

Board of Education Meeting, December 13, 2004

Questions & Answers

Q: What is the existing debt?

A: The bonds originally sold for the additions at Ridge High School, William Annin Middle School, Oak Street, Liberty Corner, and Cedar Hill Schools, and the construction of Mount Prospect School were refinanced in 2002 and 2004, at a term savings of \$1.8 million. The total amount of debt as of December 31, 2004 is \$64,559,226 and runs through the 2022-23 school year. The total principal remaining is \$42,565,000, with an additional \$21,994,226 of interest payments. New bonds are scheduled so that debt remains fixed, preventing spikes in the tax rate in any given year over the term of the bonds.

Q: What is the likelihood that additional funding will be available for the elementary schools after the Board's discussions at the January 10th meeting?

A: The Board will be reviewing plans needed to address enrollment growth in those schools. At a minimum, it is anticipated that an addition will be needed at Annin.

Q: Has the district looked at the possibility of building a new high school at another location in the township and at expanding William Annin Middle School?

A: A new 300,000 square foot high school would cost approximately \$85 million dollars in addition to the cost of a minimum of 100 acres. The district does not believe that there is available space in the township for the construction of a new high school complex. The current building services our programs very well, but will not house the potential enrollment of 1,750 – 1,850 students in 6 years. The Board has reviewed the expansion needs of the Middle School and will discuss the plans at the January 10th meeting.

Q: Will the State have flexibility or discretion in adjusting the amount of State Aid for construction? Will the Board adjust the cost of the project after receiving the State's notice on funding?

A: The State follows a strict funding formula based on \$143 per square foot of what they consider as eligible costs. The district estimates that it will receive approximately 20% to 21% in State Aid for the project, offsetting the amount necessary to be raised from taxes.

Q: Has the Board considered other options besides moving the pre-school program to the high school?

A: Yes. Other options are under study and will be presented on January 10. The district is also considering establishing an early childhood development program for high school students. The high school is the ideal location for this purpose.

Q: How close is the proposed new high school gymnasium to the Cedar Hill School?

A: The new gymnasium will be built on the site of the existing tennis courts.

Q: What effort has been made to rent off-site office space?

A: The issue has been discussed with the Finance Committee. The prospect of renting off-site presents its own set of problems and ongoing annual costs to the taxpayers. The construction cost of 7,000 square feet of office space, at \$175 per square foot for a new, self-standing building is \$1,225,000. This amount bonded over 20 years would total \$1,903,935. As a self-standing administration building, this type of construction does not qualify for any state funding. Renovating existing space into offices does qualify for 40% state funding. At a renovation cost of \$225 per square foot, 7,000 square feet would cost \$1,575,000, minus 40% funding. This results in a net cost of \$945,000 bonded over 20 years, totaling \$1,471,835. The same amount of leased space is approximately \$30 per square foot. Calculating annual rate increases of 3%, the cost of leased space over 20 years is \$5,250,000. Constructing or renovating office space costs approximately \$3.3 - \$3.8 million dollars less than leasing office space.

Q: Will operations and maintenance expenditures including staffing be discussed in January?

A: Operations and maintenance expenditures will be discussed in future budget presentations.

Q: Will alternate traffic patterns on Collyer Lane impact Saint James School?

A: They should not. The district and the Township have had discussions about using the municipal building access road to alleviate traffic at the high school. The starting and ending times for both schools do not coincide with each other.

Q: Did the district consider building a larger gym?

A: The district reviewed gymnasiums sized from 800 to 2000 seats. The footprint of the school accepts 1,200 seats nicely.

Q: Are there cost estimates for the site work at Cedar Hill School?

A: Since discussions about additional parking are ongoing, cost estimates will be finalized at a later date.

Q: Have other considerations been given to alternate designs and locations of the gym and auditorium?

A: Yes. Many discussions have taken place regarding location options for the new additions, auto traffic patterns, separation of activities and cost.

Q: Has the district considered a two-tier parking garage?

A: The concept was reviewed, and proved very costly, estimated at \$12,288,000.

Q: Would the number of students who qualify for physical education exemptions due to their participation in athletics make a new gymnasium unnecessary?

A: No. Student athletes would be exempt from physical education only for the season they participate in the sport, not for the entire school year. The facility burden would be shifted from the gym area to other rooms such as health classrooms and study halls, etc.

Q: What will the educational impact be on programs during construction?

A: The district will not have to alter programs or offerings during construction.

Q: How will the completed additions and renovations impact class size?

A: With the additions and renovations, class size would average 20-21.

Q: How will the capacity figure change after the new additions and renovations are completed?

A: The plan addresses a capacity of approximately 1,750, with contingency plans (converting offices into classrooms) accommodating another 200 students.

Q: Has the Board considered adding an exit onto North Maple Avenue rather than at the municipal building?

A: The option has been discussed many times over the past 10 years. Feasibility and costs are being determined.

Q: Has an expansion to the high school cafeteria been considered?

A: The district believes that the existing cafeteria is adequate and has room for growth.

Q: Is the school district governed by DEP storm water regulations?

A: The district must comply with State and Federal regulations that include accommodations for storm water run-off.

Q: Will there be a line item in the project for temporary classrooms?

A: The district will propose a construction plan that will not require the need for temporary classrooms.

Q: Will there be cost efficiencies because of multiple construction locations?

A: Yes. The district is able to select a construction bidding option for the overall project in order to take advantage of efficiencies and cost saving measures.

Q: Has the district considered talking with the Township regarding sharing costs for the additional shuttle transportation?

A: No. The shuttle that we are considering as an interim aid until an additional access road can be constructed is aimed at relieving the tremendous traffic backlog at the Ridge entrance from 7:00 AM until about 7:30 AM. We propose to establish a few general pick-up spots around the township so that parents could drop off their children, and avoid adding to the traffic at the entrance of the school. The shuttle school buses would operate for approximately 45 minutes, and would be offered free of charge to encourage their use. This is a totally different concept than the jitney idea that has been discussed by the Township Committee.

Q: Has the district considered partnering with the Township to build an auditorium?

A: Township Committee officials attended the December 13, 2004 Board meeting when this issue was raised. The Board will open dialogue with the Township Committee regarding a partnership.

Q: Can the Board demonstrate that the proposed new construction will not have to be demolished to make way for future expansion considerations?

A: Yes. After this phase is completed, the design allows for future additions to be added without demolishing existing structures.

Q: In what time frame will the high school population grow to 1,600?

A: High school enrollment is expected to reach 1,600 students in the 2007/2008 school year.

Q: Has the Board considered a separate 9th grade building in the construction plans?

A: We are not recommending a separate building for the following reasons:

If Built on a Different Campus

- Limits curricular opportunities – core and electives with 10th, 11th, 12th graders
- Additional costs
 - Core facilities – media center, gyms, cafeteria, kitchen
 - Separate administration
 - Personnel issues, e.g. breakage, scheduling
 - Transportation
 - Extracurricular participation

If Built as an Annex

- Same layout as an addition, but limits movement
- Lengthened school day to accommodate distance to class
- Contractual issues

Q: Will the new auditorium be air-conditioned?

A: Yes.

Q: What is being done to address the roadway entrance to Ridge High School?

A: The plan adds additional parking lots and roadways to help separate bus and vehicle traffic. The district and township are also discussing the possibility of connecting a high school roadway with the municipal entrance to Collyer Lane.

Q: Will the high school expansion have an impact on future Cedar Hill School expansion?

A: No. The closest addition will be on the site of the existing tennis courts and will not impact future needs at Cedar Hill.

Q: Does the new construction address efficiencies of mechanical systems to contain utility costs?

A: The new construction will incorporate heating and air-conditioning systems that will be appropriate for the application. Considerations will be given to initial cost as well as on-going maintenance and operating costs.

Q: Why is the district proposing a gymnasium with a 1,200-seat capacity?

A: The new gym will allow for two additional physical education teaching stations to address enrollment growth. Currently, 2 physical education classes have 354 students in 4 teaching stations. The seating capacity will facilitate large student assemblies, indoor graduations in the event of inclement weather and the ability to hold simultaneous athletic contests. During the winter season, teams are 'stacked' in game time schedules. Girls and boys' freshman, JV, and varsity basketball teams, fencing, and wrestling, compete for limited gym time.

Q: Has the district considered merging the auditorium and gymnasium?

A: No. That type of a facility is not feasible at the high school level because the needs and requirements are very different. Considerations must be given to acoustics, seating, lighting and specifically designed sound systems. A combined facility would also limit the district's ability to schedule simultaneous events. Students practicing for a musical on the stage would be drowned out by the sound of fans at a varsity basketball game.

Q: To what extent has distance learning been considered?

A: At the present time, students have the ability to take advantage of on-line/in-house coursework in courses that meet the New Jersey Department of Education's Core Curriculum Content Standards. To date, a few students have also enrolled in local college courses.

Q: What if the enrollment exceeds the current projections? Will we have to build again?

A: The current plan proposes to convert the existing auditorium into offices for the guidance department, special education Child Study Teams, business office, curriculum office, human resources, and Board of Education. These will be interior rooms, without windows, so this area is not ideal for classroom space. However, if enrollment exceeds the projection, these offices could be easily converted to classroom space, providing additional flexibility for the future.

Q: What is the existing and proposed square footage of Ridge High School?

A: Existing square footage is 210,078 square feet. An additional 137,250 square feet would result in a total square footage of 347,328 square feet.

Q: As a matter of process where do we go from here?

A: The Board will be reviewing recommendations aimed at addressing elementary and middle school needs at the January 10th meeting. There will be opportunity for public input on all K-12 plans throughout the January and February Board meetings. To be able to provide a September referendum, general plans and educational specifications must be submitted to the state by early March. Once a district has held a successful referendum, the district then prepares detailed construction documents.