and surrounding area that has been called

the "Cafeteria Commons". The Commons will be a large, open and airy space, much like a food court at a shopping mall. It will serve not only as a cafeteria but as the social center of the school both during the day and in conjunction with various after-school and evening programs. Once again, however, this benefit has a cost. In this case the school will be without the cafeteria for six months, four of which will be while school is in session. The existing wooden gymnasium will be utilized as a temporary cafeteria but all will have to live with a limited menu and reduced seating options.

**Phase Three**, or the final phase of the project, will span January and August of 2006. During this phase the north and west classroom wings will be renovated, a new administrative wing will be built, the auditorium will be renovated and a balcony section will be added to the auditorium. The modular classrooms will be removed during this phase. This phase, like the one before it, will find classrooms being moved to temporary locations as each section of the building is renovated. Because the school has had the benefit of the modular classrooms, there will be sufficient classroom space to meet the programmatic needs even as classrooms are taken off line for renovation. The school will be, however, without an auditorium for eight months and will have to find alternatives for the school's performing arts events.

The project outlined above will yield a modern, state-of-the-art high school that will serve the communities for many years to come. Its aggressive schedule will present the students, staff, and parents with a series of hardships and inconveniences, but the delivery of the educational program will continue without interruption. Moreover, as the project unfolds, new and improved spaces will be opened up to the students, something that will counter any negative effects of living through the construction process. It has been a long ten year dream that is only two years away.



West Entry