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Education

Blue Oak to build \$10 million middle school campus in downtown Napa

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A view, looking south, of the proposed new middle school campus for Blue Oak School in downtown Napa. Blue Oak's current "lower school" campus is located at the bottom of this photo. The street in the middle of the photo is Polk Street. Seminary Street is seen in the upper right.

Ratcliff Architects

Blue Oak School, a progressive, private Napa kindergarten-8th grade school, plans to build a new middle school campus in downtown Napa, across the street from its campus on Polk Street that serves the lower grades. The project is estimated to cost approximately \$10 million.

On Feb. 14, the school bought a half-acre parcel with a primary address of 1584 Clay St. from members of the A.H. Smith Company for \$3.7 million.

Currently home to the Malloy Imrie & Vasconi insurance agency, the plot stretches from Polk Street to Clay Street along Seminary Street.

“It’s a wonderful opportunity for us to grow into the community,” said Dan Schwartz, head of school at Blue Oak. “We hope to build a state-of-the-art facility and help create spaces that create innovation and critical thinking.”

Blue Oak School currently has about 125 students, including 60 middle school students on a Hayes Street campus, said Schwartz. Since the school opened in 2002, enrollment has previously reached as high as 180 students total between both campuses.

With the new campus, “our intent is to have up to 200 students,” said Schwartz.

Blue Oak School has not yet filed its plans with the city’s planning department. The plans will undergo public hearings before the Planning Commission and the City Council.

Malloy Imrie & Vasconi will relocate to Robert Louis Stevenson Plaza at 1700 Second St. That move could happen as soon as the next several weeks. The current commercial building on the Clay Street site will be demolished.

“We need more space,” said business co-owner Kent Imrie in a November. 2016 interview. “That’s the key reason for the move.”



Blue Oak School recently purchased a lot in the 1100 block of Seminary Street, between Clay and Polk streets, across the street from the elementary school. A new middle school campus is planned.

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The new property will allow Blue Oak School to consolidate the school into one area, said Schwartz.

“We’re happy to make available that property so their two campuses can be side by side,” said Imrie.

Blue Oak plans to sell its current middle school property, located at 1248 and 1272 Hayes St. and use those proceeds to help fund the new construction, said the head of school.

Plans have not been finalized, but the new middle school campus should include three separate structures: a gym, a classroom wing and a reception/collaboration space. It will reach two stories high and total about 14,000 square feet.

“Being closer to downtown is a conscious decision for us to have somewhat more of an urban curriculum,” said Schwartz.

For example, “We’re already working in Napa Creek doing environmental studies,” he said. The new middle school helps Blue Oak “continue to grow our use of Napa as a cityscape.”

A new gym will benefit both the school and the Napa community, said Schwartz.

Blue Oak currently leases space for its basketball and volleyball teams to practice, he said. After the school builds its own gym, it could also be used by other community groups, he said. For those schools that don't have gyms, it can be hard to find such space to borrow, the head of school noted.

"We're hoping to create a space that works both for us," and organizations such as the city's Parks and Rec department, he said.

The gym will be about 5,000 square feet.

The classroom wing will total about 6,500 to 7,000 square feet. The reception/collaboration area will total about 2,000 square feet.

Schwartz said the school is still working on the parking plan for the new middle school.

"We are sensitive to the needs of the community and zoning requirements, he said.

Schwartz said the students are already excited about the plans for a new middle school.

"The first graders would like a zip line" between the two buildings, he said with a laugh.

The design style of one building on the new campus should echo the original Polk street school building, said Schwartz. The other two new buildings may be a bit more modern with glass and walls that open to the courtyard "so we can have continuous flow for large school events," he said.

Blue Oak's middle school campus on Hayes Street is currently listed for sale for \$7 million. It includes almost a full acre of land, a cottage and 11,400 square feet of building space. Blue Oak bought that parcel about 12 years ago, said Schwartz.

Blue Oak School first opened in 2002. The middle school campus was founded in 2005.



A possible layout of the proposed new middle school campus for Blue Oak School in downtown Napa. A new gym could be used by other local community groups.
Ratcliff Architects

According to its website, Blue Oak is a non-denominational K-8 school fully accredited by the California Association of Independent Schools and the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, with full membership in the National Association of Independent Schools.

Tuition for the 2017-2018 school year is \$23,500. Some 45 percent of families receive tuition assistance.

The new middle school could open as soon as during the 2019-2020 school year, said Schwartz. Until then, the middle school plans to remain where it is now.

Jennifer Huffman

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Jennifer Huffman is the business editor and a general assignment reporter for the Napa Valley Register. I cover a wide variety of topics for the newspaper. I've been with the Register since 2005.