

District Facilities Steering Committee Report, June 2014

To: The Scarsdale Board of Education
From: District Facilities Steering Committee
Date: June 4, 2014

INTRODUCTION

The District Facilities Steering Committee (the "Committee") was appointed by the Scarsdale Board of Education on November 4, 2013 (appointment amended December 5, 2013) and given the task of reviewing plans for a possible capital project initiative in 2014.

The Committee is comprised of eleven community residents, two principals, three teachers, two High School students, and two members of the Board of Education. The District's Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent for Business and Facilities, the Board President, the District's Director of Facilities and its public information officer attended to provide information and support as needed.

The Committee was provided with a recent history of capital construction in the District. Over \$90 million of construction was done in the early 2000s to address enrollment and infrastructure needs. Absorbing new debt service into the budget at that time caused significant spikes in spending that, while supported by the community in annual budget votes, were clearly not desirable for taxpayers.

The following information was provided to the Committee:

1. The current interest rate environment provides an opportunity to fund needed capital construction at historically low borrowing costs.
2. Borrowing is the correct way to fund large capital projects, as it spreads the cost over many years, thus matching the benefits derived from the construction with the cost to taxpayers.
3. In fiscal year 2015-16, debt service drops from \$6.3 million to \$4.8 million, a decrease of \$1.5 million annually
4. In fiscal year 2018-19, debt service drops from \$5.5 million to \$765,000, a decrease of \$4.7 million annually
5. In planning capital construction, it is desirable to take advantage of opportunities presented by retiring debt: new debt can be added without increasing tax burden attributable to debt service.
6. If the community were to support a capital construction plan of approximately \$18,000,000, with the first payment scheduled in the 2015-16 fiscal year, there would be no increase in tax burden.

The Committee received descriptions, diagrams and the educational rationale for a list of proposed projects that came from the building-level committees at the High School, Middle School, Edgewood and Heathcote Schools. We also received information on additional infrastructure needs that were either beyond the knowledge base of a building-level committee, or district-wide in nature.

The District's architects (KG & D of Mt. Kisco, New York) attended all committee meetings. The firm's president, Russ Davidson, led the discussion of the projects. The architects reviewed the options discussed with the building level committees and provided budget development costs for each project.

District Facilities Steering Committee Report, June 2014

A subcommittee of two of our member with engineering expertise met separately with the architects to review the assigned costs. Based on this conversation, the architects revised the estimates, and provided a more detailed cost estimate for the Fitness Center relocation. These revised estimates are shown next to each project; they include all costs, such as architects' and construction management fees, site development, testing, and allowances for equipment and furniture (except for the Fitness Center, where the equipment is being donated.)

Process Overview

The principals of all schools except Quaker Ridge were asked by the District administration to convene a building-level facilities committee for their schools, with teacher, parent, and in the case of the High School, student representation. The building-level committees were asked to identify facilities issues that were impacting health, safety, or educational program within their building. The Directors of Technology and Facilities were also asked to identify infrastructure needs.

Quaker Ridge was given a major update and a new wing following a successful bond referendum in 2005. The Committee relies on the administration's representation that there are no major issues that need to be addressed in that building.

The building-level committees at Edgewood, Heathcote, the Middle School and the High School have recommended capital improvements that address issues that have long affected their buildings' operation. The technology and facilities staff have proposed items that are ideally done through a capital program, but that will, in the next few years, have to be done from the annual budget if the Board does not proceed with the referendum. Fourteen projects were identified through this process and referred to this committee:

1. Edgewood School: library and office reconfiguration
2. Heathcote School: multipurpose/lunch space
3. Middle School: Multipurpose/music space
4. High School: Dining/collaborative work space (Learning Commons, part 1)
5. High School: Design Lab/Maker Space (Learning Commons, part 2)
6. High School: Fitness center
7. High School: Little Theater renovation
8. High School: Conversion of existing space to science research space
9. High School: Adding smaller multipurpose spaces throughout the building
10. Quaker Ridge: EPDM roof replacement
11. Technology infrastructure rebuild
12. Dean Field renovations (HS)
13. Greenacres field renovations
14. Fox Meadow field renovations

The Board of Education has also commissioned the development of a Master Plan for the High School that will identify additional needs. We understand that the aforementioned projects have the highest

District Facilities Steering Committee Report, June 2014

priority for the building. We understand that this plan is still actively in process and will be available within the next two months, although a date has not been set.

Greenacres School

After touring Greenacres and meeting with that building-level committee, the architects advised the Committee that the issues presented by that facility were significant and complex. Addressing them appropriately would require funds far in excess of the amount contemplated for this bond referendum. Further, the building could not be expanded on its current site because its footprint already exceeded the state's guidelines.

Mr. Davidson suggested that the appropriate next step for Greenacres was a detailed study to identify problems and possible remedies, including both renovation of the existing building and the possible construction of a replacement building across the street. The Committee agreed with the recommendation, which has been conveyed to the Board of Education.

Update: On June 9, the Board of Education approved funding for a Greenacres study. In addition to the evaluation conducted by the construction professionals, the study will involve conversations with all of the Greenacres school community stakeholders. The investigation will begin in the summer of 2014 and continue for 6-12 months.

THE PROJECTS

District-wide Technology Infrastructure

\$1,400,000

The Committee was advised that the District's technology network infrastructure is over a decade old and components are beginning to fail. In order to provide a reliable backbone for the expanding technology use in the District, major portions of the infrastructure must be replaced and updated. The Committee agreed that the rationale for this project is strong and that it merits consideration by the Board of Education for inclusion in a possible bond referendum.

Quaker Ridge EPDM Roof Replacement

\$ 908,000

The Committee was advised that the flat roof on the older part of the building has significantly outlived its useful life. Despite careful maintenance, it has begun to fail and must be replaced. The Committee agreed that that rationale for this project is strong and that it merits consideration by the Board of Education for inclusion in a possible bond referendum.

High School Learning Commons

Part I Dining and Collaborative Learning Spaces

\$5,175,000

The Committee was advised that the High School has inadequate kitchen, food service and dining space for students. The current cafeteria holds only 410 students, and a seating area outside can hold another 60, for a total of 470 students. With two lunch periods, seating capacity is about 940 students, while the school's enrollment will remain above 1,400 for the foreseeable future. Although the "open campus" policy means that upperclassmen frequently leave for lunch, the seating is inadequate by approximately 200-250 students per period. This year, freshmen have been asked to eat in a temporary cafeteria set

District Facilities Steering Committee Report, June 2014

up in gyms A/B. Just as seating capacity is inadequate, food preparation space is severely limited and impacts the availability of food for students, especially in the second lunch period. Students must select and pay for food in the lunch time slot of 25 minutes.

The Committee was also advised that the building also lacks flexible instructional space and areas where students can work independently by themselves or in small groups. The library is routinely overcrowded, as students are using it for group work and socializing, rather than allowing it to remain a place of quiet study.

The solution is to develop an underused area of the High School surrounding Gym A/B. Half of the gym will be converted to a large group dining/work space (independent and collaborative) and small breakout rooms, while the other half will remain a physical education station. A mezzanine above, accessible by stairs from the main floor, will connect directly to the library and provide quieter work space either for students working individually or in small groups. A large instructional space directly behind the dining area, to be labeled the "Innovation Lab," or I-Lab, will house 2-3 classes of students at a time. The space will be equipped with technology, furniture and white boards that can be flexibly grouped and rearranged.

The development of this "I-Lab" requires the relocation of the fitness center that currently occupies it.

The consensus of the Committee is that the rationale provided for this project is strong and that the project merits consideration by the Board of Education for inclusion in a possible bond referendum.

Part II The Design Lab/"Maker Space"

\$2,483,000

The Committee was advised that with the end of "shop" classes many years ago, there is currently no space in the High School for students to build and proto-type their ideas. Located in the former "Auto Shop," this space will have a large central area for group work, and glass-walled rooms along the sides where students will be able to use tools, 3-D printers, and other equipment. The space will be open to a hallway that is adjacent to a courtyard that provides natural light.

Some classes such as architecture and physics will make immediate use of this space. The High School faculty and administration have begun discussing a STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics) curriculum strand; work will begin in earnest on this project this summer.

The Committee had many questions about this space, more so than for any other project. There was a diversity of opinion among the members, with some stating that there should be a more formal STEM curriculum in place before construction should proceed. Others felt that the space was already needed in order to support a STEM curriculum as it is being developed.

Relocation of the Fitness Center

\$1,294,000

In order to realize the Learning Commons as the flexible, interrelated, multi-dimensional space described above and to alleviate the associated inadequate kitchen, food service and dining space for students, the current fitness center must be relocated from the rear of gyms A/B. The current location is significantly undersized for that purpose, and in poor condition. Based on new curriculum standards

District Facilities Steering Committee Report, June 2014

put out by the national group that supports physical education activities, the PE curriculum is changing to one that is focused on lifelong fitness rather than skill sports. This curricular transformation requires a facility that is appropriate to the type of instruction being provided. Under the new curriculum, every student will take at least one quarter of fitness-related activity each year.

After exploring multiple locations in the High School, the architects have determined that the best location for the fitness center is an unfinished area beneath the new gym. Approximately 6,200 sq. ft. of unfinished area will be converted into occupied space (this figure includes corridors, closets and access points which must be provided by building code.) Of this, about 5,400 sq. ft. is actual teaching area, compared to the current fitness center area of 2,500 sq. ft.

The center will be able to hold two classes at a time, meaning that the number of physical education teaching stations will actually increase by one, despite the consolidation of Gyms A/B for the Learning Commons. Different equipment and a more accessible location will also address the gender parity issues that have long characterized the current fitness center.

After much discussion, the consensus of the Committee is that the space currently occupied by the fitness center is needed for the Learning Commons, and that the fitness center must be relocated to achieve this goal. The Committee expressed concern about the estimated cost of the relocation, and asked the architect to review the numbers, which has been done. A more detailed estimate based on the actual scope of work involved was developed, and the estimate has been revised downward.

Middle School Music/Multipurpose Space

\$2,535,000

The Committee was advised that during earlier capital construction efforts, a new music room for the Middle School was requested but eliminated because of cost. Since then, the number of students participating in the music program has expanded significantly, exacerbating the space shortage. As a result, the large performing arts groups (band, orchestra, and chorus) must use the auditorium stage as a classroom, which is neither safe nor appropriate. The Committee was invited to tour the Middle School music space and shown a video of the current space constraints.

One option was to add a large room to the north of the auditorium. A second option connected the two separate wings at the bottom of the building (the gym and auditorium wings), with a large music/multipurpose space in the courtyard at the rear of the new corridor. A classroom would be built on either side of the multipurpose space. A third option is similar to the second, but without the added classrooms.

The Middle School building-level committee chose the third option – the connecting corridor and the new multipurpose space in the courtyard, which was the one presented to this Committee. This will not only address the lack of appropriate music space, but also provide a large instructional space for other programs. Closing off the courtyard to unauthorized access with a new interior corridor will improve building security and make it much easier for students and staff to circulate in the building.

District Facilities Steering Committee Report, June 2014

The consensus of the Committee is that the rationale provided for this project is strong and that the project merits consideration by the Board of Education for inclusion in a possible bond referendum. After reviewing the options, some of our members expressed a strong preference for the connecting corridor solution, while others expressed reservations about eliminating the added classrooms. However, the Committee as a whole did not take a position as to which solution was preferred, choosing to defer to the Middle School's own building committee and the Board of Education for that decision.

Edgewood Library and Office Relocation

\$3,560,000

The Committee was advised that the Edgewood school library is undersized and suffers from structural issues. The slab foundation of a prior addition has settled unevenly, the heating and ventilation do not work properly, and there is freezing and flooding in extreme cold weather. The solution is to raze and rebuild the addition, and renovate the remainder of the space.

The school office has a poor line of site to the entrance. To improve building security, the proposal includes relocation of the school office to a new, better-defined entrance. The office will have a clear line of sight to anyone entering the building. The existing office will then require very modest renovations at a later date to be transformed into small group instructional space, and possibly a "Maker Space."

The consensus of the Committee is that the rationale provided for this project is strong and that the project merits consideration by the Board of Education for inclusion in a possible bond referendum. The security consideration prompted the Committee to endorse the relocation of the office.

Heathcote Multi-purpose Space and Small Group Instructional Space

\$3,387,000

The Committee was advised that the Heathcote School has inadequate lunch space, and must use the gym to hold the lunch program. As a result, the gym is unavailable for physical education for 10 periods a week, which compromises the school's ability to provide proper physical education instruction. The solution is a multi-purpose addition to the rear of the building that will improve drop-off and pick-up of students, and will not interfere with the school's notable architecture.

The school also has inadequate space for physical and occupational therapy services. Those services are currently provided on the auditorium stage, which is an inappropriate and public space. (These services should be provided in a confidential setting.) The solution is to build a row of offices along the interior of a courtyard. Most of the courtyard will be preserved, and the new spaces will have natural lighting.

The consensus of the Committee is that the rationale provided for this project is strong and that the project merits consideration by the Board of Education for inclusion in a possible bond referendum.

CONCLUDING STATEMENT

This District Facilities Steering Committee represents the diverse parts of the Scarsdale community. We are younger and older residents from different neighborhoods, people with children in school and people without. We are teachers and we are students. What we share is a common interest in preserving and improving our excellent schools. That is why we agreed to serve.

District Facilities Steering Committee Report, June 2014

After many hours of study and listening, we've reached consensus that there is sound justification for embarking on a capital construction program. The projects discussed above have educational merit, and the Board of Education is justified in considering them for funding. We understand that maturing debt will make it possible to undertake a program of approximately \$18 million without increasing taxpayer burden attributable to debt service.

For these reasons, we recommend that the Board of Education seriously consider moving forward with the recommended projects at this time. The combination of current low interest rates and maturing debt provide a unique opportunity to make needed repairs and improvements at low cost to taxpayers.

To clarify the process that has led to this point: Building-level committees of parents, professional staff and architects, as well as the District's technology and facilities staff, identified the projects that were highest priority in each school. Our Committee was not asked to, and did not participate in this process; we did not take positions on the various options that the building level committees considered; we did not identify the projects or priorities now being proposed for each school, except that we did endorse the Edgewood reconstruction option that includes relocating the office for security reasons. We did question the staff and architects in depth to determine if the proposed solutions appropriately meet the needs the building-level committees identified. Our Committee is satisfied that they do.

We understand that the projects recommended by the building-level committees and the technology and facilities staff represent the major improvements required in the near term. The exceptions are the High School and the Greenacres School. The High School building committee has identified additional needs, but for present purposes, recommended projects that they saw as highest priority for students and staff. We understand that the Board has commissioned a Master Plan for the High School that will be received shortly. We have also recommended that the Board of Education undertake a comprehensive evaluation of the Greenacres building, with a view toward addressing that facility's needs in the near future. We further understand that in 2015, the Board will update its five year facilities plan, which may identify longer-term infrastructure needs such as the replacement of boilers.

A number of added projects, including improvements to the school fields and renovation of the High School's Little Theater, were initially discussed. However, the Superintendent of Schools has not recommended that these projects be included in this referendum for reasons of cost, and our Committee did not consider them.

Finally, we respectfully recommend that the Board stay within the borrowing capacity that will not produce a tax increase for residents.

Respectfully submitted,

The District Facilities Steering Committee

Howard Blitman, Community Representative

Amy Cooper, Community Representative

Jenny Freeman, Community Representative

Ken Bonamo, HS Principal

Michael McDermott, MS Principal

Mitch Crasson, Teacher

District Facilities Steering Committee Report, June 2014

District Facilities Steering committee (cont'd)

Diane Greenwald, Community Representative
Susan Kessler Ross, Community Representative
Jon Libman, Community Representative
Lisa Messinger, Community representative
Jeffrey Osterman, Community Representative
Beth Zadek, Community Representative
Pam Rubin, Community Representative
Scott Silberfein, Community Representative

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