

## BUS BARN: Middle school projects are district priority

*Continued from page 1*

of the transportation facility project drew pushback from citizens as to its location, design, and cost.

The District's Bond Oversight Committee, which is charged with overseeing the investment of the bond money to ensure delivery of the \$10.7 promises, is also monitoring the \$4 million state grant expenditures.

On the list of bond capital projects were four expenditures for the existing bus barn at the elementary school totaling \$58,875. Those included adding security cameras to the bus fleet, upgrading exterior lighting, parking and access road improvements, and upgrading security systems.

With the additional funds available from the state grant, creating a new transportation facility with shop classrooms and storage, located on what will eventually become the complete educational campus (including all three schools, transportation facilities, and administrative offices) seemed like a possibility. The four projects slated on the bond capital projects list were put on hold. The school board approved the \$1.5 million project, and design work began.

Now the project is on hold and the Bond Oversight Committee is forwarding to the school board a list of recommended strategic additions to the capital projects list. The \$4 million grant is enhanced by another \$1 million that was realized from favorable market timing and interest earned. The oversight committee is recommending to the school board that \$1 million be put into a reserve

fund for future needs so the District can eliminate having to defer maintenance, a problem that is endemic in school districts statewide.

Some \$800,000 would go toward strategic project additions in all of the facilities to add to the lifespan of the buildings. That would leave \$3.2 million not yet allocated.

Phase 1 capital projects at the elementary and high schools plus the athletic

**“We want community engagement and input – Jay Wilkins”**

facilities are completed. The work at the middle school is going out for bid now with work beginning in February 2018. The 26-year-old building has many areas that need repair, upgrading, and reorganization to re-task space, increase security, better serve new educational models, and enhance the student experience.

A portion of the state grant money will allow for projects to be done completely rather than applying “band-aids,” as well as taking care of unexpected issues that arise as projects begin and unforeseen problems are uncovered.

Project leader Bret Hudson told the oversight committee that if all the strategic projects are fully completed at the middle school, the building would be good for years to come.

The Bond Oversight Committee is charged with being sure the District is delivering what was promised when the voters approved the \$10.7 million bond. They will “use strategic allocation of some of the extra funds based on discovery, team feedback, and other

opportunities that allow the School District to maximize return on the original bond intent.”

Their charge for the \$4 million grant opportunities is to be sure the District invests wisely. Their plan has included early exploration of previously and newly identified opportunities.

While they are “pumping the brakes,” as the District describes it, through this winter, a number of activities and projects will take place. The middle school construction will begin. The District will celebrate and share with the community what has been done with the \$10.7 million, including strategic additions. With the aid of a third-party facilitator, a mission and vision exercise will be completed so as to inform the District's direction for future investment opportunities.

Additionally, there will be an ongoing review of the centralized campus strategy as per the long-term plan for the District. There are plans to incorporate an enhanced community input process. There will be continued due diligence on project opportunities where appropriate.

The Board Oversight Committee is made up of several school board members, including chairman Jay Wilkins, who is also chairman of the oversight committee, project leadership that oversees the capital projects being undertaken, and community members. The school board made the appointments.

The meetings of both the oversight committee and the school board are open to the public. At the meeting last week, the oversight committee welcomed seven members of the public and invited comment from the visitors.

“We want community engagement and input,” said Wilkins.

## Superintendent weighs in on bus barn

By Sue Stafford  
Correspondent

When questioned about why the Sisters School District decided to “pump the brakes” on the proposed transportation facility (*see related story, page 1*), Sisters School Superintendent Curt Scholl remarked, “Our intent has always been that, until we know the total costs of the work on the middle school, we are not moving forward on other projects.”

According to Scholl, “Our first commitment is to finish these projects” (the ones outlined in the capital projects list).

The transportation facility was the last project removed from the list originally created for the earlier school bond that was defeated. Items

were trimmed to bring down the amount of the bond to an overall price tag of \$10.7 million.

Scholl pointed out that with “rejecting the bids of contractors” on the transportation facility, there is now an opportunity to open up dialog about the location and design of the transportation facility and do a thorough cost analysis.

“It's never a good design when people travel across a parking lot,” Scholl said of the proposed placement of the facility in the student parking lot at the high school.

During the mission and vision process being undertaken by the District this winter, Scholl reported that the combined educational campus concept would be part of the dialogue.

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