

KNOX COUNTY SCHOOLS

ANDREW JOHNSON BUILDING

Dr. James P. McIntyre Jr., Superintendent



MEMORANDUM

To: Chair and Members
Knox County Commission

From: Dr. James P. McIntyre, Jr.
Superintendent

Date: June 25, 2010

Subject: Capital Improvement Plan

In recent weeks there has been much public discussion about the Knox County Schools capital building program. As our FY2011-13 Capital Improvement Plan is on the Commission's June 28th agenda for potential appropriation, I thought it would be helpful to provide some supplementary information and analysis in anticipation of your deliberations.

FY2011-13 Capital Improvement Plan

More than a year ago, after considerable public input, the Board of Education identified five capital priority projects: renovations at Chilhowee Intermediate School, an environmentally friendly addition at Belle Morris Elementary School, a new elementary school in the Southwest sector of the county, a facility for a potential STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) magnet academy, and significant upgrades at the Carter Elementary / Middle School campus. All of these priorities, as well as a host of other school facilities needs across Knox County, are addressed in the three-year capital improvement plan adopted by the School Board this spring.

Attached, please find my explanatory memorandum to the Board of Education dated February 14, 2010. This memo summarizes the major components of the three year capital plan, including rationale, timeline, and other pertinent details. In addition, comprehensive documents regarding Physical Plant Upgrades (PPUs), Roof and HVAC projects, and the Carter campus proposal are also enclosed.

Southwest Elementary School

The new elementary school in the southwest sector of Knox County was approved based on an expected increase of more than 500 school-age children in that region in the next five to six years. After careful analysis and consideration, the Board of Education determined that it was not feasible to create that magnitude of new educational spaces solely through renovation, and that new construction was the only viable strategy to adding such substantial capacity in such a short timeframe. Enrollment growth in other parts of the county is projected to be relatively flat or increase moderately over the same time period.

Carter Campus Project

Despite the fact that only modest enrollment growth is expected in the Carter community, I have recommended, and the School Board has approved, a major capital project for the Carter Elementary and Middle School campus. This \$5 million endeavor would build a new Carter Middle School gymnasium, improve traffic flow on the campus, and substantially renovate and expand Carter Elementary School.

Carter Elementary School would see a new secure main entrance built in plain view of newly constructed administrative offices (currently the main office is on the opposite end of the building from the main entrance), significant enhancements to the cafeteria, library/media center, and gym, improved infrastructure, as well as additional classroom space, all while eliminating the need for temporary modular classrooms. It is an impressive design and a significant investment in the Carter schools which will create an outstanding educational environment for our children for many years to come.

I believe this major renovation project is an excellent investment, and leverages an existing building that, while aging, is structurally solid and will be highly functional. Despite the expressed preferences of the Carter community, building a new Carter Elementary School is simply not a necessity right now, as this renovation addresses the major concerns that have been articulated about the school building. At this time, renovation is the most cost effective and fiscally responsible way to create a safe, healthy, inviting learning environment befitting the extraordinary education that is being provided at Carter Elementary School.

Building Costs

Recent public discourse, and an item on the Commission's agenda for Monday imply that the Knox County Schools (KCS) may be paying too much when building schools. The facts simply do not support that assertion. The recently bid Paulette Elementary School in Union County has been cited as an example of more inexpensive school construction, but an analysis by our Facilities Department of recent school building projects (attached) shows that KCS school buildings are generally comparable in cost. While Paulette has been bid at approximately \$103 per square foot, Gibbs Elementary School was built for \$97 per square foot just a few years ago, and the Ball Camp expansion that we recently broke ground for will be completed for about \$106 per square foot. Construction of Hardin Valley Academy, which was managed by the Public Building Authority, was of course more expensive on a square foot basis, but a comprehensive high school (with laboratories, athletic facilities, a theater, etc.) cannot be compared to an elementary school project.

We publicly bid our school construction projects to ensure that we benefit from the best possible pricing. Our school district unapologetically has high standards for our school facilities, but we also make sure to get the best possible value from the public funds that we invest in our school buildings.

Conclusion

The Board of Education has thoughtfully adopted a capital building plan that is fair, fiscally responsible, and educationally sound. This capital plan will help ensure that we maintain a suitable learning environment in each of our schools – an environment where all students can be academically successful. In this challenging fiscal environment, I respectfully request that the County Commission support this sensible school building plan by appropriating the necessary funding to make it a reality.

cc: Knox County School Board
KCS Executive Team