MUNCIE, Ind. — The Muncie Community School Board on Tuesday night authorized emergency repairs to the storm-damaged Muncie Fieldhouse, one of the largest high school gymnasiums in the country.

"I do think there are issues of morale we are dealing with on a lot of fronts, but certainly that is a symbol of the community that, if we can get it to a point where it can be reopened in the near term, that's a healthy development," school board President Jim Williams said.

There is a chance the historic landmark could reopen during the Central High School basketball season and in time for the annual Community Christmas Sing.

More than 280 days have passed since that Sunday last November when a line of severe thunderstorms rolled through Muncie, as well as a brief tornado spin-up, ripping a hole in the roof of the Fieldhouse, rupturing water lines and turning the bleachers into a waterfall and the basketball floor into a pond.

Still, the new school board, which took office on July 1, declared at Tuesday night's meeting that an emergency exists, meaning the building can be repaired without seeking competitive bids.

"I believe there has been some passage of time since it happened, but I still think having a hole in your roof is an emergency," school board attorney David Day said. "I'm comfortable with you declaring that to be an emergency and seeking an expedited process."

The board gave the school district's emergency manager, Steve Edwards, authority to "secure quotes for the emergency repair of the storm-damaged roof." Edwards plans to ask the board to approve one of two or three quotes at its next meeting, on Aug. 28.

After declaring a state of emergency, the district is not required to advertise for repair bids, but it is still obligated to seek quotes from at least two firms that do that type of repair. Competitive bidding is more time-consuming than obtaining quotes.

Meanwhile, the board also authorized the district to create specifications for competitive bidding for other repairs to the landmark.

Williams commended Edwards, Day and board member Jim Lowe, associate vice president for facilities at Ball State University, for spearheading repairs to the unusable building, which remains exposed to the elements.

The quotes are for structural repairs to the truss decking, roof, the parapet wall (along the roof) that fell over, a fire service line that was damaged and caused the greatest...
amount of water damage, and perhaps a few seats damaged by the collapse of the limestone, Lowe said.

Jim Lowe answers preset questions during a candidate public forum at Central High School on June 12. Some of the twenty candidates will eventually make up the new MCS school board and were selected from a pool of over 80. (Photo: Corey Ohlenkamp/Star Press)

Competitive bids will be sought for the flooring work, for demolition of the ceiling that was damaged in the west lobby and for work on lockerrooms that might have taken on water. The ceiling in the west lobby "may just stay out," Lowe said. "We were talking about, give it a rustic look in there, not put the ceiling back."

It would require an "aggressive" schedule, "but I think we can do this in three months or so," Lowe said. "With any luck, we can get this done in the next three to four months."

That would bring the Fieldhouse back to the "usable point," Williams said. There is some discussion in the community about improving the Fieldhouse after the repairs. To restore the building to a condition envisioned by many people would require "private participation at a significant level," Williams said.

The school district already has received an insurance settlement of about $900,000 to repair the damage, and it will receive another $340,000 once repairs start.

In an interview on Wednesday, Williams, the emergency manager, said, "Wouldn't it be great to have the Community Christmas Sing there this year? But that's really very speculative right now. I hope we can get it done for basketball season and it would be great if we can get it done in time for the Christmas Sing."

The east bleachers were deemed unsafe to use even before the storm. "Step one will be to get the Fieldhouse back to where it was before the storm damage," Edwards said. That's all that insurance will fund.

Under a new state law, Ball State took over governance of the financially recovering school district effective July 1, appointing a seven-member board to replace the five-member elected board.

►Rain still seeping into Fieldhouse

►Inside the Fieldhouse after the storm