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The \$53.4-million project – which started in spring 2021 – will consolidate the district’s three elementary schools into a single campus on the current Fletcher Elementary School site. IMAGE COURTESY OF GORDON W. JONES ASSOCIATES ARCHITECTS, P.C.

Tonawanda City School consolidation: A culmination of 15 years of planning

BY LISA KOPOCHINSKI

With a completion date slated for summer 2023, work continues on the Tonawanda City Elementary School project in Tonawanda, New York.

The \$53.4 million project — which started in Spring 2021 — will consolidate the district’s three elementary schools into a single campus on the current Fletcher Elementary School site, which is across the street from the middle school/high school complex. The consolidation plan will close the Mullen and Riverview elementary schools and include a significant school upgrade at Fletcher Elementary.

“It is more efficient — instructionally, operationally, and financially over a lon-

ger period of time — to have all of our students under one roof,” says Timothy Oldenburg, Tonawanda City School District superintendent of schools.

PROJECT BENEFITS

This project is the culmination of nearly 15 years of analysis and planning. Facilities studies concluded that the school district’s three aging elementary schools would only become much more expensive to maintain and remain functional in the coming years.

The TONA2020 committee unanimously recommended this consolidation plan, which addresses the school district’s increasing facility needs and allows the district to improve and advance its educational programs, provide necessary services, and meet the

needs of all students.

“We are striving to be responsible and conservative to our taxpayers while working to meet the changing needs of our students, school safety, and community support,” explains Oldenburg. “The newly consolidated facility will not require significant repair or replacement for many years. We are taking proactive steps to be a sustainable organization in a permanent tax-cap era.”

Vaughn Maracle is a project executive at Campus Construction Management Group, which is overseeing the entire project with regard to schedule, budget management, and overall quality of work. He says this consolidation plan ensures that all elementary students will benefit from increased and

improved space in a 21st-century educational facility.

To date, work at the site includes the following:

- Abatement and demolition work within the existing to remain portion of the building;
- Mass demolition of an entire wing of the school; and
- Excavation and foundations on the 100,000 square feet of the new building addition to the future campus.

“Summer and fall of 2021 were extremely busy getting these efforts underway. Currently, with abatement and demolition complete, the team is able to refocus and put our efforts into the rebuilding phase of the renovation area, while continuing the progress on our new addition areas,” adds Maracle.

PROJECT DETAILS AND CHALLENGES

Gordon W. Jones Associates Architects, P.C. is the architect on this project. The firm’s responsibilities include the planning and design of the new universal pre-K through fifth-grade 900-student capacity school that will consolidate all the elementary grade students into one building.

“The solution was to create an additions and alterations project to the existing Fletcher Elementary School that met both the district’s program needs and provided the maximum amount of New York State building aid for the district,” explains Scott Jones, president at Gordon W. Jones.

The project includes the use of modern materials — such as metal panels — that simulate wood grain at the media center and stair towers, limestone panels, curtainwall glazing, and sunshade devices to control natural lighting. The building design includes a main circulation spine that separates a student bus drop-off entrance on one

end (Gibson Street) and a student parent drop-off entrance on the other end (Hinds Street).

Major features in the building’s interior include:

- STEAM spaces, which combine science, technology, engineering, the arts, and math to guide student inquiry and discussion;
- The main office, new cafeteria, health and fitness area, nurse area, library

media center; and

- 42 classrooms and other ancillary spaces.

The total area for the new Tonawanda Elementary School will be 138,880 square feet. The color scheme will accent and emphasize the school colors of maroon and white throughout the exterior and interior of the building.

Jones adds that one of the biggest design challenges was finding a solu-

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The project is the culmination of nearly 15 years of analysis and planning.
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tion that addressed the site safety of the students and the need to keep the bus drop-off traffic and parent/student drop-off traffic safely separated.

"We were able to create a dual set of entrances. The main office entrance, which includes the parent/student drop-off, is separated at one end of the circulation spine and the bus loop en-

trance is connected at the other end. Both entrances are secured and controlled."

Transit Construction is the general trades prime contractor on this project, whose wide scope of responsibilities include concrete foundations and slabs, structural steel, masonry, exterior façade, doors, frames and hard-

ware, metal stud framing, metal panels, drywall and acoustics, gymnasium equipment and dividers, safety pads, loading dock bumpers, food service equipment, auditorium seating, exterior sidewalk lift, traction elevator, and more.

"Actually, the project has been running well so far," says Nick Hunt, presi-



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dent at Transit Construction. "The only issue we've seen so far is starting work in the existing building due to demolition and asbestos abatement delays. However, we have started work in this area and should be able to maintain the schedule."

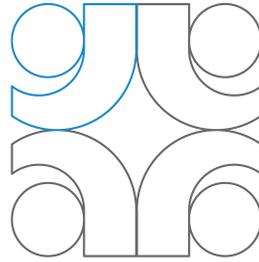
Thurston Dudek, LCC is the plumbing contractor responsible for water, gas, sanitary, and storm drain piping. Vice President Nick Dudek says the biggest challenge to date has been the schedule for such a large project that includes mass renovation and multiple additions.

"Some areas have slacked, while others have been expedited. Planning manpower and materials has been like shooting at a moving target. Also, snow has been a challenge."

As for how this project will benefit not just the school, but the community as well, Stephen DiMatteo, project manager at Gordon W. Jones, says it ensures that all elementary students will benefit from increased and improved space in a 21st-century educational facility.

"The community will also benefit from a new multiple age level playground area. Families with multiple children in different grades within UPK through fifth grade will now be in the same building versus the possibility of three different buildings."

Adds Maracle, "When completed, the final campus — which will go by the new name of Tonawanda Elementary School — will feature 38,000 square feet of renovated space, 100,000 square feet of new building area, a natural grass recreation area, parking, and student drop-off, bus loop and parking, three separate age-specific playgrounds and two outdoor learning areas." ♦



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