

WGS and VHS – Fix them or junk them?

By Schann Nelson

Last month, the Vernonia School District's long range facilities planning committee met with the public to begin a visioning process and to establish goals for the facilities of the school district. A second town hall meeting will be held next month to give the public the opportunity to evaluate proposals. Tours of the current facilities will be conducted April 27 and again in May.

What follows is a very brief summary of the committee's work and reasoning to date.

Beginning ten years ago, in 1995, the Vernonia School district has made three attempts to develop a long-range facilities plan for the district. The first plan, completed just prior to the flood of 1996, did not meet the needs of the district following the flood devastation. The second plan resulted in a bond election for \$14.9 million, which failed in November 2001 by slightly over 200 votes with a 60 percent voter turn out.

The long range planning process begins by studying current conditions. Facilities are already over capacity, with enrollment projected to grow as the population increases. Educational program needs include, but are not limited to, small meeting rooms for a variety of uses, storage space, gym space, ability to integrate technology, and space for staff and students to use informally, as in a commons area.

A comprehensive review of

the current facilities' physical condition does not present a good picture. Over the last six years several engineering firms have provided the district with evaluations of the structural, electrical and mechanical (heating, plumbing, air quality) conditions, as well as estimated costs to "bring the buildings up to code."

Washington Grade School was built in the early 1930s, when only vertical load, as from snow, was included in the design. Consideration of the impact of high wind or earthquake was not included in design specifications until much later. Current design requires that public and private buildings are resistant to both vertical and horizontal load, i.e. earthquakes, with bracing techniques developed by studying structures that have collapsed.

Each of the engineering studies concluded that Washington Grade School (WGS) and Vernonia High School (VHS) would fair poorly in the event of a significant earthquake. While no building can yet be designed to be "earthquake proof," buildings can be designed, or retrofitted, to remain standing long enough for people to get out. It is likely that WGS would be damaged beyond repair, even with earthquake mitigation. The problem arises when comparing the cost of these improvements — which will not improve the educational capacity of the school — to the cost of a new building

that meets the needs of a modern school.

The cost issue becomes more complicated when mechanical and electrical systems are evaluated. Obviously, more efficient lighting and heating will result in significant savings. Improvements in these areas could have a profound effect on the well-being of students and staff, facilitating an educational environment appropriate for the twenty-first century.

Schools today rarely have the self-contained classroom that was the standard in education for decades. Research has shown, and new building design reflects, that a more real-world environment improves learning. Classroom space is built with the intention of being flexible, permitting the available space to function in a variety of

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Sign up now for 06/07 Head Start

Vernonia Head Start, a federally funded pre-school program, is seeking students for the 2006/2007 school year. Applications will be accepted for children ages 3 to 4 years old. The U.S. Dept. of Agriculture (USDA) and the State of Oregon prohibit discrimination in all

USDA programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age or disability.

Vernonia Head Start is located at 500 California Avenue. Applications can be picked up there, or call 503-429-9243 for more information.

\$500 prize for winning teen essay

Vernonia High School students with a sense of history may want to enter the annual essay contest sponsored by the Oregon State Bar New Lawyers Division.

This year's topic addresses a newly proposed random drug testing policy at the fictional Mud Duck School District. All students participating in after-school programs could be tested, and barred from participation for the full year if positive.

The school will not pay for secondary tests to confirm test results. Students testing positive will have to deliver speeches on the drug use to the student body to be considered eligible for extra-curricular activities the following school year.

The New Lawyers Division provides legal research materials, including an actual case from Oregon's Vernonia School District that went to the U.S. Supreme Court in 1995. Justice Antonin Scalia wrote the majority opinion in 1995, and Justice Sandra Day O'Connor wrote the dissent. Students are asked to write a persuasive essay ar-

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Grants now available for part-time

For the first time ever, part-time community college students are eligible for the Oregon Opportunity Grant.

Last fall, Gov. Ted Kulongoski signed the \$77.8 million Oregon Opportunity Grant, the largest need-based financial aid package in Oregon history. The money goes to qualified full-time students during the current biennium and, beginning this year, eligible part-time (taking a minimum of six credits) students will qualify for these funds as well.

Full-time and part-time students who plan to enroll at PCC for fall term 2006 should:

1) Visit the Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) Web site located at <http://www.fafsa.ed.gov/fafsaws67bw.pdf>.

2) Complete the form and submit it to the Central Processing Center (U.S. Depart-

ment of Education) as directed online.

3) PCC downloads the FAFSA records directly from the Central Processing Center and will then notify students via letter whether or not they have received an Oregon Opportunity Grant.

Eligibility is based on a financial need formula through the Oregon Student Assistance Commission. The Oregon Opportunity Grant will support an additional 20,000 students statewide during the next biennium. More financial aid translates to more students taking advantage of programs and courses offered at state community colleges.

To contact PCC Financial Aid office, go to www.pcc.edu/pcc/fin/, or call 503-978-5291.

47J seeks Site Council help

Vernonia Middle School (VMS) is looking for community members and parents to be involved with the school Site Council. Site Council is an advisory body composed of community members, teachers, classified staff and administrators that is mandated by Oregon law.

The Council is responsible for staff development, improving instruction and administering grants-in-aid.

The Council is currently seeking applicants to serve on the VMS and WGS (Washington Grade School) council. Applications are available in the Middle School office, or call Nate Underwood at 503-429-0847 for more information.

Review 2006-07 VMS art classes

Vernonia Middle School is in the process of adopting art curriculum for the 2006-07 school year.

For information on where you may review materials, call Nate Underwood at 503-429-0487.

Pet of the Month

Columbia Humane Society in St. Helens has a variety of wonderful pets available for adoption. Find the pet that's right for you in the shelter at 2084 Oregon St. Monday through Saturday, 11 am. to 5 pm. 503-397-4353



Smokey is a beautiful Russian Blue mix. He has striking gold eyes. He is very sweet and loving, but a little shy at first. He loves to hide and sleep under blankets. His cage always looks empty because he is hiding under his blankets. He is used to being an indoor cat. Smokey is also polydactyl, meaning he has extra toes.

The Columbia Humane Society is a No-Kill non-profit shelter dedicated to helping friends find each other since 1985.

The Pet of the Month is Sponsored by:

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