



BUILDING THE FUTURE

Putney to Erect Two New Dorms

BY DARRY MADDEN

The need to replace Old Boys is the stuff of legends. Built out of an old carriage shed in 1935 (allegedly slapdash, by students, though this story is uncorroborated), talk of replacing it with suitable housing for both students and faculty has been on record since 1952.

“That first year fifty-four boys and girls were enrolled,” wrote founder Carmelita Hinton in a 1952 issue of the *Putney Post*, “And while some of the rooms in the boys’ dorm were still without windows and floor, everybody on arrival took things as they came.”

However, she continued, “But that was seventeen years ago. Today we are still using all the original buildings. The old boys’ dorm becomes increasingly hard to keep up and is expensive to maintain, and not a few new parents look quite skeptical as they leave their boys there in the fall. We can’t escape the fact that these old makeshift buildings are wearing out.”

This summer, Putney will break ground on two new dormitories. These net zero buildings were decades in the making, and will replace Old Boys and Old Girls dorms.

“Both buildings will be high performance, environmentally sustainable, and, we hope in many ways, culturally sustainable,” said Assistant Head of School and Chief Financial Officer Randy Smith.

Each dorm will house twenty-two students in eleven double rooms, and each will feature two three-bedroom faculty apartments. One will be sited across from the main entrance to the school, in the field across Houghton Brook Road. The other will be adjacent to New Boys, where several greenhouses sit currently. They will be ready to occupy in the late fall of 2023.

Smith lived in Old Boys in one of the faculty apartments. He can attest to the spartan accommodations. The sound-proofing was also legendarily bad. “My wife and I were playing Trivial Pursuit one night in our apartment. She read me a question and a kid answered it—from the common room.”

Old Boys will be torn down, and Old Girls will be converted to additional classroom space.

“They’re exciting dorms,” said Smith. “Both reflect current architectural thoughts around environmental efficiency.”

The new dorms will have highly efficient “envelopes,” like the Field House (walls will have an insulation

value of R-40 and the roofs R-60). As net-zero buildings, they will be run on electricity exclusively, and that electricity will be generated on the buildings, from Putney’s property, and through community solar sites.

All the building materials meet a very high standard, and are local where possible. A majority of the wood will be “certified,” meaning from managed forests. Interior wood finishes will be made from wood harvested and milled from Putney’s forests.

The dorms will feature composting toilets for the student populations (faculty apartments will run on standard plumbing). This switch will take 44 beds off of the school’s septic system.

“As we designed these buildings we asked, ‘How light on the land can you be?’” said Smith.

At twenty-two students per dorm, the new buildings do not increase the capacity of the student population, though they do allow for the boarding-to-day student population ratio to shift toward an increase in boarding students. The new, spacious faculty apartments will ideally ease recruiting for long-term, teachers, and will be able to house teachers with families comfortably.

Smith uses the term “cultural sustainability” to refer to some design choices inside the building that better serve those that live there, and the ability to adapt the spaces to changing needs. For example, bathrooms spaces now offer dramatically more privacy.

“They’re signature buildings,” said Smith. But he emphasized that their forward-thinking design will keep students grounded and connected—to each other and to their physical elements. “We don’t want fancy trimmings you might see at other boarding schools. We still want kids to live in the Putney way. The spaces will be clean, open, and airy.” The community, students and adults alike, look forward with excitement to this next stage in the life and lives of The Putney School.