

New Vernonia School Could Lack Some Facilities *continued from front page*

According to Cox construction is now scheduled to be completed on June 8, 2012. The District intends to begin moving into the building during the last week of June and expects to have the building ready for occupancy on August 1.

But that doesn't mean the building will be complete when it opens.

Cox and chief fundraiser John Donovan of Metropolitan Group, along with the help of project contractors, have developed a list of items, totaling just over \$1 million, that would not hinder the school district from holding classes in the fall. In his effort to manage the budget and cash flow, Cox has identified several key components of the construction project that could be postponed until additional funding can be obtained.

"We don't believe these are cuts, these are things that are not mandatory in taking occupancy of the building and operating the school," says the Metropolitan Group's Donovan.

Among that list of items that are currently postponed: installation of lockers in the hallways and locker rooms, purchase and installation of a sound system and stage curtain, completion of the large gymnasium and wrestling room (the building has two gymnasiums—one large and one small), purchase and installation of projector screens and mounts, and purchase and installation of solar panels on the roof.

Cox, ever the optimist, is calling this list of postponed items the "School

Construction Donation Funding Options." He and Donovan intend to use this list to target potential donors for the project. "We're looking to go find funding for these specific items," says Cox. "It is our intent to finish the big gym and most of the rest of these construction items beginning July 1 of this year, but that is contingent upon funding."

Donovan agrees that he sees this as an opportunity. "They are opportunities for us to identify areas to focus donor's attention on specific needs and, if

as well as an ongoing campaign for \$1 million that targets the timber industry. Donovan also says his group is targeting requests to key prospects for over \$6 million. He also says there is almost \$7 million in state and federal funding they are still pursuing. "That gives you a sense of the landscape we are working in to try to bring in the last \$3 million," says Donovan.

Metropolitan Group was hired by the VSD to help facilitate fundraising and has a four year contract for \$780,000

and wrestling room presents another challenge and carries a \$91,000 price tag. Cox says the small gym, which will have the floor from the existing VHS gym, will be completed as part of the initial construction and would be adequate to host high school sporting events if absolutely necessary.

Other items on the postponed list include: installation of non-mandatory sidewalks, installation of inside light shelves, installation of a final asphalt paving lift on the entire parking area, and purchase and installation of the high school science classroom fume hood.

Cox and Donovan are researching the potential of having community volunteers assist with some of the construction projects that need to be completed. "There are some questions we still have to answer before we can put out an invitation to the community," says Donovan.

The removal of the proposed

Vernonia Rural Sustainability Center (VRSC) from the scope of the project has created some challenges. The VRSC, initially planned as part of the campus, was originally budgeted at \$3.3 million and would have housed two science labs, the district administration offices, shop and drafting class facilities and art class facilities. With the removal of the VRSC from the project, art and drafting rooms have been moved into the new main school building. The Administration office will be located in a house the district owns that is on the school property. Shop classes will continue, although they may not have a permanent home initially. Cox says he is researching some options for the shop equipment that include use of a barn on the home site where the Admin office will be.

Cox notes that changes in the design of the building has driven costs of the project higher as the elements have changed during planning and construction.

Cox insists that he believes the funding can be found to complete the project and finish the school in the near future. He also says he believes the VSD could see additional revenue in the future which could be used to expand facilities. An increase in student enrollment would lead to increased funding from the state. Substantial savings in operations once the building is open, because of green technologies that have been included in the building design and construction, will also benefit the annual budget. "There are a lot of things that could happen here," says Cox.

Cox remains firm in his belief that the VSD has embarked on a great project that will be a benefit to the community for many years to come. "I strongly believe we are building a high quality building that will still be here in the year 2100 and it will still look good and we will still be proud of it."



Light colored wood paneling surrounds the terra cotta panels in the library of the new Vernonia school. The artwork was removed from the facade of Washington Grade School and recently installed in the new building.

necessary, to work with donors even after the school is technically open."

Donovan says that the capital campaign committee has pending requests of \$500,000 to individual major donors, corporations, and foundations

with the district that extends through 2013.

Cox says he believes Metropolitan Group has been an excellent investment for the VSD. "We certainly wouldn't be where we are today without them," says Cox. "They've helped us at every step along the way and their expertise and contacts have been instrumental in moving us forward."

Part of the \$37 million that has already been committed to the project includes a federally subsidized Quality Schools Construction Bond loan for \$3.4 million that the VSD obtained as bridge funding during construction. Right now the VSD has seventeen years to repay this loan at just over \$200,000 per year. Repayment comes out of the state school fund the district receives each year, and directly affects the VSD operating budget. The Vernonia Education Foundation, which has been fundraising for the new school, has reimbursed the VSD for the loan repayment for the last two years. Donovan says he hopes to pay off that loan eventually through his additional fundraising.

In addition, the \$37 million dollars raised so far includes \$4 million that the state of Oregon recently made available to the Vernonia School project. Those funds are still in the process of being transferred to the project, and Cox is still unsure how that money will arrive. He says right now it appears it will be a grant that will be added to the \$11.2 million in FEMA funds the VSD received from the buyout of the current school site.

The list of projects that have been postponed until July, or that will be "phased in" as Donovan likes to say, could be disconcerting to the Vernonia community. Cox says the lockers have already been purchased and are on site. He has attached a \$21,000 price tag that is needed in funding to have them installed. The completion of the large gym

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