



Roosevelt Middle School Exterior Project: FAQ's

River Forest School District 90 has been engaged for the past 14 months in a systemic planning effort to improve the Roosevelt Middle School campus. This document addresses some of the Frequently Asked Questions about the background of the project and its primary objectives. For additional information, please contact District 90 Director of Finance and Facilities, Anthony Cozzi, at cozzia@district90.org.

What is this project about and why is it important?

An important part of River Forest's history, Roosevelt Middle School was originally built in the 1920s. It has had five building additions and renovations since then, yet none of the school renovations have addressed the changing nature and functionality of the school site.

Today, over half of the school property is devoted to vehicle parking, and student and bicycle circulation around the site crosses vehicle traffic at numerous "pinch points." Since the main office was moved to the north parking lot entrance last year, wayfinding has been challenging for visitors. Finally, the site lacks outside spaces for learning and instruction, and all of the students must congregate in one location before entering the building in the morning. The combination of these elements results in a campus that puts parking and vehicle traffic ahead of students' needs. However, the link between the quality of the school environment and student achievement has been validated through numerous research studies. The proposed exterior project is intended to "re-set" the campus to meet the evolving needs of our students and community for at least the next 25 years.

What are the key elements of the campus re-design?

A downloadable copy of the proposed plan and design is available on the District 90 website at district90.org. The plan features a new congregation plaza for students north of the main entrance, a through-drive on Lathrop with visitor parking and a River Forest Public Library drop box, and an improved playground for students on the east side of the building. It also includes the disbursement of bicycle parking for students and staff throughout the school site, efforts to reduce chronic and longstanding problems with drainage run-off, and improved signage and lighting. Finally, the project is intended to manage and improve safe circulation around the school block for pedestrians, bicycles, and vehicles.

How did this plan originate, and who was involved in the process?

In November 2011, the District 90 Board of Education directed the staff to begin looking at ways to improve the functionality and safety of the school site, and a committee of

stakeholders was convened to investigate potential solutions. This 11-person committee included Roosevelt staff, parents, and District 90 administrators. In addition, the committee worked with a well-respected landscape architect to identify potential solutions that would effectively address the limitations of the campus, while working within the confines of the land-locked school site and meeting the needs of students. In addition to providing information on the project through the Wednesday Journal, the District 90 website and a series of School Board meetings, District 90 reached out to River Forest neighbors in the area, including the River Forest Public Library, the River Forest Park District, and the River Forest Tennis Club, for their input. Discussions took place with the leadership of each of these entities, with the goal of strengthening the project as well as being good neighbors. In late January 2013, the resident neighbors on both Jackson and Lathrop received additional information on the project via a hand-delivered letter.

How much will it cost?

The Board of Education has not approved the final scope of the plan, which is subject to public comment. The estimated cost for the current plan configuration is not to exceed 1.4 million dollars. However, the Board has not approved the project at this time and the amount approved is also subject to change.

How would District 90 pay for the project?

The costs for the proposed project have been accounted for in the current operating budget, and would be available from the operating fund reserves. The Board of Education has planned for this anticipated expenditure and has healthy fund balances to support the expense. While the cost for this project is significant, the Board of Education has a long history of strong financial stewardship and responsible spending. The Board has chosen to reduce tax levies twice since 2008. This pattern of responsible financial management underscores the District's strong level of commitment to this project, and the degree to which the project's objectives are valued. Additionally, the project is being designed with an eye to long-term value.

How can the District justify that the project is partly intended to improve safety – has anyone actually been hurt on the site due to vehicle accidents?

There is no known record of anyone (student, staff member, or visitor) having been injured by a vehicle on the Roosevelt site, however there have been many reported “near misses” in recent years. Our safety studies suggest that one of the key elements in this situation is that the current parking lots are configured with only one entrance/exit. When vehicles enter the lots to park and are unable to secure a space, they typically back out of the lots, crossing the sidewalks and entering Lathrop Avenue in reverse, or attempt a challenging, multi-point turn to exit. This was instrumental in the design of the through-drive on Lathrop, which includes new short-term visitor spots.

The situation in the north lot is of particular note in that students must cross the lot to leave the campus or visit the library during congested times of day. These challenges were foremost in recommending, as suggested by the District's traffic engineer, the north lot as staff parking only during school hours. Minimizing frequent "in-out" traffic during the day, which can be achieved by limiting short-term visitor parking, is the best way to improve safety in this area.

Furthermore, the installation of the new student plaza in the north lot is intended to provide both a safe congregation area for students and a safer crossing through this busy area. One of the key elements of the proposed project is that every student will be able to more safely access the school from any direction in the village, without having to cross any lines of traffic on the block.

Who is responsible for the north lot between Roosevelt Middle School and the River Forest Public Library?

District 90 is responsible for maintaining and managing the north lot, as it is located on the property of Roosevelt Middle School.

The plan indicates a considerable reduction in parking on the school site. How will this loss of parking be accommodated?

The proposed plan shifts 31 parking spaces off of the current site and onto residential streets in the vicinity of the school. However, it also includes installation of five new short-term parking spaces for visitors to the school and library (as well as the installation of a library book drop box on the driver's window side). And, it includes designated handicapped parking spaces on the north and west sides of the school.

Where can I get more information about the proposed plan?

More information is available on the River Forest District 90 website (district90.org), including a presentation to the community on February 27, 2013, and a downloadable copy of the proposed plan.