

# Committee Backs 2nd High School

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**HARRISONBURG** — All in all, an endorsement announced Friday by the High School Space Committee is just another brick in the wall of support for building the city's second high school.

Clearly telegraphed and widely expected, the public-engagement advisory panel's choice of another secondary school to solve the overcrowding problem at Harrisonburg High School will be formally presented on May 16 to the City School Board.

The 25-member committee, comprising Harrisonburg City Public Schools stakeholders such as parents, teachers, administrators and business leaders, made the endorsement with a unanimous vote Thursday night.

But signs began emerging as early as March 30, less than two weeks after the committee formed, when the group chose the new facility over an annex or addition to the existing Garbers Church Road school.

That's when the 19 committee members participating in a straw poll voted unanimously to back the new school as a way to ease overcrowding at HHS, which opened in 2005 with accommodations for 1,360 students and now has around 1,750.

Top city schools administrators, such as Superintendent Scott Kizner, have openly backed a second school.

City Council has not committed any money to fixing Harrisonburg High's overpopulation.

A second high school is the most expensive of the three options, but the panel's announcement said it would also be the best "long-term solution that will provide double the opportunities for student leadership and participation in activities."

If the second high school was built with room for 1,360, the division could accommodate 2,720 high school students combined.

That would make it the only option of the three able to handle the 2,500 to 2,600 high school students that the Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service projects will be in the city by the 2023-24 school year.

Based on the projections, the only way the division could accommodate that many with an annex or addition — each of which could hold 800 students — would be to keep HHS as overcrowded then as today.

"The committee recognized that while the initial costs for a new high school will be higher than the alternatives, the long-term benefits will show that this is the most cost efficient option," the announcement said.

The cost of a new school at a separate location is being assessed in a \$40,000 study by VMDO Architects of Charlottesville; the cost will also be presented to the School Board on May 16.

Moseley Architects of Harrisonburg estimated an annex, a separate building on the existing campus, would cost between \$48.3 million and \$55.8 million. An addition would cost \$45.1 million to \$51.4 million, Moseley estimated.

In addition to being the best way to keep pace with the expected growth in the city's number of high-school age teens, the announcement said committee members feared a single school with 2,500 or so students would be too big.

A large school would have "more impersonal experiences among students, fewer opportunities for student participation in athletics, clubs and academics, and fewer opportunities for teachers in terms of leadership and coaching positions," the announcement said.

The space committee will host an open house Thursday from 5 to 8 p.m. at the existing high school, where various information stations will explain how the committee arrived at its decision.

The May 16 board meeting is at 7 p.m. at City Hall.

On June 6, the School Board, which is free to take or ignore the space committee's advice, will vote on its choice.

The School Board will present its choice on June 8 to City Council, which will need to vote on whether and when to fund it.

For more information about the ongoing saga of the Harrisonburg High School overcrowding issue, go to [harrisonburg.k12.va.us](http://harrisonburg.k12.va.us) and look for the latest update in the "Announcements" section along the far left side of the homepage.

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