

Banks school board continues discussion of possible bond

The primary focus of the Banks school board, at present, is gathering information in preparation for putting a bond before the public in November. The centerpiece of this effort to date, the Facilities Planning Committee 3 (FPC3), gave their final report at the regular board meeting March 8, where the public was conspicuous by their absence. However, the March 10 meeting of the Blue Ribbon panel assembled by Superintendent Jim Foster was well attended by the invited members of the panel and a smattering of patrons.

Board chair and delegate to FPC3 Will Moore's opening remarks to the panel of community members explained the boards commitment to discovering what facility improvements district property holders are willing to support. He apologized for the short time period that the board is giving the committee for review of the material; the panel will meet again March 17 to offer their conclusions. Moore explained that the board would like to have input from the panel before finalizing questions for a community phone survey scheduled for late March. He concluded by saying that the board would make a final decision about a bond proposal in May.

Working from a tightly scripted two-hour agenda, FPC3 chairman Pete Edison led the panel through a brief overview of the written material furnished to members of the panel before introducing FPC3 member Ron Frame. Frame gave a brief summary of the history and condition of each of the four instructional buildings currently in use. All four buildings have significant deficiencies in architectural, structural, mechanical and electrical areas, and because of their age, all of the building have poor insulation and need significant seismic renovations. The junior high received a very poor seismic vulnerability rating. Accessibility is an issue throughout the high school, which is a series of connected buildings with construction dates beginning in the 1920s, and additions in the 1930s, 1959, 1967, 1969 and 1976; it also has inadequate plumbing. Frame told the panel that complete system-by-system evaluations of each building, with supporting documentation, is included in the FPC3 final report.

District business manager Simon Levear gave a brief presentation to the panel about the financial impact of a 2010 bond, explaining that the district's long term debt had been

greatly reduced by refinancing previous bonds in the last two years. Bond interest rates, which are included in repayment costs, are the lowest they have been in 25 years according to Levear. The district currently levies approximately \$2/thousand, with all current bonded debt expiring in about five years. Because the district has great flexibility in how long term debt is structured, most of the bonded debt the district would incur by passing a bond in November would not be scheduled for repayment until after other bonds are paid. This allows the district to keep the total amount levied each year to a minimum.

Qualified School Construction Bond funds, part of the federal stimulus package, were a significant motivation for the board to start the process. The district must pass a bond and have a "shovel ready" project before the end of 2010. Any government grant or interest savings would reduce the district's debt and therefore the amount the district is required to levy. No federal funding is assumed in any of the options offered.

The proposed bond amounts begin at approximately the same dollar amount as the previous bond attempt in 2008 with

option A. However, lower interest rates on bonds and lower construction costs make it possible for this \$25 million to cover more significantly greater improvements to campus facilities than contemplated in 2008. Option B covers the middle ground while options C1 and C2 are based on a budget of about \$35 million with an estimated levy increase of \$1.50/thousand. The total estimated levy for all options would remain below \$4/thousand. The voter rejected 2008 levy would have required a levy amount in excess of \$4/thousand.

Rick Rainone of Cornerstone Management Group has worked with FPC3 from the beginning to "make sure that the scope [what is wanted] is adequately budgeted." He told the panel that his firm has made accurate projections of costs for the fifteen districts they have worked with. He also said that public construction costs are significantly higher than, and not comparable to, private construction costs. Rainone explained that his figures are based on the total amount of new square feet included, plus renovation, replacement and other costs. Improvement of traffic flow at the elementary is included in all options as a part of site improvements.

Option A: The basic package includes:

Junior High: 17 new classrooms including science, computer and special education rooms, new library, administration and staff areas, new gym, new restrooms and renovation and enlargement of cafeteria/stage and locker

rooms = \$9.4 million

High School: 22 new classrooms including science, computer and special education rooms, new library, administration and staff areas with new commons area. The Voc/Ag building would be renovated, the food service equipment replaced and the gymnasium bleachers replaced.

Site Improvements: Demolition costs for junior high and high school, cost of temporary classrooms (six months because of phased construction), new parking lots and soccer field, upgraded heat systems, new site lighting and minimal renovation of existing instructional buildings.

Edison said that a soccer field was included because the program has enjoyed spectacular growth, from its inception a year ago fielding a varsity team, to a full roster of JV and varsity, boys and girls teams.

Total estimated cost of about \$24 million for all of the improvements cited under option A.

Option B includes all of option A plus a new high school kitchen, renovated high school locker rooms, expand junior high gym to full regulation size, auditorium upgrades, new centrally located restroom/storage building and significant improvement to traffic flow at the elementary school for buses, cars and pedestrians. Total estimated costs for option B is about \$27.8 million.

Options A, B and C1 assume the district office building remains intact. Options C1 and C2 have very similar budgets
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