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# Architect unveils first renderings of proposed North Penn HS renovations

Board awards contract for real estate broker



Rendering of proposed renovations to North Penn High School, with group instruction spaces adjacent to new classrooms. (Image courtesy of Schrader Group Architects)

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LANSDALE — Much [can still change](#), but district officials now have a rough idea of what a [renovated North Penn High School](#) could look like.

District officials recently saw a first set of design concepts for the planned renovations, and approved a key contract for planning to move part of the current complex offsite.

“We’ve had a wide breadth and depth of consensus-building, priority establishment, and design concepts,” said superintendent Todd Bauer.

“In designing and talking through our priorities, they gave us surveys, they showed us images, we went on tours. There have been several hundred people involved in the process up to now. And we gave Mr. Schrader a series of priorities, of what we would like to see,” he said, referring to project architect David Schrader.

Renovations to the high school have been [discussed in detail](#) throughout the year, with presentations so far this year by staff and the district’s architect The Schrader Group on [traffic upgrades needed around the campus](#), recent [equipment failures and facility shortcomings](#), [cost estimates for a planned new ninth-grade wing](#) of the school and a revamp of the existing building, staff and board member tours to similar schools in the region, and a series of [invite-only public meetings](#) with students and community members to [discuss possible site layouts](#).

[On Sept. 12](#), Bauer and Schrader brought school board members up to speed, giving a presentation of site layout concepts and renderings based on the input from those meetings so far.

“In a 50-year-old building that originally was developed to house about 2,500 students, there are certain passageways through the building, and there are certain ways of learning that the building is set up for,” Schrader said.

As he spoke, Schrader showed the board a timeline of steps taken to date, including the planning meetings with staff to determine what programs and classes could be offered at the new school, followed by the July and August public input sessions where residents tried to fit blocks meant to represent classrooms, common areas and athletic fields onto the current campus

“It took people a while to understand how to work things onto the site, so that was part of the fun at the beginning of the process, but I think you can see that people got the idea and started to figure out how the building organizes,” he said.



Rendering of proposed renovations to North Penn High School, showing stairways that could be used as group learning spaces alongside new classroom space. (Image courtesy of Schrader Group Architects)

In the eight different team designs yielded by those workshops, athletic fields largely stay where they're located now, while the current high school auditorium and natatorium would be modernized but stay in place, with added classroom space for the new ninth grade wing largely added near the current front of the building, and new parking and fields on the former WNPV radio station and transportation department complex adjacent to the school.

### **9th grade access**

The new classroom space could be connected to the interior commons areas by large concourse-style throughways meant to better handle large numbers of students, Schrader told the board, and to better integrate ninth grade students who currently have to bus from the district's three middle schools to take high school classes or athletics.

“One comment (from a student) was, it's like having a dog at a fence with a squirrel on the other side. They want to get to the high school so badly, that they really want to take advantage of those opportunities,” Schrader said.

Based on that feedback, Schrader and staff have developed a site plan with new staff parking at the rear of the high school near Crawford Stadium, a new driveway running north-south from Snyder Road to Sumneytown Pike between the school and Crawford, all surrounding an expanded school at the center.

“All of this is conceptual. So everything has to be vetted with quite a few more people: with the municipalities, the county conservation district, and PennDOT. So this is a starting point for conversation, and then it becomes time to start sharing this and getting feedback to it,” Schrader said.



Site plan of proposed renovations to North Penn High School, center, with additions to the high school building, expanded parking adjacent to Crawford Stadium at top, and a new roadway running between Sumneytown Pike (left) and Snyder Road (right). (Image courtesy of Schrader Group Architects)

“The overall organization of the site does not change a lot. Instead, there are upgrades to the site,” he said, with stormwater upgrades and traffic flow improvements that weren’t addressed in prior renovations.

**Sneak peek inside**

Inside the renovated building, a common area could be located between the athletics, performing arts and academic areas, with a color-coded floor plan showing the amounts of space dedicated to different types of uses and grades of students, all divided by what Schrader termed a “Main Street” and smaller arterial hallways connecting to certain areas. The current school J-pod, which Bauer called “the round pod” in the existing building, could be converted into a high-ceilinged common area featuring tables for group instruction and food service, with tables and couches “used all day, for different functions,” the architect said.

Open stairways could connect multiple floors of classrooms, with areas for small group instruction, clear wayfinding for students to find each area, and floor-to-ceiling windows to allow plenty of daylight — colors and materials are still very much undecided, Schrader told the board, and will be refined as the site plans are finalized.

“All we’re trying to do is give you a sense of what the space might feel like within the building, and how things might connect back and forth,” he said.

Outside furnishings could emulate the brick façade of the current school, and the fitness area could look out onto playing fields, with logos and wayfinding signs added once the site layout and plans are complete. Board VP Christian Fusco said he had heard feedback in the earlier planning meetings about whether ninth grade should be added in a new wing that could be used throughout renovations, or throughout the complex, and Bauer said staff would make either work.

“Whether we fully integrate ninth grade, and it’s just part of the building, or it’s a standalone entity, it’s still a same-size addition, still usable for swing space,” Bauer said.

Board member Al Roesch said he had trouble picturing how teachers would instruct in the new building, and Bauer said it’s meant to draw from instruction seen at other schools

“The more modern high schools, and the more modern teaching and learning, has transitioned from a stand-and-deliver type of process to a participatory process. Kids are doing now, more than they are sitting at desks, the assembly line type of teaching,” he said. “You don’t have spaces where 50 kids can gather and work together. That’s the concept behind this. It would certainly take professional development, it would take some shifts in curriculum, but we have time for that.”

Board member Tim MacBain added that, as a high school teacher in another district, he’s seen an advantage to the years of delays in finalizing the NPHS renovation plans caused by COVID-19: “We get to see now, in practice, what the students’ needs are following the pandemic. We’re not talking about 21st century education anymore,

we're talking about the next generation of education. We do get to see further in to the future now, than we did five years ago."



Rendering of proposed renovations to North Penn High School, depicting an open common area in the area of the current school's J-pod. (Image courtesy of Schrader Group Architects)

Pete Nicholson, the former high school principal [now planning the renovations](#), said he's seen current staff and students try to create those mixed learning spaces already. "On any given day, any given period, if you walk through the high school, you'll see groups of students on the floor in the hallway. Which is certainly not best practice, but the learning that's in effect is top-notch, and we want to see more of those spaces," he said.

Board member Wanda Lewis-Campbell asked how the renovations would address students with accessibility limitations, and Schrader said the current two elevators in the building would likely be joined by two more, to make distances between each area shorter. Fusco asked if chair lifts could also be added on the stair spaces, and Schrader replied, "they call that evolution of design, and we can keep talking."

MacBain asked if the renovations would include increased access to the nearby North Montco Technical Career Center, and Bauer said that's been "a hot-button topic" with that school's board. Schrader said walkways between the two are still being

developed, and Bauer said early signs are that North Montco would be “very supportive” of doing so, and moving ninth grade onto the campus would open the offerings to a wider range of students.

### **New site for bus depot**

One action item related to the high school renovations was approved by the board on Sept. 21, after discussion by their facilities and operations committee in late August. A request for proposals seeking a real estate broker to identify [new sites for the district transportation center](#) was “out on the street” for applicants in August, according to district Director of Facilities and Operations Tom Schneider, and responses were due in early September, then vetted by staff.

During the Sept. 21 action meeting, Bauer said staff had recommended a contract with Lanard & Axilbund “for the purpose of assisting the district with land acquisition or lease for a transportation center.”

*North Penn’s school board next meets at 7 p.m. on Oct. 10 at the district Educational Services Center, 401 E. Hancock Street. For more information visit [www.NPenn.org](http://www.NPenn.org).*

[https://www.thereporteronline.com/2023/09/27/architect-unveils-first-renderings-of-proposed-north-penn-hs-renovations/?utm\\_email=E58424E555E3D56395F4441FF4&lctg=%c2%a0E58424E555E3D56395F4441FF4&active=yesD&utm\\_source=listrak&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=https%3a%2f%2fwww.thereporteronline.com%2f2023%2f09%2f27%2farchitect-unveils-first-renderings-of-proposed-north-penn-hs-renovations%2f&utm\\_campaign=philly-lans-the-reporter-morning-news&utm\\_content=curated](https://www.thereporteronline.com/2023/09/27/architect-unveils-first-renderings-of-proposed-north-penn-hs-renovations/?utm_email=E58424E555E3D56395F4441FF4&lctg=%c2%a0E58424E555E3D56395F4441FF4&active=yesD&utm_source=listrak&utm_medium=email&utm_term=https%3a%2f%2fwww.thereporteronline.com%2f2023%2f09%2f27%2farchitect-unveils-first-renderings-of-proposed-north-penn-hs-renovations%2f&utm_campaign=philly-lans-the-reporter-morning-news&utm_content=curated)