

Marion takes big step forward

Written by Mike Deupree

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The "where" question about a major upgrade of Marion High School athletics facilities has been answered. So, for the most part, has the "what." Now it's time to find the answers to "when" and "how."

The biggest decision needed to proceed with the upgrade was whether to renovate the existing football field near Thomas Park or build a new, multi-purpose facility at the Les Hipple Athletic Complex adjacent to the high school.

Many factors were involved. The cost of a project that included a new stadium was estimated at \$9.3 million, compared with \$6.7 million if the plans involved renovating the existing field. On the other hand, the current field is more than a mile from the high school. Planners weighed the pros and cons, and conducted a survey online that ended up favoring the Thomas Park location by 290-116. The school administration recommended that option. On Nov. 22, the school board voted 5-1 to concur.

That answered the "where" question. A master plan explains the "what."

The plan calls for new grandstands to increase home seating from 950 to 2,200 and house new restrooms and locker rooms. Also a high priority is replacing the electrical service, including the lights. The existing support facilities may be razed to provide space for additional parking.

Football isn't the only sport that will see changes. The existing athletics complex at the high school is a big part of the planning.

"There are ideas for upgrading the baseball/softball fields and tennis and soccer facilities," said Corby Laube, director of activities at Marion. "Some of the details could change in these concepts once the projects actually start moving forward."

Among the issues he mentioned that need to be addressed are lighting, storage, press boxes, field position and accessibility for the handicapped.

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OK, so how about "when" and "how"? Be patient, fans and students.

"We have no current timetable on when it actually will be started/completed or how it will be funded," said Laube. "That will be the next step."

It's a step eagerly awaited by students, faculty and fans.