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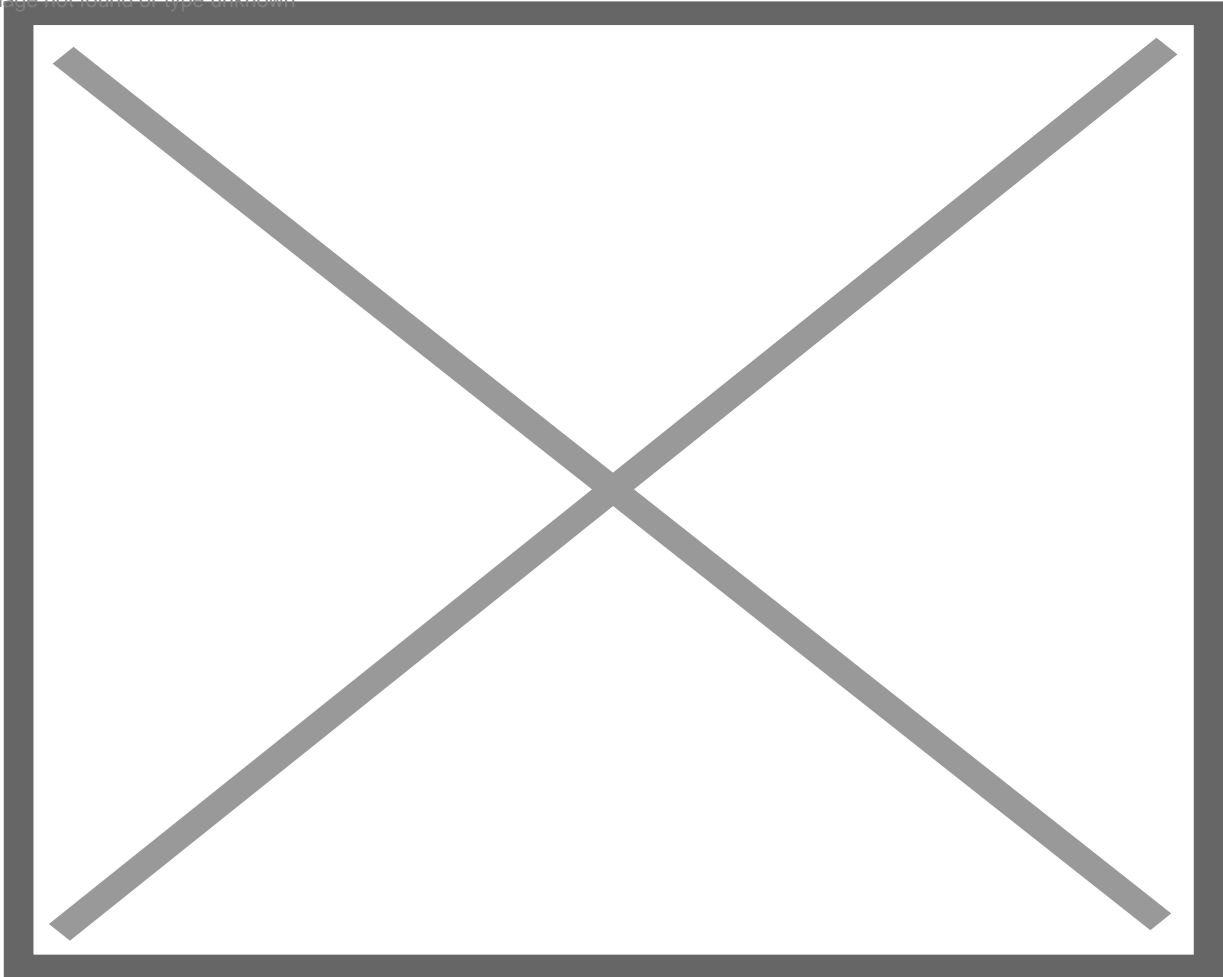
CZM Approves Central High School Reconstruction With Groundbreaking Redesign and Emphasis on Specialized Education

The new design promotes interdisciplinary learning and aims to prepare students for direct entry into work or higher education through enhanced career and technical training

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Janeke Simon **July 17, 2024**

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A detailed site plan for the new St. Croix Central High School, including various buildings and amenities. By. DLR GROUP

The new St. Croix Central High School will be a truly comprehensive learning institution that is designed to allow students to pursue their passions in a holistic way, members of the St. Croix Coastal Zone Management Commission were told during Tuesday's CZM meeting.

On the agenda was the consideration of the V.I. Department of Education's request to use Federal Emergency Management Agency funds to replace the existing St. Croix Central High School infrastructure. The federal consistency determination from CZM is necessary for the school's demolition and reconstruction to move forward.

CZM Commissioners learned that while the physical footprint of the new school is expected to be smaller than what previously exists, the facility will nevertheless be designed to accommodate a minimum of 1000 students, as well as to facilitate the delivery of existing and new programs that are being designed. VIDE officials noted that plans include a musical performance hall, and outdoor learning spaces complete with appropriate furniture and lighting, a key outdoor space will be dedicated for agriculture, the final form and layout of which will be decided after extensive consultation with the St. Croix Central community.?

A major focus for the new school will be fostering interdisciplinary learning, with a broad emphasis on career and technical education training. The school, because it is being designed from the ground up with these concepts in mind, will be uniquely suited to facilitate students who wish to pursue their passion in fields such as music, dance, and sports, committee members were told. As such, the school will be able to produce graduates who are either prepared for tertiary education with a strong portfolio, or to enter straight into the world of work.

As Education Commissioner Dionne Wells-Hedrington explained, when the department began to create its facilities master plan, officials knew that "we did not want our high schools to mirror each other, meaning that their focuses would [not] be on the same things. We know supply and demand and human capital is always a challenge, but we wanted to be able to provide a variety of offerings to our students based on their interest."

Dr. Wells-Hedrington acknowledged that "one of the areas that we have not been as successful with is incorporating the arts and music curriculums and opportunities for certificates and training for potential jobs into our curriculum." The new school buildings will allow education officials to address that deficiency by, for example, including sound rooms where students may be able to record and produce "tracks that they create on their own to start to grow business opportunities for themselves." Wells-Hedrington emphasized that the aim of the new design was to allow the department to expand "our concepts and offerings to our children" in the academic and career space.

VIDE officials and representatives presented a broad overview of the project timeline. First would come the demolition of the existing gymnasium, which will free up space to begin construction of the first set of buildings for the new school. Once those are complete, students will be moved from their old classrooms into the new spaces, following which a second round of demolition will begin. The next phase will be to build more of the new school's buildings before demolishing the remaining structures of the old campus and allowing students, faculty and staff to fully occupy their new school.?

Ms. Wells-Hedrington emphasized the importance of effectively promoting career and technical education opportunities to ensure students are aware of their options. She pointed out that students often lack exposure to the full range of possibilities within a discipline, making marketing and public awareness crucial for engaging them effectively.

CZM Assistant Director Gregory Richards was pleased to learn of the plans for the new St. Croix Central High School. "We really appreciate the new design and the focus of what this new school is supposed to be about," said Mr. Richards, speaking for himself and fellow alumni of CHS.?

The Commission passed a motion to approve the federal consistency determination for the construction project, as CZM staff found it aligned with CZM goals, unlikely to significantly impact the environment, and in the public interest. However, the Department of Education must meet several conditions: obtaining all necessary federal and territorial permits, adhering to best construction management practices, and providing adequate public notice before starting construction.

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