

Edwardsville School Board Discusses Plans for New High School Commons Space

by Sydney Sinks, News Reporter
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EDWARDSVILLE - The Edwardsville Community Unit School District #7 Board of Education discussed plans for the expansion of the Edwardsville High School (EHS) commons during their work session on Feb. 12, 2024.

The commons expansion project will add 8,000 square feet to the existing commons space. This new area will include a grab-and-go “Tiger Bites” area where students can purchase snack options, space for studying and events, and renovated restrooms.

Construction will begin on Sept. 9, 2024. The existing restrooms will be renovated starting during spring break 2025. The goal is for the EHS commons project to be substantially completed by Aug. 6, 2025, in time for the 2025–2026 school year. The project will be completed by Holland Construction Services for a total of \$6,844,242.

“They really are working with us and making sure we’re being as efficient as possible,” said Alex Metzger, the district’s architect.

There was a lot of discussion about the renovated restrooms, which will include single-user stalls with sinks in an open corridor. Board members asked Metzger about plans for the all-gender restrooms.

“The single-users, the whole point of them is to be completely private,” Metzger explained. “They’re floor-to-ceiling masonry walls, drywall ceilings, standard doors with a full locking capability, so that makes them completely private, secure and safe.”

Board member Bob Paty asked about the monitoring of the restrooms. Metzger explained that there will be six cameras in the sinks area so they can monitor who goes in and out of the stalls. Additionally, the sinks will be in an open corridor so it will be easier for faculty members to monitor the bathrooms and make sure no students are skipping class or bullying others.

Paty asked about vaping in the stalls and how this will be monitored. Superintendent Dr. Patrick Shelton explained that the vape detectors that currently exist in the EHS bathrooms are “too good” and pick up every scent, including perfume and hairspray. Metzger and Shelton said the school safety officers can use the cameras to determine if someone is vaping when the vape detectors go off or if it’s a false alarm.

Secretary Jennifer Brumback asked if there would be mirrors in the bathrooms. She pointed out that some school districts have removed their mirrors in an effort to minimize the amount of videos and pictures that are taken on school property. Metzger responded that the design currently has mirrors above the sinks, but they can “dive into” whether or not they want to keep the mirrors there, put mirrors in the individual stalls, or remove them completely.

Board member Scott Ahart pointed out that there will be no way to know how many people are in a stall if the doors are from floor to ceiling. He suggested adding a cut-out at the top and bottom of the door.

Member Lynne Sanderson replied that she wouldn’t use a bathroom like this “as a female” because it would not be “private enough.” She added that it can be “very frightening” to be the only woman in a bathroom, so she likes the idea of the locking doors.

Paty noted his concern that “things fall through the cracks” and the monitors will no longer check the vape detectors if they go off too often. He also noted that the hallways can be “mayhem” and he is concerned that monitors will not be able to pay attention to what is happening in the bathrooms.

Student representative Chase Warner said he thinks the bathroom renovation will be “received very well” by students because it’s in a central location and the stalls will provide a private space for students.

In response to Ahart and Paty’s concerns, Vice President Terri Dalla Riva noted that the Board has received many complaints about the existing EHS bathrooms. She said everyone has “the right” to use the bathroom “with as much peace and as little attention drawn to themselves as possible.” Paty said he agreed. Dalla Riva also pointed out that there are other traditional gendered bathrooms with stalls on the EHS campus that students can use if they prefer.

“What got me started on this was the idea that we need to provide a safer environment because last year in early ’23, late ’22, we’ve gotten so many emails and phone calls from parents that are just like, the bathroom isn’t safe,” Dalla Riva added. “And so we started to look at, how do we make an environment where bathrooms are safe and recognize that everyone has a fundamental right to use a toilet, no matter who they are, and they should do it without having to draw attention to themselves?...I think that this fits this idea.”

The Board of Education is set to vote on the EHS commons bid at their upcoming regular meeting on Feb. 26, 2024.