

The future of Meriden's high schools (Part 5)

By Brian P. Daniels and George McGoldrick

When determining the correct course of action with regard to upgrading Maloney and Platt High Schools, we must recognize and account for the many important civic functions these schools perform in addition to the education of our children. Our high schools are multi-functional facilities, and maximizing the return on our investment necessarily includes identifying ways in which the facilities can be improved to better serve the needs of the citizens of Meriden.

Currently, Maloney and Platt High Schools collectively are utilized for sports teams, leagues and camps, Relay for Life, CIAC, DARE, Kiwanis Kapers, Boy Scouts, Girls Scouts, Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Breakfast, Lions Club Palm Sunday Brunch, police and fire department examinations, election voting, district-wide school concerts and musicals, Meriden Federation of Teachers, Meriden Employees' Credit Union, Project Excel, condo association meetings, Chamber of Commerce, Hicks Essay Contest, Breakfast with Santa, Red Cross/Dan Ormsby blood drives, Project Graduation, Tri-Town Special Olympics, Senior Night, Meriden Shriners, SAT testing, card/coin shows, and National Honor Society.

Perhaps the most important, but rarely utilized, secondary function the high schools serve is that of emergency shelters. Locally, Meriden must be prepared at a moment's notice to open shelters for area evacuations and sheltering local residents in the event of a severe storm (such as an ice storm or a hurricane resulting in a long term power outage), a hazardous materials release, or a building evacuation due to a fire, flood or police operation. According to the State of Connecticut Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security, the three primary scenarios triggering the recent review of each municipality's evacuation and sheltering plan are a Category 3 hurricane hitting the Connecticut coast and all of New England, a Millstone Power Plant release of contamination, and a large scale terrorist attack in New York City.

The number of people that can be accommodated in a particular shelter is based upon the shelter's non-emergency use. This figure also is affected by the demands created by any particular emergency, that is, whether only a temporary (24 to 48 hours) evacuation from an area is needed or whether longer term post-impact sheltering is required. The ability to accommodate persons with disabilities, in addition to overall capacity, is a key consideration in designating a shelter.

Currently, the Max E. Muravnik Meriden Senior Center can accommodate 350 persons for an evacuation and can shelter 60 cots. That center also has a generator sufficient to run the entire facility. The evacuation and sheltering capacities of the City's four other designated emergency shelters are as follows: Maloney High School – 3,726 evacuation, 1,530 shelter; Platt High School – 4,765 evacuation, 1,110 shelter; Washington Middle School – 1,935 evacuation, 820 shelter; and Lincoln Middle School – 3,410 evacuation, 885 shelter.

With an eye toward further preparing our community to meet the challenges of a serious emergency situation, the City must explore installing a fuel cell in either or both

of the upgraded high schools so that the facility could operate independent of the electrical grid if necessary. Similarly, improvements to meet the handicapped accessibility needs also would be incorporated in the high school projects.

Any plan to upgrade Meriden's high schools must take into account the current and future community uses of these schools so that every dollar spent on these projects is leveraged to the fullest extent possible.

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