

# Board Gets Estimate On New School

Between \$ 87.7M And \$99.9M For High School

By **TONY BROWN**

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**HARRISONBURG** — Depending on the variables, the cost of building a new high school to ease overcrowding at the city's only existing high school is expected to cost between \$87.7 million to \$99.9 million, if construction were to start now.

That was the estimate presented to the Harrisonburg City School Board on Tuesday night by VMDO Architects of Charlottesville.

The estimates do not include the cost of buying and developing the land that would be needed for a school.

VMDO's report, which the board commissioned in March, goes on to say that waiting three years to build, at an annual inflation rate of 4.25 percent, would increase the cost to be from \$99.3 million to \$113.2 million.

Those figures are all in the range of being twice as expensive as the other two options under discussion, an annex beside or an addition to Harrisonburg High School.

"It gets more expensive over time," VMDO's Bob Moje said.

HHS, on Garbers Church Road, was built in 2005 for 1,360 students; about 1,750 now attend.

Also on Tuesday, a public-input committee appointed by the School Board formally presented its preferred solution: a new high school, which would accommodate 1,200 to 1,500 students.

The committee's report said that solution would better handle the expected growth in Harrisonburg's high school-age population than the annex or addition, each of which could handle another 800 students.

A third report Tuesday, one by Davenport & Co., a Richmond firm that is acting as financial consultant for the board, estimates that borrowing \$100 million would mean the city would have to raise real property taxes by 17.5 cents per \$100 in valuation. For a \$250,000 home, that would increase the annual tax bill by \$437.50, or \$36.45 a month.

Several people in attendance also spoke on the overcrowding issue, half of whom rejected any plan that involved raising taxes. They suggested their own solution: reducing the high school to grades 10 through 12 and sending ninth-graders to the city's middle schools.

Any decision to issue bonds or raise taxes must be made by Harrisonburg City Council. The School Board is scheduled to vote June 6 on its choice for how best to resolve the overcrowding at HHS. Two days later, the board will meet with council to go over the decision.

Both meetings are at 7 p.m. in City Hall, 409 S. Main St.

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