

DMUSD board provides direction on Carmel Del Mar School library, multi-use room updates



A rendering of the re-imagined library and innovation center at Carmel Del Mar School. (Courtesy DMUSD)



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The Carmel Del Mar School modernization is moving ahead with features such as a reimagined library/innovation center and a renovation of the multi-use room, rather than any expansion of the space. The Del Mar Union School District board gave the design direction at its Sept. 10 meeting, trying to find a balance between budget constraints and community input, meeting student and staff needs, and giving the 30-plus-year-old school some “gentle loving care.”

That night the board also approved the California Environmental Quality Act exemption for the project, aiming to select a contractor by the end of the year and kick off construction next summer.

During past board discussions and community input sessions with the architect, Carmel Del Mar parents said what the campus needed most was a larger multi-use room to replace their “cramped and dated” space, an MUR that could safely fit more students and parents inside for school assemblies, plays and events like science fairs. Many were not in favor of making any changes to the library.

In response to community concerns, the board gave direction in June for the staff to pause the library/innovation center improvements and for the design team to “sharpen their pencils” on the options for an expanded MUR. Since then, Assistant Superintendent of Business Services Chris Delehanty said the district has been working to gather input and share information with the community about the options. Board President Gee Wah Mok also recently walked the campus along with Trustee Bill Porter, who knows the school well as he was a teacher at CDM for many years and lives in the neighborhood.

“We’ve looked at all the options and sharpened the pencils as sharp as we can get,” Delehanty said.

With the recent renovation of Del Mar Hills Academy, Carmel Del Mar is now the district’s oldest campus, built in Carmel Valley in 1992. It currently has the largest enrollment in the district with 520 students (down from 558 last year). With the enrollment capped to three sections per grade level, it is projected to dip to 468 students by the 2027-28 school year.

The district has budgeted \$10 million for a scope of work at CDM that includes transforming classrooms into new modern learning studios, improvements to the building including a new roof, fresh paint and a heating ventilation and air conditioning system replacement. Aging portables will be removed and the restrooms updated.



A rendering of a renovated MUR on the Carmel Del Mar campus, with a new opening and overhang. (Courtesy DMUSD)

In the school's library, which is currently sunken down and flanked by walkways, they have an opportunity to raise the floor, creating a flat and open space that will connect with adjacent STEAM studios and a revamped outdoor courtyard. The library will not be decentralized as it has been at some of the newer and remodeled district campuses. It will remain at the heart of the campus but become a more flexible space, Delehanty said. The library books will stay, with moveable furniture and racks. Quiet nooks for reading will be created both inside and outside.

Modernizing the library space will cost \$2 million—even without raising the floor, it will still cost \$1.3 million, which includes replacing skylights, lighting, flooring, casework and carpeting, adding storage, whiteboards and making the connection to the courtyard. The newly reimagined open space would have the increased capacity to hold events, performances or assemblies, with seating room for 276 chairs and 526 on the floor.

To expand the MUR by 1,000 square feet would cost \$4.4 million, putting the district over budget. The work would touch more than 50% of the connected buildings, which would trigger structural analysis and a seismic retrofit to meet the state building code. The expansion would also push the MUR 25 feet into the central courtyard of the school's main entrance, bringing the capacity from 252 to 400 people, with room for 350 chairs.

To find a solution, the district and the architects also explored expanding the MUR in the other direction, however, that would require the demotion of the outdoor amphitheater (with its dragon mascot mural) with no room on campus for a relocation. Expanding that way would also require a new fire lane, becoming both a less ideal and more expensive option at a cost of \$6.5 to 7 million.

Mok said touring the site, he recognized that the expansion would encroach into the courtyard and change the entire look of the school without really solving the capacity problem.

A general modernization of the MUR would stay within the budget threshold at \$800,000, converting the two doors into one accordion door with an overhang, opening up the space to additional overflow courtyard seating and viewing. There will be room for 160 seats inside the MUR and about 36 additional seats outside. There will be upgrades to the lighting, ceiling, carpeting, AV system and stage: "It will look like a fresh new space," Delehanty said.

Trustee Doug Rafner also suggested that the AV upgrades could include projection screens that would allow those sitting outside to have a better view of the stage. Trustee Alan Kholos also suggested the district invest in temporary structures for shade or cover in that courtyard in the event of inclement weather.

Kholos acknowledged the concerns the board heard from parents and the element of faith required in making changes to something everyone is used to, like the library. "All of our new builds have been incredible," he said of the new Pacific Sky, Del Mar Heights and the latest renovation of Del Mar Hills Academy. He said he didn't want to miss out on the chance to upgrade and make the campus better and more usable.

While new, Superintendent Marisa Janicek said she has quickly become acquainted with the project, walking the site with the principal and having conversations with "thoughtful and caring" parents who have shared their concerns about taking the library away.

"(The library) is a special place for our kids and it still should continue to be," Janicek said. "The renderings are renderings, it's the layout. But the heart and soul of the library will be created through Carmel Del Mar."

“Moving forward, it would be beneficial to make this the absolute best project it can be for Carmel Del Mar,” she continued. “I think it’s a beautiful school and a lot of thought went into maintaining the uniqueness and to really try to think through all of the opportunities to create more space within the campus.”

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