

News Article
Facilities Planning Committee
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By Dallas Boerner – Boerne Star

Over thirty-five members of the Comfort ISD community and staff packed a room at the administration building Thursday evening to review and give their input on the proposed options of improving the district's campuses. The meeting is part of a multi-step process in creating a bond that would address the needs of district facilities and would be up for vote once completed.

Superintendent Leslie Vann shared that there's been a couple of other items the public has brought up such as a building a competition-sized gymnasium and an auditorium/community room that hadn't been calculated into the initial district improvement plan options.

An issue that parents, whose children currently play sports in the district, brought up is that they are picking their children up late at night or taking them to practice as early as 6 a.m. to accommodate the athletes. Some parents don't know where to pick their children up because the students are shuttled to any available gym within the district. CISD board president Brad Spenrath also points out "the volleyball girls put up and take down their game nets every day so that the next group of athletes can practice in the same gym, and the equipment gets more than the normal wear and tear." Consulting firm PBK Architects' representative Michael Martinez gave the option to build a new gym incorporating an auditorium and a community area within.

George Pace, a commercial general contractor who has experience with PBK Architects and whom has seen his three sons graduate from Comfort, served on the facilities committee in 2006 when the district's last bond was approved. He asked how the conversation got started on district improvements. Vann said "safety and security was the primary reason we looked at a district plan, but as we toured the facilities, like at the middle school, there were areas that had been left alone for years."

One option discussed for securing the elementary campus was fencing sections off between buildings and installing electronic doors leaving only a small area for visitors to enter and check in. Concerned citizen Lauren Sharp, pointed out that "even with an electrical door locking system to the exit only doors like the gym and cafeteria, there's still room for human error if someone props the door open." Martinez, whose worked with many districts on securing their campuses, said "there is no way to secure any campus 100 percent" citing the Sandy Hook school shooting had almost every precaution in place including cameras and a secure front office check-in for visitors. Vann added that such a system would be a long-term goal and will be up to the citizens to incorporate into their bond package.

Sharp also added input on the locker rooms, "The showers and floor are in bad shape. I've had athletes in there and there's been MERSA and staph, so to me it's not only a visual embarrassment because that's where the visiting teams go, it's also a health concern."

Brian Scheele, who has quadruplets that attend CISD and whom is wheelchair-bound from a ranching accident in 1996, says the 120-foot ramp at the junior high is so steep he has asked students to help push him up the incline. According to the facilities study the ramp has some structural issues and was not optimally designed as it now funnels water into the lower level building.

If the district and voters went with PBK Architects proposed plan that yielded the most improvements, the price tag is close to 26 million.

Pace informed attendees that he knows how hard it was to get the last one through, and as much as he like to see the district take the 26 million dollar option to improve the facilities, he believes there's people in the community that are going to raise a flag on the price tag. He added, "We need to look at this bond package realistically and see what is a necessity and what the voters will most likely pass."

Martinez quoted a 2 million dollar bond being the minimal amount needed with only the district's three campuses safety and security needs being met.

Vann emphasized that the bond options are ultimately up to the district's parents, staff and community members to decide because it is their school and their requests should be calculated in the proposed package. He adds, "if we don't take care of what we have now, in ten years it will be substantially more costly to improve our facilities, so it is something we need to address."

Comfort ISD is a Chapter 41 district meaning any taxes paid by citizens goes to the state and is redistributed throughout Texas through the Robin Hood Act. Any money received from a bond is the district's to keep.

Currently the tax rate for CISD is at \$1.21 with Vann requesting an estimate from the board counsel on what the new tax rate would equate to with the proposed bond.

One community member pointed out, "the fact that we are having this conversation, it'd be hard to argue that all of this isn't necessary." Even though he's not a native, he did come from a similar small farm and ranch community. "If you have pride in your school and want to maintain pride in it, I see all these needs as necessary. If we are going to do this, lets get on board and fix this place up so we can be proud of it."

Aaron Robeson whose children attend the high school, added, "If we are going to improve the facilities, we need to make sure our needs for the next ten years are met. We don't want to have to go out for another bond in five years because we missed something."

When PBK Architects reps asked attendees what they thought of the proposed plans to either renovate or demo the historical two-story middle school building, a compassionate citizen spoke up, "I imagine you're going to get different reactions from people that grew up here and played in that gym verses someone like me, who came here in 2004 that doesn't have that emotional connection. But I understand that there are those that do and you have to think about the nostalgia of it."

Martinez noted that as it stands now, the current technology building at the middle school which was built in 1892, will cost as much to renovate as it would be to build another facility in its place.

Spennath spoke on the history of district improvements, "In 1998, when we got a bond issued, we built a high school. Then in 2006, voters passed a bond and we built on to the middle and elementary school. In that time period, these older buildings did not get maintained, so now we are at a point that if we don't take care of them and try to fix the problems and make them usable, they are going to fall down and we'll be left with an obsolete building."

Vann has asked the public to look into the future and help upgrade or build new facilities to benefit generations to come. "Our preliminary demographic study suggests that in ten years we could

have 1,300 students here and currently our capacity is 1,250, so we're at a point where we need more room."

The meeting helped pave the way for the community to start looking at options with future sessions addressing costs to be determined. Once informed, the facilities committee can then start prioritizing what they want in their bond package.

The district encouraged the facilities planning committee to contact Vann with any recommendations along with any questions about costs.

The board will review the district's demographic study and projected growth at their next regular meeting on December 12th.