

Facilities Committee tells school board "Tear down high school"

The Banks School District Facilities Planning Committee presented their findings to the board of directors during a work session before the board meeting on February 12.

The committee recommends razing the high school and the older portions of the junior high, including the portables. They would like to see an addition to the remaining portion of the junior high school and construction of a new high school that would encompass other uses and be a community learning center. Other uses could include a public library, police services, medical facility, day care or preschool center, community auditorium, senior center or recreational building.

Committee Co-chairman Ryan Birr explained that committee members had come with all different ideas, started from scratch and "come up with a full idea that we pretty unanimously agreed on."

Co-chairman Pete Edison said that a turning point for the committee was a tour of existing facilities. After that, he said, no one could see sinking \$2-3 million into the buildings. Member Lynda Goovaerts said one thing that really swayed her was finding that a class at the junior high is held in a former

restroom. The high school and the junior high both have significant health and safety issues, in addition to lacking enough room. Mechanical and fire systems are not adequate. The design of the high school makes it very difficult to secure. Birr added that the architect had said that the older part of the junior high was built at a time when construction materials were inferior and unsafe, and that it was easier to tear it down than to renovate it.

The board expressed concern about a lack of space for sports facilities since the plan shows new buildings on the existing practice football field and some of the existing baseball and softball fields. Edison explained that the plan would necessitate installing a turf field for football. Currently, the football field is used primarily for high school games. A turf field would stand up to use for practice, games, and P.E. Edison also stressed that the district needs to buy any adjacent lands as they become available for sale. The plan also recommends moving baseball and softball to another location.

A key consideration for the committee was keeping the school buildings together and centrally located in the commu-

nity. Vicky VanDomelen said, "We are a unique community and we have the opportunity to keep it all together." She commented on how it fosters communication between schools and the community when people are able to visit and use the facilities.

Another consideration in having more uses in the building is cost. For example, the library needs to move to a new location soon and could share in the upfront construction costs and, more significantly, in the ongoing operating costs of a shared library. Daycare facilities and other uses would be fee-based and could offset other operating costs for the district.

The committee viewed their work as a first step and did not delve deeply into funding options. However, they included a recommendation for the district's next step: organize another facilities planning committee to begin refining project details. This group would be an official Banks School Board Committee and would include an appointed or hired Community Partnership Liaison. They also recommended that the district contract with a bond consultant, a program manager and a design consultant for pre-bond planning. Rough esti-

mates are that the district could get most of what it needs for around \$30 million.

Birr said that the district has \$10,000 invested now, plus hundreds of volunteer hours by the committee, and hoped the board could maintain the momentum. "I'm hearing how excited people are about these ideas...it seems to be gaining some real momentum now," he said.

The committee also talked about how important it was for the safety and security of the students to improve traffic circulation. By purchasing land on Oak Way, the district could establish a separate entrance for buses at the elementary school. The proposed location of the high school would also facilitate traffic at that location.

At the board meeting, directors reviewed the district's annual audit report with Forrest Arnold, of Jones and Roth. He said that the district had received a clear opinion with no qualifications.

The board also approved the agreement with Northwest Regional Educational Services District for services to be provided in 2007-08, as well as the extension of certified contracts for all teachers and the elementary principal.

Sixth grade teacher Sena Wilmoth made a presentation on what she had been doing with the Talented and Gifted program. When funding was established last summer to de-

velop resources and materials for a TAG program, her first step was to shadow a TAG coordinator in McMinnville. She learned that what the district needed to focus on was differentiated teaching. This means adapting mainstream lessons so that they are appropriate for both higher and lower level learners. She purchased flip books for all of the teachers to help them adapt lessons and accommodate all students. She had also planned to use the funding to provide an in-service day of instruction on TAG methods, but all of the in-service days had already been scheduled. She plans to do this next school year instead.

She said that her personal belief is that the school is only as good as the TAG program, because allowing these students to reach their full potential establishes them as role models for other students and "raises the bar overall." She added that her philosophy was not to work TAG students more, but to encourage them toward deeper thought and learning. She hopes that the district will be able to establish a stipend for a TAG coordinator at the elementary school level.

As part of the consent agenda, the board approved an adjusted 2006-07 calendar which adds two days to the end of the school year to make up for weather closure days. Students will now attend class through Friday, June 15.

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