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LEBANON COMMUNITY SCHOOL CORPORATION

Building project clears first hurdle

BY SARAH LANG
The Lebanon Reporter

Lebanon - Applause greeted the Lebanon Community School Corp. board of trustees at Tuesday's meeting after the board accepted the 1028 hearing resolution, another step forward in the corporation-wide building renovation project.

"I know we are doing good things for our future," said Alan Cragun, board president.

The 1028 hearing, required by Indiana law, is a public hearing the corporation must have before spending at least \$1 million on a new building or to renovate an existing building, explained board attorney Kent Frandsen. At the hearing, all information on the potential project is presented, and the maximum amount of the bonds is set.

The maximum amount the corporation could spend on the project was set at \$40 million - \$28 million to be spent on Lebanon High School, \$1.1 million on Lebanon Middle School, \$1.8 million on Central Elementary, \$260,000 on Harney Elementary, \$940,000 on Hattie B. Stokes Elementary, \$330,000 on Perry-Worth Elementary, \$77,000 on the service center, \$63,000 on the transportation center, \$75,000 on the administration center and \$74 million on soft construction costs.

The 1028 hearing allowed members of the public a chance to speak to the board about the proposed project. Anne Patterson, a mother of three LCSC students, said it just makes sense to move forward with this project.

PUBLIC WILL VOTE ON REFERENDUM IN NOVEMBER

BY SARAH LANG
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Collette Irwin-Knott of Umbaugh Associates financial advisors said at Tuesday's meeting she expects a "pretty short" repayment period for the proposed \$40 million bond. School corporations may use up to 20 years, but Irwin-Knott said she expects this bond to be repaid in 12 years and eight months.

The new debt would be brought on as old debt is falling off, Irwin-Knott said, resulting in a flatline tax rate. The tax rate currently is 67.25 cents per \$100 of assessed value, and with the repayment plan, the tax rate would never be higher than 66.74 cents. Board attorney Kent Frandsen said people will be paying the same as now, but just for a

"I can say without hesitation I fully support the board moving ahead with this project," Patterson said. "It's time to do these things. I believe in order to be competitive in the community and draw desirable growth and continue to bring desirable faculty to our schools, we need these renovations."

Patterson commended the board for researching and looking in to all the costs. The project is fiscally responsible, she said, especially because it coincides with debt rolling off, so the tax rate would never actually increase.

longer period of time.

"This is a project that will have a big impact and keep the tax rate level," said Michele Thomas, board vice president. A referendum question will be placed on the November general election ballot, asking the public whether they approve the tax rate to complete the building project. The corporation is worried about how the state will word the question, since the state has the final say on the wording.

The question may include wording like "a 66 cent tax rate increase," since during the final years of the repayment, the tax rate would have been zero but will be the 66.74 cents if the project is approved by the referendum vote.

Superintendent Dr. Robert Taylor said the corporation requested to include a brief

statement on the ballot, explaining that the tax rate would remain the same and never be higher than what taxpayers are now paying. But it is up to the state, so he said it is up to the board and administration to inform the public of the reality.

"When you're doing it the way we're doing it, it doesn't fit within statutory language," Frandsen said.

Board member Tom Merritt had one final reminder for the board.

"We just need to remember it's the taxpayers' money, not our money," he said. "And we do. We've had lots of discussion about that, and I feel good." If the referendum passes the public vote, bidding will begin in the spring with construction starting later in 2011. The entire project may be done by 2013.

time to eat lunch, and the unpredictable thermostat that leaves classrooms "extremely hot one day and extremely cold the next," she said.

"I've found that quite distracting from tests and studies," she said, "because sometimes I'm sweating and sometimes I'm shivering."

No one spoke in opposition to the project.

The HVAC (heating, ventilation and air conditioning) would be addressed in all buildings, said Tom Neff of Schmidt Associates architects, saving up to \$150,000 annual-

ly on energy costs alone. All facilities would also get a centralized security camera system.

Neff showed the crowd a photo from the dedication of the high school in the 1950s.

"It's very similar to today except for parking," he said. "It's been incredibly maintained, but a 50-year life span needs updating."

Some renovations to LHS would include building a new, secure entrance with a new administration area right in the front; creating a community project room; moving the media center to the front of the building; expanding and moving the cafeteria; widening the hallways; adding a new bus-only entrance; renovating the auditorium; expanding and moving the band and choir area; and adding a second-story to the southwest corner of the building to add more academic space.

Other specifics Neff mentioned were a secure front public entrance at LMS, a new roof at Stokes, and a new HVAC system at Central that would save 20 to 25 percent in energy costs.

Board Member Tom Merritt said he was in support of the project - always has been and will continue to be - but he warned the board to be fiscally prudent with taxpayers' money.

"When I talk to people, I'm selling a conservative project," he said. "Big ceilings and arched roofs, that's not what the public is looking for. We need to do this, but we need to be careful how we spend the taxpayers' money."

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Superintendent Dr. Robert Taylor agreed, saying transparency will be the norm for this process and there will be no extravagant spending.

"There will be no smoke and mirrors, no Taj Mahal," he said. "We will focus on building the most appropriate learning environment for our students in the most prudent and fiscally responsible manner. So at the end of the day, future students will have a building they are proud of, but the tax-paying

community members will not be burdened."

Taylor said the proposed renovations would extend the useful life of the 50-plus-year-old high school to the year 2030.

Administration and school board members are now restricted by law as to what they can say and how they can promote the referendum and building project. They can provide facts and share their opinions, but they cannot spend any tax dollars on the project's promotion.