

The Falmouth Enterprise, Friday, March 29, 2002

Support FHS Renovation

EDITORIAL

What will happen if town meeting, then voters, reject the \$63 million project to renovate the (Falmouth High) school?

Students and staff will continue to spend six hours a day breathing substandard air. Handicapped students and visitors will have to cope with a municipal building that ails to meet the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act. The New England Association of Schools and Colleges could actually terminate accreditation of the high school, because the last accreditation, in 1999, was conditioned on improvements that included improving the air quality and ventilation and making the school compliant with the ADA.

If the community votes against funding the project, these problems will still need to be addressed. While such a steep price tag-which is estimated for the year 2007 and takes inflation into account-is hard to comprehend for the renovation project, the breakdown of costs shows they are triggered by requirements beyond local control. The heating and ventilation system needs to be replaced; no one disagrees with that.

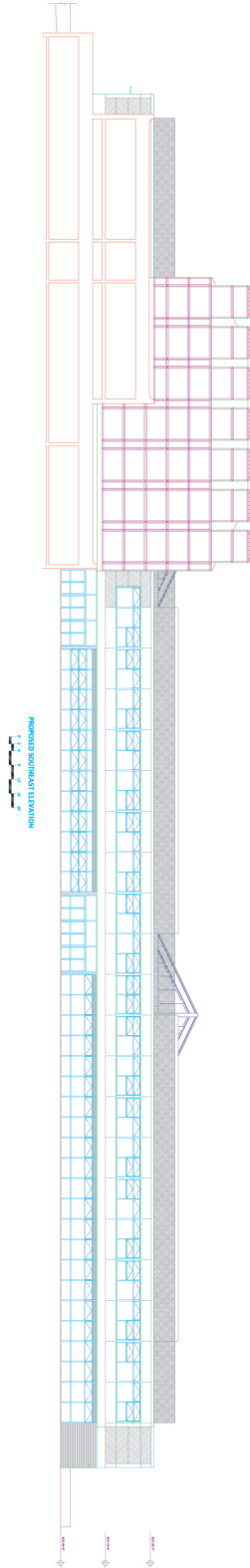
However, once the cost of the repairs to a public building exceed 33 percent of the assessed value-which the ventilation repairs do-the building must also be made compliant with the ADA, which adds more expense. That pushes the cost to more than 50 percent of the assessed value, triggering the requirement to meet state building codes for such things as energy efficiency, lighting and fire safety.

Meeting all of those requirements puts the project close to \$40 million, and at that price, the School Building Needs Committee decided to seek reimbursement from the state Department of Education. That, too, triggers requirements, such as costs come from items like bonding costs, furniture, and inflation.

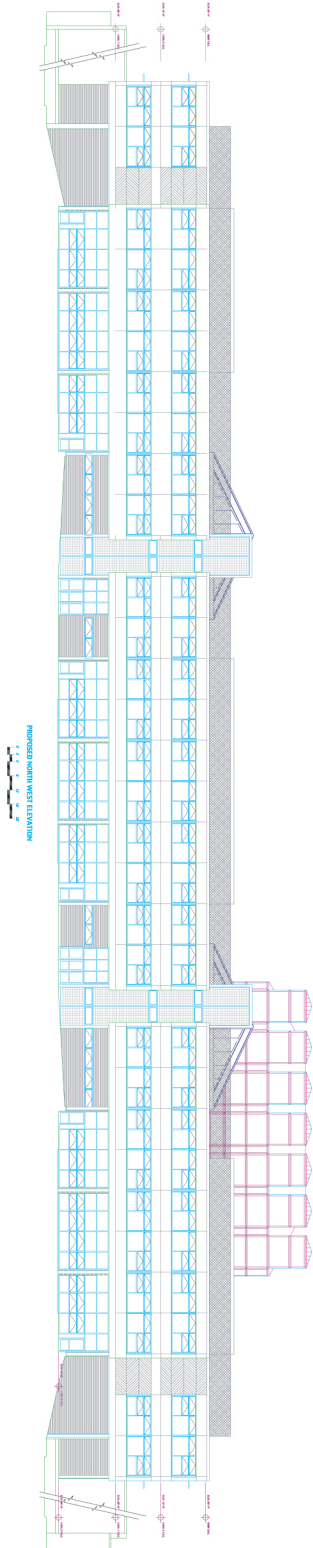
Look at it another way. Forget the legal requirements. We shouldn't ask the school staff and students to work in the unhealthy environment of a large closed building with inadequate ventilation, and we shouldn't have a busy public building that doesn't meet state building codes or ADA requirements.

Building anew seems to be an enticing option only because it appears to be more. It's wishful thinking. Construction of a new building has its own costs. The state will reimburse the town more for renovation than for new construction. The cost of demolishing the building would be about \$5 million, and the steel structure would be wasted.

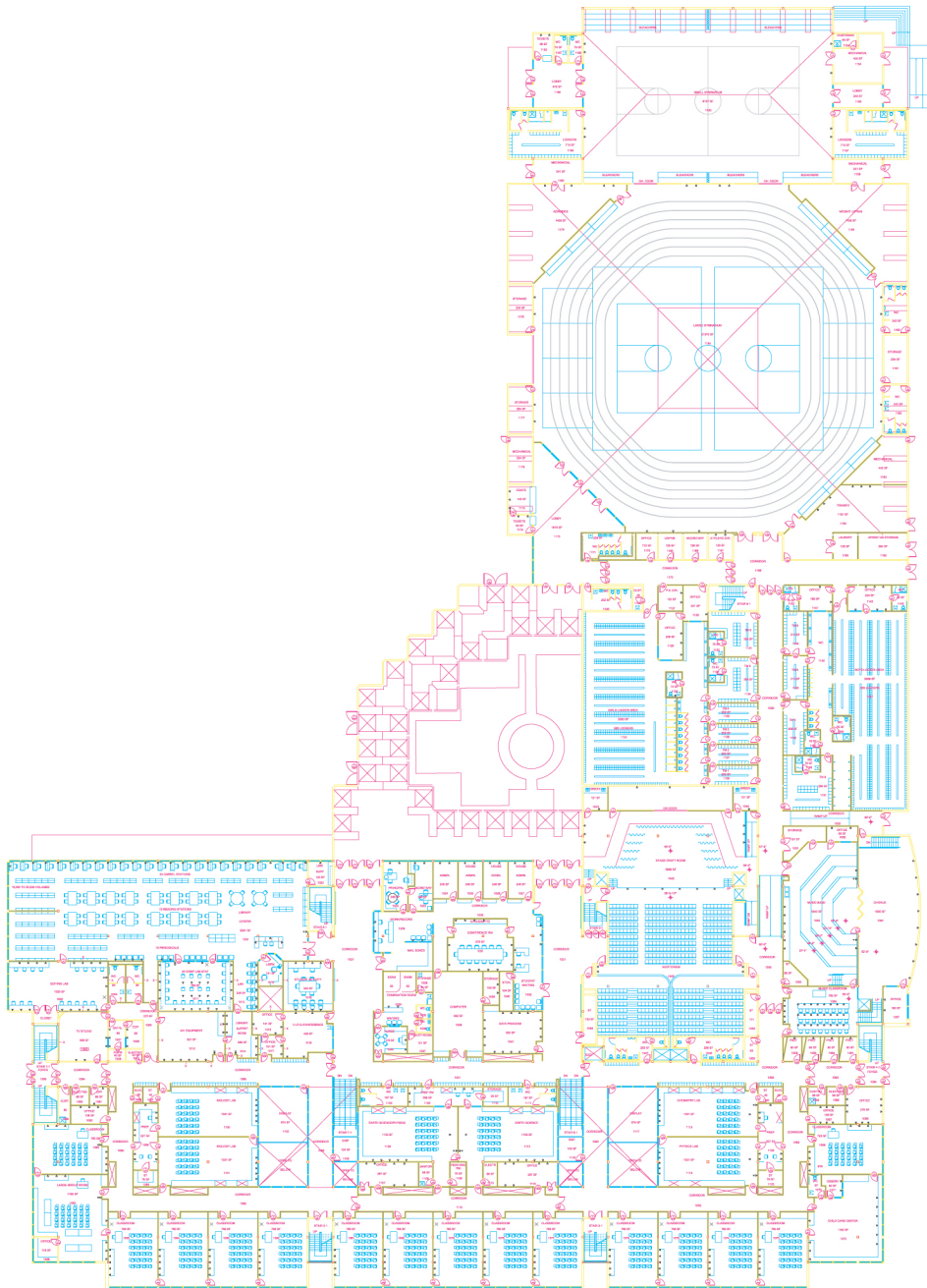
Forget the idea of using the high school for something else; another tenant would have to correct the same extensive problems. That's what it boils down to actually: the building has serious problems that must be corrected. There is no way around that. Building anew would cost more and delay the project. Town meeting members should give strong support to this funding measure, article 23, to send a message to voters in the town election that the high school renovation is a sound project.



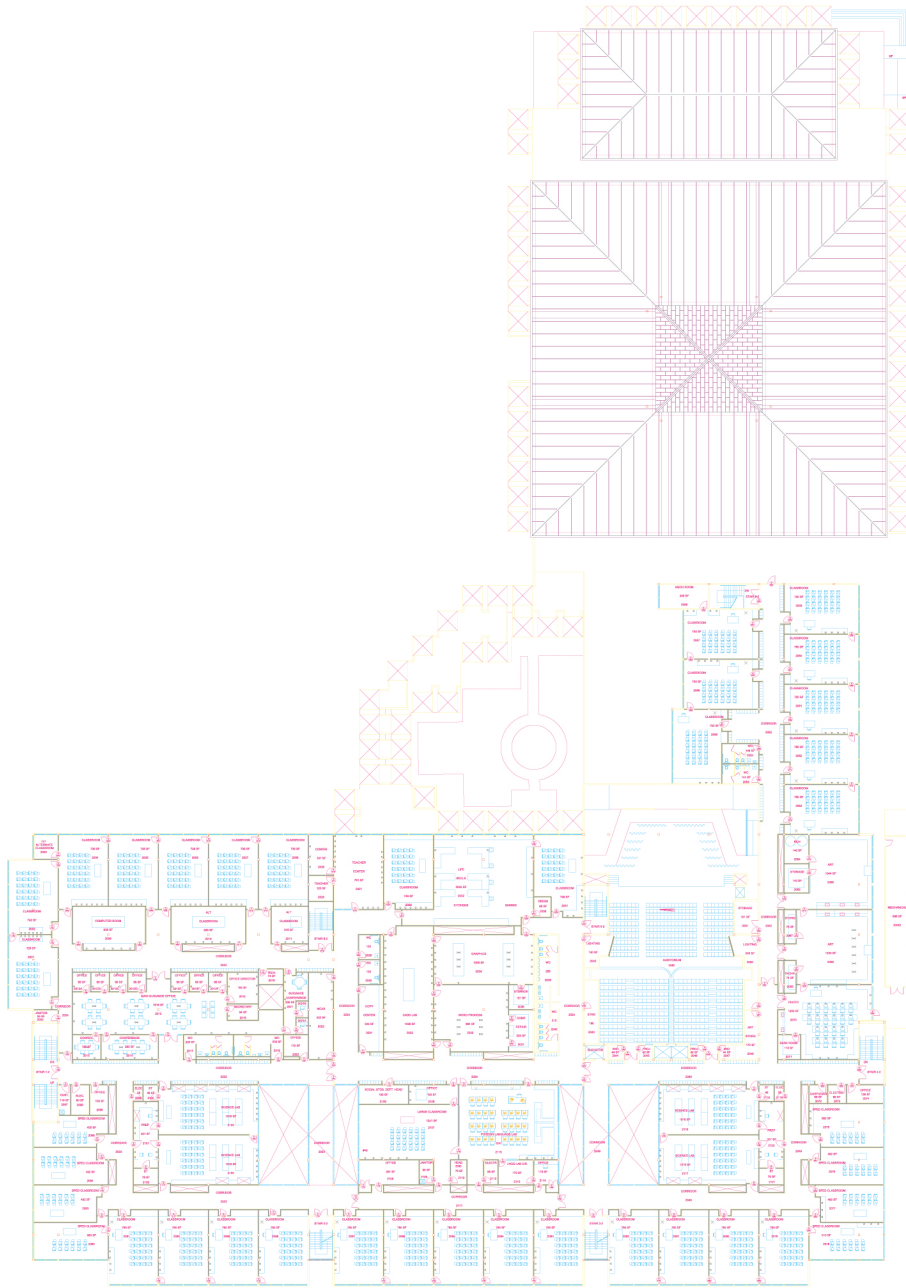
Proposed Southeast Elevation



Proposed Northwest Elevation



First Floor Plan



Second Floor Plan