

SPOTLIGHT

Preliminary plans introduced for new elementary school, Bridgewater addition

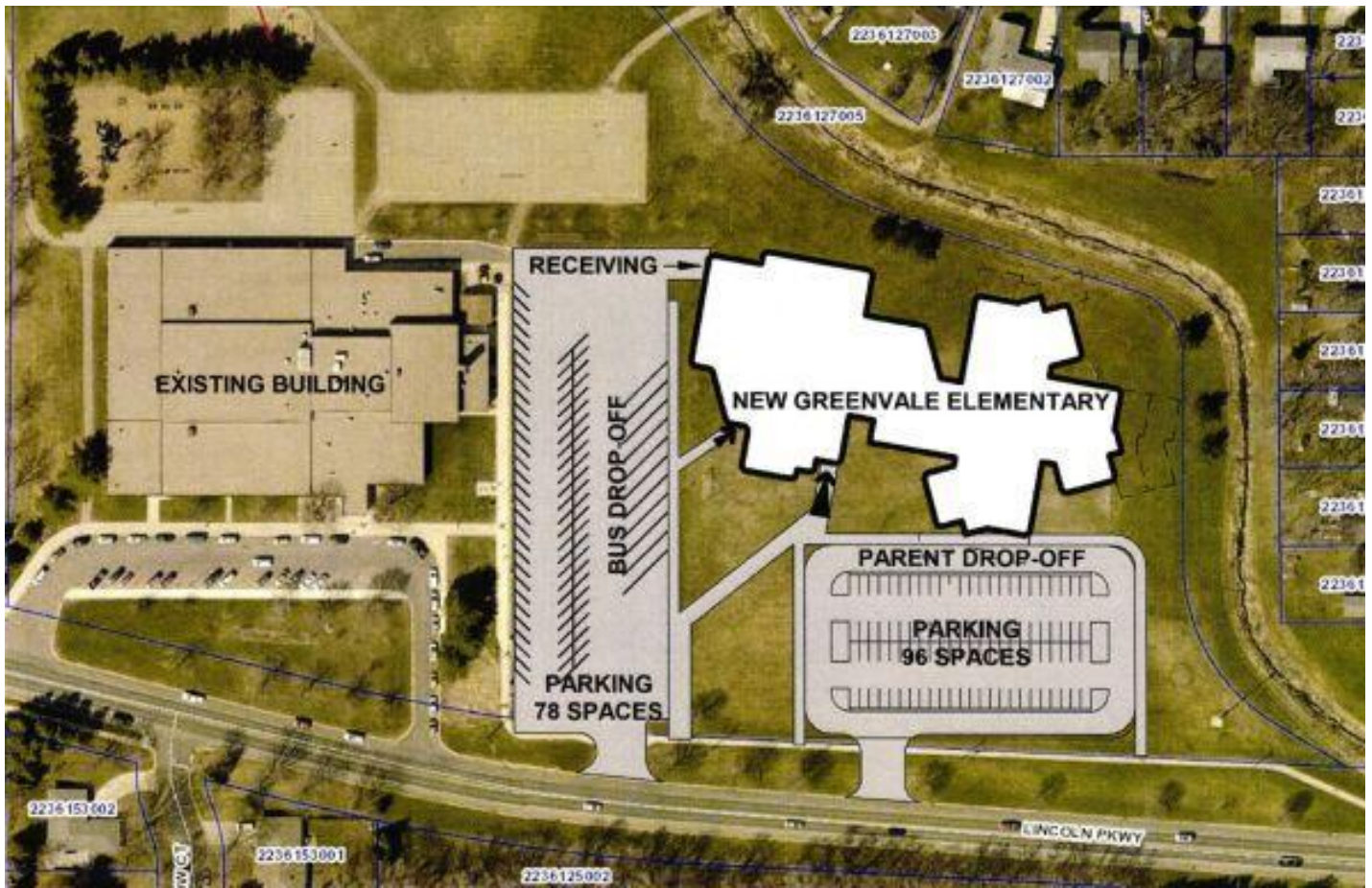
By ANNE KOPAS akopas@northfieldnews.com Mar 13, 2019 Updated 20 hrs ago

After months of planning, Northfield's new school is finally taking shape.

Design teams comprised of school district staff, students and community members spent the last few weeks meeting to form a plan for the new Greenvale Park Elementary, as well as the addition to Bridgewater Elementary. At Monday night's School Board meeting, members got a first look at the plans, presented by Sal Bagley of Wold Architects.

The bigger of the two projects is the new Greenvale, a 90,000-square foot building designed to hold up to 600 elementary students. The design of the current Greenvale Elementary — with an open classroom design considered by many as inconvenient at best, unsafe at worst — was at the forefront of the team's minds.





A diagram shows the proposed location of the new Greenvale Park Elementary, a 90,000-square foot building that would sit on the land just east of the current school. Plans for the parking lots are still in flux. (Graphic courtesy of Wold Architects)

“The building should meet the needs of today while providing for future flexibility and potential expansion,” reads one of the team-determined design criteria.

The new building will sit directly to the east of the current, which will be re-purposed as an early childhood center. A competition-size gym, cafeteria and kitchen area, media center and main office with secure entry are proposed to form the school’s west wing. To the east, classrooms are proposed to be grouped into pods by grade, with kindergarten through second grade on the ground floor and third through fifth grade on an upper level that will also house specialty rooms like art and music.

As plans move forward, architects will meet with education staff, to further refine details of even. They’ll also be conducting a traffic study of the lots.

“There’s lots yet to learn about the site,” said B



Meanwhile, Bridgewater Elementary is set to have its addition in place by the fall of 2019. An expansion off the current front doors will form a 4,000-square foot main office with an added secure entrance. The existing office space will be remodeled into a special education space with rooms for teachers to work with groups of 6–8 students, as well as meeting rooms and flexible areas for one-on-one interaction.



A diagram shows the proposed location of Bridgewater Elementary's main office addition, which will feature a secure entrance. The current main office space will be renovated for special education use. (Graphic courtesy of Wold Architects)

Both projects are currently projected a few thousand dollars. The Bagley renovation is roughly \$27 million and the Bridgewater addition is roughly \$10 million.

"I think there's a lot of passion, and I think the Bagley is a great project," says Superintendent David Bagley.



Flex

In the fall of 2018, Northfield High School launched its flex hour program, allowing students a longer lunch period and expanding their choices for using it. Since then, the program has been met with enthusiasm — though as Principal Joel Leer reported at Monday’s board meeting, it’s undergone a few tweaks along the way.

When the program began, it followed a 10/20 schedule, where students had 10 minutes to move to their selected location and 20 minutes to stay put until the cycle repeated. During that time, students can grab lunch, get homework help, attend career/college readiness sessions or simply de-stress and talk with friends.

But, when surveying the student body, this 10/20 schedule emerged as a source of stress for students who either worried about making it somewhere on time, or who simply disliked the restriction. Now, students are allowed to move about freely during the period — a simple change that’s gone a long way toward reducing this stress.

“The stunning result was something that looked very much like it did before, it’s just that everyone’s more relaxed about the movement piece,” said Leer.

SCHOOL TECH UPDATES

As the Northfield School District nears the ends of the leases on many of its iPads and other devices, it's looking to see which options would best serve students going forward. A recent staff survey showed a strong preference for students to continue using iPads in elementary and middle schools, with a divided preference between Chromebooks and iPads for high school students.

At a focus group meeting held in March, district leaders gathered more feedback, which suggested that all grades continue using iPads, while increasing student access to Chromebooks, if needed.

No decisions have yet been made, since there is a variety of opinions of various devices.



As the program continues, there are still concerns. For example, some teachers reported that their homework help sessions weren't as well-attended as expected, or that some who needed help weren't seeking it out.

Overall, though, students continue to see positive outcomes from the flex period, with the majority reporting that they experience less stress and greater connection to peers and teachers.

"It's dramatic, in terms of students feeling like their day is more balanced with the flex period," said Leer.

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