

District unveils unified high school design – Chris Jackett – C and G

Proposed plan geared to land on 2012 ballot

By Chris Jackett
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BLOOMFIELD TOWNSHIP — After 11 months of working with various groups of community members and the Bloomfield Hills Schools district, Fielding Nair International presented its 85 percent schematic design plan for a unified high school last week.

During an Oct. 18 special meeting of the Board of **Education** that lasted nearly three hours at the Doyle Center, residents and board members listened to the plans for and voiced their thoughts about the district's most ear-catching project.

"It's been here in Bloomfield Hills for a long time," Board President Ingrid Day said. "It's a multi-faceted issue for our school district. What we're hoping for in this last year is to find a way to unify. This is a tough, emotional decision. A lot of things have changed since we started talking about this in 2002. We hired some facilitators to come in and **begin** community discussion."

FNI began the discussion, and the result is a project with a base cost of \$65 million for a single hybrid high school at the current Andover site. The school would be 64 percent new and 36 percent renovated, and would hold about 1,650 students in 331,200 square feet of space.

"We concluded after the focus groups and many (more than 40) presentations, we concluded that we should do a hybrid option," said FNI chairman and co-founder Randy Fielding. "Not only will this facility be a national exemplar, but an international exemplar. What we've done is work through a wonderful solution."

The proposed unified high school would be primarily two floors, with an open cafeteria in the center between the front doorway on the east side and a western courtyard. The school's administrative offices would look out into the café.

The southern edge of the school features a new layout with "learning centers" instead of long hallways. Outside the southern edge of the school, a smaller two-story building would be renovated for the Model High School program, broadcasting studios and other classrooms.

The plan also features two other options that bear additional costs. A potential athletic upgrade package would add up to 29,500 square feet for a total cost of just more than \$7 million. It could include a 12-lane swimming pool, a new 20,000-square-foot fieldhouse with three basketball courts and room for 1,800 spectators, and new team locker rooms.

"We looked really hard at the existing fieldhouse to see if it could **support** your needs, and at the base level, it could," said Isaac Williams, FNI senior designer and planner, of why the package is an option and not a necessity.

A **learning** community upgrade package would further renovate the existing learning community rooms for roughly \$8.7 million.

Together, the upgrades could increase capacity to 1,800 students.

Under the current plan, the site of the current Central Administration Building would become a string of eight side-by-side tennis courts as Central Administration moves into the Doyle Center.

Relocation and technology costs could add about \$3 million to the base cost. With all parts included, and if both packages are adopted, the project could cost between \$83.7 million and \$85.5 million. However, officials said the \$68 million price is more likely, as the packages could be adopted separately further down the road.

The 2010 base plan was slated for a \$97 million cost, but it did not pass a bond vote last November as the community called for more of a hand in such a big decision.

Although the new plan is less costly, the district said a Plan B would be announced prior to a 2012 vote on the plan proposed Oct. 18. Some thought that plan should be done sooner, rather than later.

“Yes, the plan a looks very charming. So have previous plans,” said district resident John Roach. “What happens if you don’t have the money you’re dreaming of? Let’s get at it. We need to tell the community what they will get if you don’t get what you want them to get.”

Bloomfield Hills resident and Bloomfield 20/20 co-founder George Derderian has had a change of heart over the past nine years and two failed bond proposals.

“I can tell you we’re now at the bottom of the barrel in terms of facilities,” said Derderian, who has separated from B20/20 over the past decade, in comparing BHS high schools to other regional schools. “Reality is we’ve got to have a plan now. I think these gentlemen have done a good job creating a reasonable plan. ... We can’t afford two schools anymore. We’ve got to buckle down on what we spend for the schools and we’ve got to buckle down on how we do things. We’re past that point and everyone has to face the facts that we have to spend money.”

To view schematic designs, monetary figures and video of the special meeting, visit www.bloomfield.org/bhs-unified-high-school.

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