



*"Back to school" recap of what's taken place and what's coming up*

## **Update on the Facilities Task Force and the Referendum on Facilities Needs in 2006**

*August 26 2005. Answers to Your Questions . . . and some Fast Facts*

### ■ When did the facilities study begin?

A major one-year study began in March 2004, by architects and engineers, of the district's mechanical and electrical systems; health, safety, and security; accessibility; technology needs; and academic issues related to facilities.

### ■ What was the next step?

A 28-member citizen-staff Facilities Task Force was formed in January 2005 to visit, study, and review all district sites, prioritize the district's facilities needs, and to give a final report and recommendations to the School Board by December 2005.

### ■ What is the hoped-for result of the final report?

Some school districts ask community members for financial help through referendums every couple of years. District 16's last bond referendum was ten years ago and the one before that was 35 years ago.

In the current effort, the goal of the school district and the task force is to develop a plan that serves students, staff, families, and communities for the next generation. The task force is dedicated to a plan that would be best for educating students well into the future and would also be a fair use of taxpayer dollars.

### ■ Decision-making process

There are still many steps remaining. The task force continues to meet, community meetings will be held throughout the fall, final recommendations will not be completed until December or later; the School Board will then review, accept, or alter the plan and set a date for a referendum. The community will ultimately decide upon the facilities improvement plan by voting on a referendum in February, March, or later in 2006.

### ■ Preliminary update

On June 28, 2005, the School Board heard a preliminary update on the progress of the citizen-staff Facilities Utilization Task Force. Excerpts from this presentation are available on [www.springlakeparkschools.org](http://www.springlakeparkschools.org) the district web site as are numerous other updates including a presentations with dozens of photos illustrating a variety of facility needs.

### ■ Deferred maintenance is the largest need, expense

Task force members spent months reviewing hundreds of pages detailing deferred maintenance projects. "Deferred maintenance" projects are similar to large projects in one's home that are "on the list," need to be done, but often are delayed until resources are available. Within all of District 16's facilities, \$60 million in repairs, renovation, retrofitting and improvements have been identified.

### ■ Why such a large figure?

The reasons are many. They include the age and number of buildings and the vast needs associated with repairing or replacing windows and doors, roofs, parking lots, boilers, and electrical and mechanical systems. Construction costs increase almost ten percent per year.

The last extensive study of facilities needs was almost twelve years ago. At that time, \$60 million in maintenance, repair, renovation, and upgrading needs were identified. Because *that* was such a large figure, a 1993-95 citizen-staff task force significantly whittled away at the list of projects and recommended those addressing only the most critical needs.

This totaled \$28.8 million and, in 1995, voters approved a bond referendum for this amount. At that time, over 100 projects were completed on time and on budget.

Bottom line: a lot of projects were postponed ten years ago. The needs still exist, there are ten more years of needs, and the costs to address them continue to grow.

### ■ Has the District properly maintained its facilities?

The facilities are well-maintained but 50 year-old boilers must be replaced and 35-50 year-old buildings need retrofitting in order to continue to serve student and community needs now and in the future.

"While well-maintained," most buildings "have surpassed their life cycle," according to a Minnesota Department of Education official who toured District facilities.

It has done everything possible to maintain facilities, but within its means. The District takes great pride in the community's facilities and those charged with the task perform their work in top-notch fashion. There has been flat state

funding for four years, 3.5 % annual inflation, and a financial strain for over a decade.

Buildings and Grounds budgets have been frozen for years and the District operates with fewer custodians than it did when there were fewer facilities to maintain. With financial constraints, and a goal of keeping budget cuts away from the classroom, building maintenance funding and projects have not kept pace with where we would like them to be.

### ■ What else is the task force studying, considering?

The 50-year old Spring Lake Park High School is going to require major renovation. It is not feasible to renovate the school's oldest sections and these will most likely be recommended for removal in the final report. The task force is currently reviewing numerous options for a high school that retains its best features and includes significant new construction as well.

### ■ What else was in the June update?

All facilities would be updated. In addition, the task force strongly endorses the need for additional classrooms at Westwood Middle School.

### ■ Enrollment growth

A study by a former demographer for the state of Minnesota indicates an additional 400 elementary students entering the system in the near future. While the population of Spring Lake Park and Fridley remains relatively stable, Blaine is experiencing a great deal of growth. Just under 60 percent of District 16 students now come from Blaine, about 23 percent from Spring Lake Park, and about 18 percent from Fridley.

### ■ Renovation? New construction?

The task force and the school district have been reviewing state statutes and meeting with the Minnesota Department of Education's facilities specialist.

A key consideration is that when the cost of renovation approaches 60% of the cost of new construction, the state is not likely to approve a plan for renovation, strongly preferring in such cases that a district chooses new construction in order to maximize taxpayer dollars and produce facilities that will better serve the community and its future generations of students.

### ■ Statutes. Guidelines.

In addition, the state has strict guidelines for the number of acres required for schools. The high

school complex, at 40 acres, also includes Kenneth Hall Elementary, the district offices, Learning Alternatives, and district-wide Community Services facilities and programs.

A state official has said that an elementary school should not co-exist on a site with a high school. State guidelines suggest that about 75 acres are needed for these existing facilities. The number of people that attend school, work at, or visit this "high school complex" on a day-to-day basis compares with the number of people that live in the entire city of Osseo.

Once major renovation is proposed, the guidelines above are likely to be enforced and a plan may not be approved by the State if it does not address these space issues.

As stewards of the community's tax dollars, the district must propose a plan based upon sound decisions for the future, that addresses state statutes, and combines a mix of renovation and rebuilding.

### ■ How will state approval affect the district's facilities plan?

The State has strongly indicated that there are far too many students and too many activities at the high school/Kenneth Hall complex. In addition, the preliminary estimates for renovating Kenneth Hall are at 75% of the cost of new construction. While this makes the school a prime candidate for new construction, state guidelines suggest that this cannot happen on the existing site.

The task force is looking into a number of plans, some of which would involve eliminating Kenneth Hall Elementary from its current site, performing a major overhaul and new construction at the high school, and building a new elementary school.

If this were to be recommended in the final report and approved by the School Board, an elementary school would most likely be built in the new high growth area of Blaine, a city that has almost 60 percent of District students but no elementary school in that area.

Whether facilities that house the district offices, Learning Alternatives, and Community Services remain where they are currently located or not are also among task force considerations.

### ■ Consideration of a new, replacement elementary school

The possibility of the district considering building a new school in Blaine has generated a lot of interest . . . and questions. First of all, no such decision has been made. The possibility of this happening sometime in the future, though, has caused the district to explore whether or not sufficient land is even available. Very, very few options exist with development in Blaine booming.

The district has, to date, become aware of a large enough and suitable 20-acre property. It has entered into a verbal agreement to further explore acquiring the property. If the district waits longer, and property does become necessary, it would run the risk of needing a site and not having one available. If land is purchased, and is not needed, it could be resold.

Acquiring property for possible future use would not affect the General Fund and would not mean one less cent is available for teaching and learning.

### ■ What would deferred maintenance, major renovation, and new construction cost?

Updating all facilities, making them structurally and educationally sound, for a generation or more will be costly. An eventual recommendation could total as much as \$90 million.

### ■ With millions of dollars in costs, what would it mean for taxpayers?

While an improvement plan such as this would involve major and costly projects, it is easier to get a handle on it in this way: If a bond referendum of this size were to be approved, sometime in 2006, it would mean an additional \$15-20/per month for the average homeowner in the district beginning in 2007.

### ■ A plan that will provide quality education for our students

Members of the citizen-staff task force have discovered that the needs are great, and have stated that "we owe it to our communities and generations of students to come to do it right." The quality of communities is determined in large part by the quality of its schools.

Teaching, learning, and student achievement is greatly aided by facilities that meet today's and tomorrow's educational needs.

### ■ Will this plan fit with other district initiatives?

The transition, for 2005-06, to three K-3 elementary schools, and one 4-5 school will fit perfectly with plans being considered by the facilities task force. Changes in the elementary configuration were made to ensure equity and consistency of class sizes, at all levels, all year. In addition, this configuration will produce equity in support services and programs as well as similar populations of students within all four schools. It was also done to avoid major boundary changes. If not for the new configuration, for example, Woodcrest Elementary would have an enrollment of 620 (a capacity it does not have) this fall instead of 429.

### ■ Task Force next steps

Addressing deferred maintenance projects and providing new classroom space at the middle school will be among the recommendations in

the task force's final report expected by December 2005. All other decisions are yet to be finalized. The plan will take its final form in the next few months.

### ■ Community meetings

Meetings to share the results of the task force's research and study, to present concepts, and to obtain community feedback will be scheduled throughout the fall of 2005.

### ■ Revisions, final report

Following community meetings and further meetings of the task force, a final report containing task force recommendations for a facilities improvement plan will be presented to the School Board. While this date is flexible, it could be as early as December of this year.

### ■ School Board decision

Upon receiving the report of the task force, the elected community members of the School Board will spend the time necessary to review the proposed plan, and accept or alter it. The Board will then choose whether or not to have a facilities improvement bond referendum. They would then decide what projects would be included in a referendum and set a date for a special election.

### ■ Bond referendum on facilities improvement

The timing on a Board decision and setting an election date is flexible. However, it is expected to take place sometime in 2006, no earlier than February, and quite possibly later than that.

### ■ If the referendum passes

If the taxpayers of the district approve a 2006 referendum, work on improving district facilities would begin almost immediately.

### ■ How to keep informed

- The district's web site has a great deal of information on the facilities improvement project. Go to [www.springlakeparkschools.org](http://www.springlakeparkschools.org) click on "Facilities Task Force Updates." This site will be continually updated.
- Community informational meetings will be scheduled throughout the fall.
- Local and metro newspapers have been covering, and will continue to cover, this project.
- Programming on the facilities project will be presented on Comcast channel 19 (Blaine, Spring Lake Park) and on Time-Warner channel 14 (Fridley).
- Mailings to all district residents between now and a 2006 referendum will further keep all members of the community informed.
- In September, the school district will launch a new way to communicate with parents or any district residents. By going to the web site home page, or any school home page, you will be able to sign-up to receive periodic, e-mailed "E-News Updates."