

Girls sports, pools fuel part of bond



By TIM SMITH
STAFF WRITER
Farmington Public School District officials have two words for those who oppose building auxiliary gymnasiums at North Farmington and Farmington high schools, as part of the upcoming bond issue:

Girls sports.

"There were 15 girls sports that were not anticipated to need space" when the existing NFHS and FHS gyms were built, in the 1950s and early '60s, said Cheryl Cannon, assistant superintendent for business and operational services.

She and other officials last week discussed why the proposed new gyms and other improvements to the Farmington High swimming pool are essential bond issue components. The girls sports program did not begin until 1970, but the district did not add indoor gym space to meet the expanding needs, said athletic director Ron Holland.

"And, in 1980, we infused ninth graders into the high school," Holland said. "That created space problems for us, too."

Those space problems continue into the late 1990s, when 25-30 percent of the district's 11,500 students participate in at least one sport. Female athletes — and boys, too — sometimes are forced to practice in hallways because of gym space that officials view as obsolete and inadequate.

And that doesn't even include the growing interest elsewhere. There are intramural leagues, community recreation activities and other groups who want to use the gym facilities, Holland said.

To provide adequate space for the various athletes, the district is asking voters to approve the addition of 8,000-square-foot auxiliary gyms at both North Farmington and Farmington high schools, at a cost of about \$1.5 million each.

"These are going to be designed to handle different sports," Holland said. "And there won't be a need for seating areas. These will just be used for instructional purposes."

Farmington Harrison High School, which opened in 1970, is better equipped to handle the growing student-athlete population, said Don Cowan, executive director of K-12 instruction and student services.

The gyms are included in the \$28.1 million Proposal II, which would not take effect unless the \$65 million Proposal I is approved.

"When the gyms are being used for varsity and junior varsity basketball and volleyball and there's no place for anybody else to practice," Cannon explained.

The lack of space also impacts how well teams can prepare for upcoming games.

"Coaches don't like it (current space) because they feel they're not properly teaching fundamentals and getting (players) prepared," Holland said.

Some residents question such projects, labeling them "extras." The doubts often go away "once they find out the use, the number of kids involved," Cowan said.

Sink or swim

Raised eyebrows also meet another Proposal II project, sinking \$850,000 into improving and deepening the Farmington High swimming pool, the same type of project previously done at North Farmington.

Holland said about \$250,000 is required to tear out the floor of the leaking pool and repair its corroded piping. Doing just those repairs, however, would be the equivalent of sinking money into an unusable pool.

In order to host competitive league swimming meets, and to comply with state safety codes, the pool and diving area would have to be deepened and widened — at one end from 4 feet to 14 feet.

Other school districts in Oakland County are in various stages of such pool improvements. Holland listed Bloomfield Hills, West Bloomfield, Oak Park and Berkeley among them.

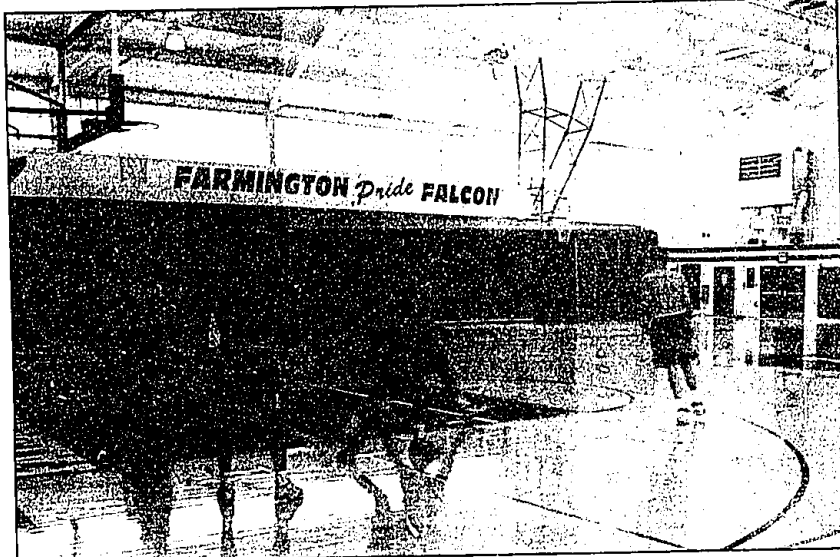
"If we just went in and did the plumbing," Cowan explained, "we'd have the same old pool. We'd be spending \$300,000 for a pool that you can hardly use."

"You're kind of blackmailed into doing what you have to do."

Holland said the FHS project would mirror the North Farmington pool enhancement.

The existing diving area would be filled in and transformed into a warm-up pool, complete with handicapped access. A diving board also would be located to the side of the deepened end.

Editor's note: Sunday we'll look at technology needs and cafeterias that are part of the bond.



Courting voters: Auxiliary gyms are needed because of the growth of girls sports, school officials said. Gyms like the one here at Farmington High are used almost around the clock for practices and games for both boys and girls sporting events.

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BRYAN MITCHELL

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