

Trail mulls \$4.8M indebtedness

The Lackawanna Trail School Board decided Monday night to hold a special meeting April 20 for the main purpose of voting on funding a plan to upgrade both of the district's school buildings.

Mark Gullick, account manager of McClure, said a plan which included complete roof replacement at both the elementary center and high school would cost \$4.779 million, but his company guaranteed \$1.6 million in energy savings over a 20-year period leaving a net actual cost of \$3.1 million.

On Tuesday, April 7, during its work session, Gullick and development engineer Chris Stutz laid out some options including a plan costing around a million less that would partially replace the roofs.

But they also laid out some additional alternatives which included adding cooling in the elementary center to the tune of \$6,992 per unit, as well as \$639,000 for cooling the high school auditorium, library and gym; and also a plan for adding 23 exterior and 71 interior security cameras, base cost of which would be \$113,107.

Trail superintendent Matt Rakauskas said the IP Video Security system was "something we definitely need."

The board, however, noted that the need for cooling both buildings when it only got super hot two or three times a summer was something it could do without.

But the conversation shifted back to the security cameras and Trail High School principal Mark Murphy raised questions about zoom capability and others wondered about storage capacity and accessibility of data recorded.

Gullick said on April 7, he would bring back to the board on April 13 a discussion about security options, but if that was a sticking point, that part of any potential plan could be amended and the board should not hold up its decision to commit to the repairs, because valuable work time could be lost during the summer months if it delayed making a decision.

"So, you're looking at the entire program in place before students come back to school," board president David Thorne asked Gullick.

"Yes," he said, noting that would be conditional only if a vote took place on April 20.

This past Monday, Gullick returned with George Monahan of Guyette Communications who gave the board a lesson on the intricacies of security cameras. He noted that adding pan zoom capability would add \$232,000 and the district would have to forfeit infrared capability of capturing night activity.

With a TV monitor he demonstrated views from different locations and then also the pros and cons of different units.

In the end, Gullick said, "George and I would recommend the original fixed camera proposal."

Gullick told the board at that point, the only thing his company was looking for was a commitment from the district as to whether it wanted to go with a bare minimum rehabbing with only partial roof replacement plus fixed security system for \$3,446,100 or a plan with complete replacement of the roofs and security system for \$4,892,174.

Thorne said business manager David Homish would need to weigh in on what the district could afford.

Homish noted that the district presently had a \$200,000 a year debt load that would end in four years.

He said the district was in very good shape financially, and taking the upper end of the plans would end up committing the district to about \$380,000 a year in indebtedness for 20 years.

Board member Kevin Mulhern noted the guaranteed savings offered by McClure would knock \$80,000 a year off that.

But Homish pointed out, "You still have to lay out the full up front cost, and the savings would only show up later in reduced energy bills."

After meeting in public nearly two hours Monday, there was a quietness about committing the district to new debt.

Then, board member Ned Clarke broke the silence by saying, "I look at these buildings as my house. My personal thought is that all the roofs should be done. In the long run we are fortifying the existence of this school and its physical plant."

He added, "It's a tough bullet to swallow, but I think we need to take it to move forward."

Mulhern agreed, followed by board members Joe Strauch, Phil Stark and Thorne, suggesting that the board knew where it would be headed when a vote took place April 20 at 7:30 p.m.

"We'll need to advertise the meeting," Thorne said.

He asked Homish if the new plan would cost about one and a half mills.

Homish said it would be more like two mills for the residents in both Lackawanna and Wyoming counties.

In other action Monday, the board approved seven field trip requests, five of which were at no cost to the district.

Murphy had noted April 7, that the high school finished among the top three teams regionally and would be competing in the National History Bowl in Arlington, Va., and Washington, D.C., April 24-26.

Although Elementary Center Principal Brian Kelly was not present Monday, on April 7, he excitedly introduced the school's K'nex champions whom curriculum director Tania Stoker would be taking to state competition in Harrisburg on May 5.

The board also: appointed Sweet, Stevens, Katz and Williams as its solicitor with the fees having gone up \$10/hour for the first time in four years. Board member Strauch said that because the solicitor bill amounted to more than \$10,000 a year, it should have been put out for competitive bid, but he was outvoted 7-1 on the matter.

Contracts with Pro-Care for an athletic trainer, with the Children's Service Center of Wyoming Valley for behavioral health services, and the Northeast Intermediate Unit for special education services were approved.

The board also accepted the resignations of Robert Fitzsimmons as girls' basketball coach, and David Hopkins as percussion instructor.

The school board also agreed to sell two parcels of land in the borough of Factoryville to the state Department of Transportation (PennDOT) under eminent domain while the College Avenue bridge nearest the LTEC parking lot was being closed for repairs.

Rick Kordish said PennDOT was temporarily taking the sidewalks over "and then will give them back to us" for maintenance purposes.

He noted Monday that a "blast" went out notifying parents and guardians about the College Avenue Bridge being closed effective Monday which meant that all 12 bus schedules would be altered with morning routes an additional 10 minutes earlier and afternoon routes an additional 10 minutes later as new routes were found transporting students into and out of the LTEC parking lot.

Although the bridge was still open Monday night, Rakauskas said it definitely would be closed.

In his superintendent's report, Rakauskas noted that a window opened Tuesday for PSSA tests in April for grades 3-8. He noted that high school graduation would remain on Friday, June 5, although the last day of school for underclassmen would be the following Monday.

He said that at the May meeting he would be presenting a 2015-16 school calendar to the board that opened with four in-service days before students started on Monday, Aug. 31.

Board member Clarke noted the board's Discipline Committee would be having a public hearing in the Trail Elementary Center Library at 6:30 p.m.

"This provides a opportunity for the public to review what we're doing," Clarke said.

Strauch complimented Pat Carpenter on the trout project undertaken in the elementary center.

In the high school principal's report, Murphy said he hoped to have recommendations to the board by its next meeting for a replacement girls' volleyball coach and a girls' basketball coach.

He noted that in addition to PSSAs, Keystone Exams and advanced placement exams would follow in May.

He said the school's Bring Your Own Device policy was comprehensive at least on paper and was exploring piloting a Responsible Digital Security Course, offered by People's Security Bank next fall.

Murphy reviewed a plan of activity for the remainder of the school year and noted the high school would be having its 'Good Guys' breakfast April 24 with alum Cody Steele this year's recipient.

Murphy also noted that third quarter report cards went out last Friday.

In her report, special education coordinator Stephanie Russell said she was in the midst of a busy IEP season, and curriculum director Tania Stoker also underscored the upcoming PSSA exams.

She noted that in the superintendent's proposed calendar for 2015-16, extra days for in-service training at the front were partly because she was planning to have a Harvard-trained educator, Dr. Collins, lead a workshop in 'Writing Across the Curriculum, a new initiative for next school year.

At the school board's work session April 7, resident Christy Clarke asked the board about a concern she had regarding student government elections.

Clarke said that it seemed the high school was mandating a certain course had to be completed in order for students to offer for student government elections, and that in essence the district was making students pay to run for office.

She wondered out loud about what that was teaching students. She said she had conversations with principal Murphy about the matter, "but he never got back to me."

Murphy told the board that he had "new" information, that her concern did not rise to the level of board discussion, and if after a further conversation with him was not satisfactory, she could speak to the superintendent.

Clarke was not at Monday's meeting to see if her concerns had been addressed.