

# Board of Education closes access to Kennison Field bleachers; considers renovation options

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Following a detailed report and lengthy discussion during its regularly scheduled meeting on May 14, the Hermiston School District Board of Education directed Interim Superintendent Wade Smith to disallow district and community use of the bleachers at Kennison Field effective immediately. This decision followed a detailed report provided in person by representatives from Fishel CM and Landmark Landscape Architects.

At the request of the Board of Education during its April Board Work Session, Smith consulted with Fishel CM to provide a thorough review of the Kennison Field bleachers, as well as attempt to isolate the cause of significant cracking and separation occurring throughout the all-weather track. Landmark, from Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, as well as Anderson-Perry Engineering from La Grande, Oregon, performed thorough on-site and soils inspections, which provided the basis for the report presented to the Board.

The report highlighted significant safety and code concerns with respect to the bleacher system. Jonathan Mueller, Senior Landscape Architect, who was present at the meeting, noted the following in his report, "Of all the site components, the bleachers surprised us the most. This is because given the current status of code related to stadium seating, there are no aspects of this current set of bleachers that appear to be compliant with today's standards. These represent the greatest threat to the health, safety, and welfare of the public of all the components we reviewed."

The report noted the following safety concerns and code violations of the circa 1960's bleachers, which fail to meet current standards:

1. Open deck that provides a fall through hazard
2. No side and back guardrails for seating over 30" above the ground surface
3. Non-compliance with aisle requirements
4. Non-compliance with exiting requirements
5. Non-compliance with handrail & general code requirements
6. Antiquated foundation/support system
7. Press box access is not compliant
8. Non-compliance with ADA accessibility-ramps, seating, spaces

As shared during the meeting and in the summary, "the current bleacher system represents the single greatest potential for a legal claim against the school district of all the components we surveyed," noted Mueller. "Our recommendation is that a new system of code compliant stadium seating be immediately pursued."

Following review of the seating deficiencies, Mueller informed the Board of Education and administration that the twenty-year-old track is failing. The architect's report, which included a detailed analysis of the structural component of the track facility by Anderson-Perry, states "[it] is quite evident that the track is at the end of its useful life and that replacement is the only option to correcting the existing condition." Pictures displayed to the Board of the 35 or more significant cracks, which continue to separate and worsen, reinforce the status of a failing track foundation.

"The engineer's report revealed a 1 to 1½ inch asphalt layer on top of a 2-3 inch aggregate base. Those were the standards typically used twenty or so years ago, which is why you are witnessing failure of the track. Today's standards typically call for double those levels to avoid the problems you are realizing at the current facility," noted Mueller.

Following the architectural and engineering report, Interim Superintendent Smith relayed to the Board that, per their request, he contacted the district's liability insurance company to inquire as to the potential risk for claim, should an accident or injury occur on the current bleacher system. Smith conveyed that the underwriter, after reviewing the report, recommended that the district disallow use and immediately proceed with the replacement of the bleachers.

Heath Gardner, a representative from Fishel CM, provided a recommendation that the Board of Education consider replacing the bleachers with a code-compliant system and replace the failing track facility with a layout which would allow for football and soccer use (a 400 meter track system with a shorter, but wider layout), which has been the industry standard for many years. An alternate recommendation for Board consideration is to install a synthetic field turf rather than natural grass, “a system nearly all high schools in Oregon, of Hermiston’s size and larger, have gravitated to for expanded use and lower overhead and maintenance needs,” stated Gardner.

The estimated cost for replacement of the bleacher system, track renovation, and multi-use synthetic turf came in at \$3.147 million dollars. Smith presented \$2.79 million in resources the Board could consider applying to the project. Most of the resources come from a larger than anticipated \$2.0 million State reimbursement grant received from the Oregon Department of Education upon completion of the three new schools.

The Board concluded its two-hour deliberations with direction for Smith to contact the Hermiston Sports Boosters and other potential revenue resources, prior to a special meeting scheduled for Tuesday, May 22, at which the Board may determine how it will proceed with the Kennison Field renovations.