

February 27, 2007

To: Smitty

From: Monty Aldrich

**THOUGHTS FROM THE UNIT OFFICE...**

At our February regular monthly board meeting, there was discussion on the maintenance and updating of our buildings and grounds. I have been asked several questions about where we are going with this, and I would like to clarify what stage this discussion is at.

First, I would like to address the high school. Our high school was built in 1948, and the addition (Ag and Industrial Arts) was constructed in 1963. Since that time, routine maintenance has taken place throughout the years. Our issues now consist of many different items. One is the masonry structure on the outside of the building. If you walk around and look at the building, you will see parts of bricks flaking off in certain areas. This is a sign of water inside the walls. To remedy this, we completed a roof drain project last summer where existing interior drains were reconstructed and placed outside into the sewer drains. This helped alleviate some water leaks inside the gym, and removed some standing water in other areas. The roof has also been an issue. Around 7 years ago, there was a spray-on coating placed over the existing membrane of the roof. That white coating has given us problems and is near the end of the warranty. Something will have to be done with the existing roof in the next 3-5 years most likely.

Our issue and upcoming project for this summer is to take care of the masonry problems and the cosmetics of the exterior of the high school. In addition, we will need to fix some underground leaks in the concrete structure of some walls. Water is seeping inside the building, making the walking surface unsafe. To take care of the masonry problems, we had basically two choices. Tuckpointing was one choice. Many have asked what this process consisted of. Basically, a crew would come in and grind out existing mortar between each and every brick, then replace that with new product. In addition, there would be some sandblasting to renew the brick surface. The other option was to install an EIFS System, which would basically be placing a surface on the exterior of the building that would provide insulation value and a new, modern look. It was approved to pursue this EIFS System beginning May 1 tentatively. Options with this new system include putting a new design and facelift on the high school. This process will take the entire summer to complete.

At the grade school, our building is in fairly good shape although the new roof project that was completed last summer is leaking at times. Even though the roof is new, most people understand that with a flat roof, water is going to find a way in. We are also in the process of replacing the heating and cooling controls at the grade school to find a more accurate way to control humidity and temperature. The original system that was installed is not functioning properly.

At our other facility located near the square in town, we have added road pack to develop a parking lot in the back. As you probably know, ROE #12 has added a Pre-kindergarten classroom there that will be functioning each school year. That entire building is housed with early childhood learning center students in some fashion. SESE (South Eastern Special Education) and the Clay County Health Department also uses that facility. After adding preschool transportation last December, we are providing transportation for those students as well.

Other discussion that surfaced at the board meeting involved possible new construction in the future. This could include an addition to the grade school or high school, and would include classrooms, a gym, and some other optional facilities. Those might include a circuit fitness center that could be open to the community, as well as some other options that could be used in cooperation with the community. Obviously this is only in the discussion phase, and all information will be updated and offered to the public if and when it moves along.

This might seem odd, but we need more classroom space. Most people will say that we used to house more students in buildings than we have now, so why couldn't we continue without additional space? Many Illinois mandates including special education law have dictated how we divide classrooms and how we classify kids. Obviously scientific research has identified more specific learning or behavioral issues with students. We now have many more specialists who teach kids. All kids have an equal right to an education, and currently we have many of those specific teachers and kids housed in very small spaces trying to provide a quality education. We have many who share space, and I have confidentiality concerns with this. We have also expanded the curriculum, and graduation requirements are increasing due to state mandates. With that, we can always use more rooms.

With the gym issue, I know that this caused many to vote "no" in previous referendum issues. I also know and believe that education is number #1 but also understand that we basically have one gym and another 1/2 gym to work with in the district. Through the years, we have added girl's high school and jr. high basketball, and girl's jr. high volleyball. In addition, we use gyms for boy's basketball at the 5-12 level, and for numerous practices in every activity. We have kids practicing on a daily basis, sometimes up to 8:00 or 9:00 p.m. Putting kids out five nights per week can be detrimental to their educational achievements. There have been guidelines put on practice times and the amount of contests per activity, but space is the issue.

Probably the biggest educational issue other than the special education issue listed above stands with Physical Education taught within each building. At the grade school, it is basically impossible to have 60-90 students in that small gym at one time while trying to teach skills in P.E. P.E. should be about teaching lifetime skills and fitness skills so that we can address health issues. It is difficult to do anything other than "roll out the balls" unless we have 20 performing skills on the gym floor and 40 sitting in the bleachers watching. I do not see much physical or mental benefit gained from that. It is impossible to teach the value of physical fitness and lifetime activities when there is no space to do this.

I believe our athletes could benefit from a fitness facility that could include a weight room. I believe our entire community could benefit from having a circuit fitness training facility designed to give aerobic and anaerobic exercise to any age. I believe many could benefit from having an indoor facility in which to walk daily. There are numerous possibilities with some of these things.

The bottom line is that we have to pay for all of this. Right now, the state has put a hold on construction money that would help fund some of this. We do have some matching money to spend for construction. Is it worth keeping our school buildings updated, efficient, and safe? Is it worth it to keep our schools modern and attractive while providing our students and community with a variety of options to choose from? Will someone drive through our town and be attracted to move here because of our schools? Will our district survive status quo? Do our kids deserve more efficient areas in which to learn? These answers will come from all of you in the future.