Notes from Warren Schmidt 5.25.17

There have been several questions regarding proposed new facility. Today we will try to answer a few more for you. Remember you can send questions to schmiw424@gmail.com. Rather than answer each question individually, in most cases we will answer them on the website under “Building Project.”

Q 1: Why are we still asking for the full amount when land was donated for this site and there are already existing ball fields on the Brandon Campus?

A: The amount before the donated land exceeded $39,000,000. Once the land was donated we made a recommendation to reduce the amount to $38,750.00. As the Board reviews the project over the next month or so we will evaluate all costs and see what can be reduced. $38,750,000 is the highest amount, current sporting fields can reduce the cost, but there are many unknowns that will soon be answered. Unknowns come in the form of heating, holding ponds, daycare etc.

Q 2: Why are we building at $300/square foot when that is well above the MN average of cost per sq ft. for a new school?

A: The figure of $300 per square foot came from our architect and the State Department of Education.

Q 3: Why weren’t there any type of town hall meetings?

A: This district has already had four years of study. During that time prices have gone up approximately 5% to 6% a year costing the tax payers approximately $5,720,000 by waiting on a $30,000,000 million dollar project. We are attempting to save the district approximately $2,325,000 at 6% and at 5% 1,937,000 million dollars by holding the referendum this August so that we can get bids in early March. ($38,750,000 x 6% = $2,325,000 at 5% the figure would be $38,750,000 = $1,937,000)

There have been three major decisions made so far.
(A) Build on two sites or one site: The State made that decision.
(B) Remodel or build new: The Board made that decision at a meeting on May 3rd where there was public input on the agenda so the public had an opportunity to speak.
(C) Site selection. On May 10th there was a public meeting that addressed this issue. On May 15th the Board made a motion to select the Lund property. No public comments were made during the discussion time of that motion.

Thus two of the three major decisions did provide an opportunity for the public to speak. The first major decision was done by the State not the School Board.

Q 4: What is the intended use of the Evansville facility and ball complex?

A: There has been no formal discussion on behalf of the Board of Education as to the future of the Evansville site. Two contractors have indicated that all but the community portion of the
building should be demolished. However, no formal discussion has been initiated on behalf of the Board that addresses the future use of the Evansville site if the referendum is successful. Even if the referendum is successful we do not foresee that will change as to our present usage for at least two years. We don’t foresee any type of action until we know the outcome of the referendum. At that time it will be my recommendation that the Board continue to use the ball diamonds if the City of Evansville is agreeable. The building use is also a concern that needs to be addressed and hopefully with the cooperation of the City we can find a good use of the building along with the grounds that the district owns (3.05 acres).

**Q 5: If the project comes under budget will the taxpayers get a refund?**

A: That decision is a Board of Education responsibility. We see the possibility of lowering the taxes if the amount of savings merits.

**Q 6: Will there be marble floors and Cherry wood trimmings?**

A: No, I will not recommend that and I am sure the Board isn’t interested in that type of spending. I do foresee a building with some polished concrete floors, pre-hung doors, metal trim and hanging ceilings with hard tile floors. However, I do not foresee marble floors and cherry wood trimmings.

**Q 7: Let’s vote the first referendum down and then the Board will come back with a reasonable amount such as $20,000,000.**

A: Just ask a neighboring district how that worked out. Their first referendum was defeated so they lowered the amount from $24,000,000 down to $19,900,000. Now two years after completion of the building they are in search of ways to fund more classrooms. Yes, the voters can defeat the referendum but reducing the amount but that will only make the building less functional and cost more in the future as the district grows. Building a structure that only accommodates present enrollment will lead to another referendum within a short time frame at additional cost and effort.

**Q 8: How did the District come to the conclusion of $38,750,000 figure for a new school?**

A: The MN Department of Education has a tremendous amount of information and guidelines that they employ. They demand a Review and Comment on any project exceeding $2,000,000. Thus, every project that exceeds two million dollars requires explanations detailing size of rooms, square footage and so forth. One of the first things we did was look at our future enrollment projections. MDE knows what schools are doing so they have data to guide architects and schools as to what is needed or currently being done. The architect firm also has a history of what is being done and what they have done so they also have data to guide them. The square footage of the proposed facility was developed with guidelines supplied by MDE and data from previous projects the architect firm has worked on. In addition the architect firm took a look at the curriculum that is being used in this district to help guide them in their decision.
Q 9: Why haven’t we seen blueprints or sketches of the proposed facility?

A: The Board of Education and the Administration are trying to hold down costs and the price of architect fees are a major cost. Thus, I recommended that we wait until we know the outcome of the referendum before we go ahead and spend a large amount of money that won’t be useful if referendum fails. Also the architect’s want staff, Board and community inputs before they begin drawing blue prints.

Q 10: What is next?

A: We wait until we hear from the State Department of Education as to the status of our Review and Comment. During our wait the Board will work on the memorandum with Mr. Lund, get voter lists prepared, secure land owner lists and begin work on timelines that will define the voting process. We will also be supplying a comparison of taxes in the surrounding districts that border District 2908.

One thing to remember is that neither Evansville School District nor the Brandon School District have been asked to approve a building referendum for many years: since 1954 in Evansville and 1970 in Brandon. So comparing present tax rates is not a true picture. No part of this consolidated district has been asked to approve a school construction referendum for the past 47+ years. Yes, maybe District X is paying less tax than what will be proposed for the B-E District but District X paid more tax ten years ago as compared to this district. What I am saying is that yes the taxpayers of this district may pay more than your neighboring districts, but the two districts of Evansville and Brandon have been paying less for a school construction referendum the past fifteen years as compared to their neighboring districts.

When comparing tax rates also keep in mind each district is different. I don’t think you can compare Alexandria District with District 2908 due to the fact that Alexandria has more people than District 2908 and more people and more industry allows the tax office to spread the tax.

Value has been and continues to be the driving force in the amount of tax paid in Minnesota and most states. The more value one has the more tax one pays. We know costs are very relevant. A $500 increase to one family may be a greater percentage increase than $2,000 is to another family. We understand there is only so much disposable income to go around. We want a good building/school for our students but we also understand that it needs to be balanced with costs. This is where the project gets very personal and we understand that. This is why come August 30th everyone will have a chance to weigh all aspects of this project and determine how they will vote.

Thank you for your questions and continue to send them to schmiw424@gmail.com. Again, rather than answer each question individually, in most cases we will answer them on the website under “Building Project.”