

**Urbana School District #116
Facilities Planning Committee
Interim Report
February 17, 2009**

The USD #116 Board of Education charged the Facilities Planning Committee with advising them on the development of a long-term capital improvements plan. The committee also was asked to evaluate the current locations of elementary schools, to help plan for a new Early Childhood Education facility and to provide input on spending priorities.

Our committee believes that a high quality public school system in Urbana is critical for this community's future growth and prosperity. In addition to their educational mission, excellent public schools play a crucial role in supporting business and industry. They form the foundation of healthy neighborhoods and contribute to residential property values. Excellent public schools attract talented faculty, staff and professionals to major employers such as the University of Illinois, Carle Hospital and Clinic, Provena Covenant, the Research Park and area manufacturers and businesses.

Committee Activity

Over the past six months, our committee has toured all school attendance centers in the district, from the Early Childhood program to Adult Education. We have received input on facilities needs from all school building administrators and representatives of the Urbana Education Association, the Urbana Alumni Association, the C-U Ministerial Alliance, parents and students. We have consulted with the Regional Planning Commission, the Champaign County Housing Authority, the City of Urbana Community Development staff, and district architects to obtain information on housing, growth trends and infrastructure needs. School district administrators and central office staff have provided overviews of the financial, operations and maintenance, and educational programming needs of the district. Experts in sustainability, energy efficiency and green building design have given presentations. Every parent in the district has had an opportunity for input via a survey that was conducted last fall. In short, we have made a systematic effort to gather as much information as possible to serve as the basis for our recommendations.

Guiding Principles

The Committee recommends the following general principles to guide facilities planning in Urbana District #116.

1. The excellence in Urbana's educational programming must be matched by excellence in facilities and infrastructure to create attractive, energy-efficient and healthy learning environments.
2. The district must be committed to responsible stewardship of financial, environmental and human resources.
3. The district must maintain transparent and disciplined planning processes so that stakeholders can understand the short-term and long-term facilities needs.
4. Renovations and new construction should meet the highest reasonable level of sustainability and energy efficiency and provide space that is flexible and adaptable to changing instructional needs.
5. The district should continue its commitment to neighborhood-based elementary schools; each school also must reflect the diverse population of Urbana.
6. Elementary school attendance area boundaries should be reviewed at least once every five years to maintain a balance between building capacities and the number of students assigned to each.

Financial Considerations

In general, we believe that District #116 does an outstanding job of maintaining its aging school facilities. The buildings comprise approximately 835,000 sq ft; grounds comprise approximately 137 acres. While the buildings and systems vary in age and quality, they all are cleaned and maintained to high standards.

However, the challenge facing the district with regard to capital improvements is that there is no regular, ongoing source of funds available for major facilities upgrades or new construction. This situation was further compounded by the imposition of tax caps in 1996; to date, the district has lost over \$10 million in operating revenue as a result. The overall school district operating budget is approximately \$49,400,000 for the 2008-09 school year.. (By comparison, the City of Urbana's proposed budget for FY09 was \$46 million.) About \$44,189,000, or 89 %, of the school district's budget is allocated for education fund expenditures; \$3,190,000 or 6.5%, is available for daily operations and maintenance expenditures such as cleaning, grounds maintenance, and plumbing, heating and electrical systems maintenance. Another \$300,000, or 0.6%, is available annually for Life-Safety work, which is restricted to items such as fire alarms, asbestos removal, or electrical, plumbing and heating system replacements.

The district has addressed some of the capital needs through a combination of public and private initiatives over the past 10 years. Urbana residents passed a building bond referendum in 1999 with 83% of the vote to renovate Urbana Middle School and Leal School, implement a district-wide technology plan and build the indoor swimming pool in conjunction with the Urbana Park District. An estate bequest to the park district also helped fund the swimming pool, which is operated by the park district on school district property. Working cash fund bonds sold in 2007 and 2009 will generate a total of \$3 million. This is being used to upgrade libraries, replace classroom and hall way lighting, replace classroom furnishings, purchase computers and to fund site improvements such as parking lots and building entrances. In addition, since 1996, the Urbana Alumni Association has donated nearly \$600,000 to fund facilities improvements and equipment for athletics, fine arts, technology, and the libraries at Urbana High School and Urbana Middle School. These capital projects have made a positive impact on the schools' learning environments but many other major facilities needs have not been addressed.

If the proposed 1% facilities sales tax passes, Urbana is expected to generate an additional \$3 million annually. Of this amount, the Board of Education has pledged \$1 million annually for property tax relief; \$2 million is slated for capital improvements. These funds are limited by statute for use for "school facility purposes such as acquisition, development, construction, rehabilitation, improvement, financing, architectural planning and installation of capital facilities consisting of land, buildings, structures and durable equipment." (District #116 Business Office Memo, 9/08/08, C. Baker)

Preliminary Recommendations

The District #116 Facilities Planning Committee has identified a number of facilities needs that should be addressed. Our final report will provide more detail on these and other improvements needed at individual schools. The major recommendations are listed below.

- Every elementary school should have a separate multipurpose room and a gymnasium. Currently, only one of the six elementary schools (Leal) has a multipurpose room. In the other schools, gymnasiums double as cafeterias and serve many other programmatic needs, thus severely limiting the time the gymnasium is available for physical activity. It is crucial for schools to be able to provide regular physical education to all children on a daily basis. A multipurpose room would provide much-needed space for school breakfast and lunch programs, school assemblies, fine-arts programming, and after-school programs, meetings and events. It could also be available for community use. The need for both a

multipurpose room and a gymnasium was raised more often by building principals, teachers, staff, parents and children than any other single issue.

- We must improve indoor environmental quality and energy efficiency. Most of the schools have problems with maintaining optimal temperatures. There were many complaints about rooms or areas in schools that frequently are too hot, too cold, too noisy or too dark. Beginning with Urbana Middle School, systematic energy audits should be conducted in each building. These audits will determine where changes can be made to windows, doors, walls, acoustics, lighting and insulation. These modifications will improve the learning environment, increase productivity and save money. At a minimum, schools that switch to a year-round, balanced calendar must have central air-conditioning. Currently, Prairie School and King School are exploring this calendar option.
- We must provide a new facility to house the Early Childhood Education program currently located in Washington School. This building is a disgrace; it is unsuitable for the youngest and most vulnerable children in the school district. Currently, the Early Childhood program serves approximately 375 children ages 3-5 who are considered at-risk based on income or special needs. A new facility could allow the program to expand and welcome a broader segment of the district's preschool population. An investment in early childhood education pays huge dividends down the line as it helps families develop the academic, social, and parenting skills needed to succeed in school.
- We must continue strategic improvements at all schools to upgrade the electrical and network infrastructure necessary to support technology in classrooms, learning centers and offices.
- We must renovate Urbana High School's Cobb Auditorium to provide a facility that accommodates the outstanding student and community performers who use this space. We must also upgrade the southwest athletic quadrant at Urbana High School. Investing in the athletic quadrant will allow use of the space for physical education to meet present and future needs. Both of these capital improvements would lend themselves well to a private fund-raising effort to complement the public investment.
- District #116 Central Offices and the Adult Education program share a building in downtown Urbana. We should consider moving them to a different location. The downtown Urbana facility is a confusing labyrinth of multiple levels, windowless offices and classrooms and inadequate and inaccessible meeting spaces. While the Adult Education program's portion of the facility is not funded by the Urbana School District, it serves Urbana students and residents well. It needs major renovation and repair.

Summary

All Urbana residents are directly affected by the quality of Urbana schools. Our schools' appearance and function speak volumes about our community. Urbana School District #116 leaders are careful stewards of the resources they have but we, as a community, must address the capital needs. We look forward to sharing our final report with the Board of Education.

Committee Members

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