

## Get The Facts!

### Frequently Asked Questions Ripon Area School District Facility Planning

#### **District Facilities**

#### **Q. What is the current grade level configuration for the District?**

A. Grade groupings consist of Pre-K, K-2, 3-5, 6-8, and 9-12. There are three Pre-Kindergarten Schools (AdvoCap/Head Start, Pickett Community Center, and Ripon Children's Learning Center); four elementary schools, (Barlow Park and Journey, grades K-2, and Murray Park and Quest, grades 3-5); 2 middle schools (Ripon Middle School and Catalyst, grades 6-8); and 3 high schools (Ripon High School, Lumen, and Crossroads, grades 9-12).

#### **Q. What is the condition of our school buildings?**

A. Please refer to the comprehensive Facility Master Planning Study posted on the website. The oldest building in the District is the middle school, and it was originally built in 1939 as the high school. It was then converted to the middle school in 1963, and a new high school was built. Both elementary schools were built during the 1990's and at that time had ample space and modern features. A high school remodeling and addition was then completed in 1999. Since 1999, only minor building repairs and maintenance items have been addressed using the operational budget (i.e. boiler and roof at middle and high school).

#### **Q. What is the recommended site acreage for each building?**

A. The recommended site acreage for each building to meet today's educational requirements is Barlow Park Elementary – 14.0; Murray Park Elementary – 14.0; Middle School – 25.0; High School – 36.0; and combined Middle and High School – 41.0.

#### **Q. What is the acreage, square footage, and what year was each building built?**

**Barlow Park Elementary/Journey** is approximately 70,700 square feet and it is located on a 12.9 acre site. The building contains one floor, and it was built in 1998.

**Murray Park Elementary/Quest** is an approximately 64,300 square feet facility and it is positioned on 9.9 acres adjacent to Murray Park. This is the newest of the four building as it was built in 1992. The building contains only one floor.

**Ripon Middle School/Catalyst** Originally built in 1939, the Middle School is the oldest of all District buildings. The 87,500 square foot facility is also located on the smallest parcel of land at 4.43 acres. The site is connected to the nearby High School with a fenced walking path. The building contains two main floors with some spaces located in a basement level. Additions and renovations were constructed in 1955 and 1995.

**Ripon High School/Lumen** was originally built in 1962. The approximately 196,000 square foot facility is located on the largest site of 27.4 acres. The site is connected to the nearby Middle School with a fenced walking path. The building contains one floor. An addition and renovation was completed in 1997.

#### **Q. What is the enrollment capacity for each building?**

A. The student enrollment capacity for each building is: Barlow Park - 342; Murray Park Elementary - 373; Middle School - 450; High School - 600; combined Middle School and High School - 1050.

**Q. Has RASD completed an enrollment projection analysis?**

A. Yes. Applied Population Laboratory at the University of Wisconsin – Madison was hired to complete an Enrollment Projection Analysis for 2013-2022. The projection process uses a combination of historical enrollment data, birth trends, and projections, housing starts data, and population trends and projections to create reasonable assumptions about future growth scenarios. District enrollment has increased by 88 students over the last ten years, but in the past five years enrollment has declined by - 3.3%. These numbers include 4K enrollment. When enrollment history was broken down by grade groupings, elementary and middle school have both decreased over the last ten years, declining by 20 and 12 students. High school enrollment on the other hand has increased by 43 students since the 2003/04 school year.

**Q. How many students will attend RASD schools 10 years from now?**

A. The long-term trend shows a slight increase in kindergarten enrollment. However, outgoing 12<sup>th</sup> graders were not fully replaced by incoming kindergarteners. The information provided in the school enrollment projection report points to a slight decrease in enrollment in the RASD over the next five to ten years.

**Q. What were the building deficiencies identified in the teacher and staff survey?**

A. While the buildings have been well maintained, the list of deficiencies identified by teachers and staff includes items such as IT infrastructure, food service equipment, and HVAC issues. The survey also identified the lack of space for small group learning and break out spaces throughout the buildings, and the condition and layout of co-curricular spaces for students, staff and the community (i.e. speech and language support).

**Q. Is it true the District owns a parcel of land?**

A. Yes, the District purchased a parcel of land in 2004 on Eureka Street.

**Q. Why is the community more concerned with the middle and high school buildings?**

A. The community participants have focused on the operational and educational deficiencies at all schools, but they have mainly focused on the middle and high school. They are concerned with handicap accessibility, security improvements, water drainage, and addressing educational inadequacies.

**Facility Planning Process**

**Q. What is a facilities study?**

A. A facilities study surveys and documents the physical characteristics of all district buildings. The study reviews the appearance, condition and current uses of the buildings. The data is used to determine the feasibility and cost of space reallocation, remodeling and/or expanding of the buildings. The process also includes a review of existing floor plans and a thorough walk-through of all district facilities and systems.

**Q. Why did the District conduct a facility study?**

A. With the help of the community, the School Board, Administration and the Facilities Planning Team, the District carefully evaluated the facility resources. A thorough review was conducted on the condition of the two elementary schools, middle school and high school.

**Q. What are the goals of the facility planning process?**

A. The goals of the facility planning process are to obtain a detailed understanding of the facility needs and wants; support current and future educational programs; explore all factors with planning, designing and building schools; determine scope of repairs, modernization, or new construction; facilitate technology and environmental upgrade discussions; explore all facility options and solutions; and present options to the community that support the core responsibilities of the Board.

**Q. Why develop and maintain a long-range facility plan?**

A. A long range facilities plan is meant to gather and organize factual information from which present and future educational program needs can be determined; estimate pupil populations as to numbers, ages, and socioeconomic backgrounds, so that facilities may be planned for and provided; make an objective appraisal of the quality and capacity of existing school facilities; allow more effective decisions regarding the quality of new and existing school facilities; coordinate a program of total school and community planning to benefit and support economic development; develop a system of educational programming and facilities prioritization; and maintain a program of continuous comprehensive planning and financing of school facilities.

**Q. Why is the Board and District committed to conducting such a comprehensive plan?**

A. The Board of Education and District Administration want to establish credibility with the community; gain a solid understanding of the education system, buildings, and the people; and develop a roadmap for long-term facility solutions.

**Q. What is the Facility Planning Team, and who serves on it?**

A. The Facility Planning Team consists of four Ripon School Board of Education members (David Olson, Gary Rodman, Tom Stellmacher, and Dan Zimmerman), with Mary Whitrock, Superintendent, Rick Ketter, Business Manager (Retired 6/27/2014), and Brian Pepler, Director of Facilities representing the District. Following Rick Ketter's retirement, his position on the Facility Planning Team was filled by the new Business Manager, J.J. Gutman.

**Q. Who are the consultants hired to lead the facility planning process?**

A. The team of CG Schmidt Construction and Plunkett Raysich Architects out of Madison and Milwaukee has a long history of planning, designing and building exceptional educational facilities. After a comprehensive interview process, the Board unanimously approved hiring the CGS/PRA team. This team of experts will help with prioritizing the building needs, while determining which projects can be addressed within yearly operational budgets and which require long-term capital expenditures.

**Q. Did the planning team tour the district facilities?**

A. The buildings were toured and evaluated on August 21st, 2013 by Plunkett Raysich Architects and KJWW Engineering with additional support from CG Schmidt Construction. The planning team also met with the principals, athletic, and music directors for each school.

**Q. Has the planning team looked at the daily use of space for the choirs and bands?**

A. Yes, the architects have looked at the daily use of the choir and band spaces at our schools. Currently the middle and high school have a full schedule of daily class sections, so overall space is being reviewed.

**Q. What was the range of potential facility options?**

A. The planners explored the full range of potential facility solutions such as continuing with small maintenance repairs at the four schools using funds from the operational budget, upgrading and adding a partial building replacement to the middle and high school, repurposing the current middle and high school, building an all new middle and high school on existing and vacant land, to renovating and building an all new high school on district owned property. The costs and overall impact on the community was evaluated. These potential solutions were generated based on the ability to address the short and long-term needs of the District. For example, the District could reduce operational costs by utilizing existing space more efficiently.

**Q. What was the range of projects outlined in the seven facility options?**

A. The seven options included continuing with small maintenance items and minor repairs; five-year capital maintenance projects with safety and security improvements; remodeling the middle school and high school; all new middle school in current location and remodeled high school; all new middle school on new site and remodeled high school; consolidating the middle school and high school on high school site; new high school on alternative site and high school becomes middle school; and a new combined (grades 6-12) middle and high school on an alternative site.

**Q. What was the process for narrowing from seven facility options down to four plans?**

A. The process included reviewing the existing facilities study; completing an educational space analysis; conducting a teacher and staff survey; interviewing the principals and custodial staff; hosting seven community engagement sessions, meeting with principals and staff, Ripon City Officials. After all of these steps were taken, the Board was able to determine the four plans that would be the most favorable and beneficial to the community.

**Q. What is the Criteria Matrix used by the Board, District and Community to evaluate the options?**

A. The Criteria Matrix is just one means of evaluating proposed facility solutions to assist with the Board in narrowing of options. Criteria includes: available space around the existing schools for athletics and parking; increased space for community uses; pool reconfiguration and repairs; long-term educational needs; flexible learning spaces; high school event spaces; improved learning environments (i.e. heating, ventilation, air conditioning, and daylight), deferred maintenance needs; abatement; Americans with Disabilities Act accessibility; safety/security and traffic flow; maximizing existing space; energy efficiency; and future information technology needs.

**Q. How did the District identify the needs of the District?**

A. For several months the planners have been reviewing and compiling information from the superintendent survey, staff survey, one-on-one meetings with principals, enrollment projections, and several technical assessments (i.e. deferred maintenance list, energy study, safety and security review, and technology plan). Once armed with data, the planners began conducting an existing facility condition assessment and an educational space analysis for each building. The community also provided input on their needs and wants for the District.

**Q. Who participated in the Community Engagement Sessions?**

A. The first of seven Community Engagement Sessions was held on September 19, 2013 and the last was held on May 19, 2014. Any resident who lives in the district was welcome to attend any or all of the seven community engagement sessions. District residents provide a community voice for the planning process. The goal was to represent the interests of the overall community, consider the long-term facility needs of the District, develop and give feedback on plan options, and make a recommendation to the Board. A series of listening sessions will be scheduled once the options are further refined.

Community members have provided valuable insight into the planning process, and participants communicated the diversity of opinions that exist within the District.

**Q. How do we plan to prioritize the needs of our school buildings?**

A. Numerous options were formalized after the planners spent several months assessing the condition of the facilities, and the Board, District, staff and community had several opportunities to provide input on the day-to-day operations of the buildings and improvements needed. At the fourth community engagement session in December, the planners presented six options to the community for feedback. Numerous community members asked the planners to explore additional options, such as buying properties between the middle school and high school; consolidating the middle and high school so there are fewer buildings to maintain; to combining the middle school and high school on another site. At the January engagement session, the community outlined a set of criteria to be used to review the options to be sure they address the identified needs of the District and help prioritize needs moving forward. These criteria were then used to narrow down the original seven options to four plans. These four plans were also featured on the community-wide survey. This survey provided additional insight on the needs and opinions of the district and the community's priorities. All of these factors have contributed to decision-making about what needs should be prioritized.

**Q. How will the facility planning process address the educational needs of the District?**

A. Making more efficient use of the under-utilized space at the middle school and high school allows the District the opportunity to create personalized learning environments for students. Movable furniture and walls, re-configurable buildings, rooms, passageways all represent this type of flexible environment. Cafeterias, auditoriums, and "multi-purpose rooms" need to be designed for convertibility or other uses in the future.

**Q. Why is the timing right for the District to consider addressing our aging facilities?**

A. We've made great progress developing educational initiatives to better prepare our students for careers, college and life after high school. We've also been developing a plan to update our aging facilities. This is a particularly good time to consider our options because in 2016 the District will pay off a large loan associated with the last building project. This drop in debt payments will reduce the tax impact of any new spending.

**Q. What will it cost to improve our school facilities?**

A. The preliminary estimates for the options range from \$0 borrowing to \$63 million that addressed varying degrees of repair, renovation and new construction. At this point, the building cost estimates were based on how many square feet are needed in a new building and historical data on the cost per square foot. The Board considered numerous ways to scale back on the new building options to reduce costs. The residents approved Plan C, which includes significant upgrades to all building systems and includes the demolition of the Middle School. Plan C will combine the Middle and High Schools by building an addition onto the existing high school for \$29.1 million

**Q. What does the "revitalization" of a school building entail?**

A. "Revitalization" typically includes the replacement or renovation of: site improvements (parking, bus loops, student drop-off, playing fields, stormwater management and utility improvements); building envelope (roof, insulation, exterior wall repair, windows and doors); finishes (floors, ceilings, walls repairs, casework, specialties); mechanical systems, plumbing and electrical systems (including life safety systems); Americans with Disabilities Act, or ADA compliance; furniture, fixtures and equipment; and technology equipment.

**Q. Will area businesses and subcontractors be able to participate in the project?**

A. Yes. While the School Board hired CG Schmidt last fall to serve as construction manager, the Board remains committed to providing qualified area contractors, distributors, and suppliers the opportunity to openly bid on any future work, provided any project is ultimately supported by the community. CGS will be reaching out to area qualified companies to bid and encouraging them to use school district residents for labor projects. Through the course of the project, CGS will be required to track how many local labor hours are completed by residents. When the time arrives, interested local companies or suppliers are encouraged to inquire with CGS or the District Office for more information on future opportunities.

**Q. If combining the middle school and high school is approved, what will happen to the existing middle school?**

A. The building will be demolished, and the site will be used for additional parking and athletic facilities.

**Q. How do we protect our community's investment in schools?**

A. Facilities kept well-maintained will improve the education of Ripon children. Additionally, Ripon Schools can be very active after-hours as community space. The positive reputation of a community's schools plays a major role in the enhancement of long-term real estate values, and attracting families to the area.

**Community Survey**

**Q. What was the community survey process?**

A. The Board sought input from the entire community through the facilitation of a community-wide survey. The District sent out a Request For Purchase (RFP) to survey vendors and the Board approved contracting with School Perceptions out of Slinger, WI. School Perceptions is an independent educational research firm that works with school districts to gather, organize and use data to make strategic decisions. They have expertise in conducting community surveys. All survey responses are confidential and returned directly to School Perceptions. The community survey reached households beginning April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2014. To save on District expenses, we encouraged the community to take the survey online by going to the website: [www.survey2000.com](http://www.survey2000.com) and enter the Survey Access Number found on the survey. All survey data was returned to School Perceptions.

**Q. What was the survey response rate?**

A. Nearly 1,000 surveys were completed.

**Q. Who participated in the survey?**

A. Participants were residents of the Ripon School District of voting age. 55% of the participants did not have children enrolled in the District, while 45% are parents of RASD students.

**Q. Did any facility plans stand out as more favorable?**

A. Based on results of the survey, Plan C was found to be the most favorable option. A majority of residents approved of this plan; 368 residents only supported one option and 217 of these voters selected Plan C. Additionally, 59% of residents supported closing the middle school and investing in a new option, such as combining with the high school. Plan C received significantly more support than any other plan.

**Q. Were participants supportive of continuing the current \$500,000 operation referendum and maintaining the current tax rate?**

A. Yes, 69% of all residents said they would support the continuation of this rate.

**Q. Where can the final survey results be found?**

A. Final survey results are available on the District website at [www.ripon.k12.wi.us](http://www.ripon.k12.wi.us).

### **Combining the Middle School and High School**

**Q. How will traffic flow on the new, combined facility?**

A. If the referendum passes, a traffic study will be conducted. Bus routes and Student Drop-Off will be reconfigured to ensure a safe, organized, and efficient traffic pattern. Several options will be generated, and then we will work through each possibility to find which traffic route will work best for the community.

**Q. What will happen to the soccer fields on the Middle School lot?**

A. The Middle School lot will be converted to additional parking and tennis courts. There will be some green space that remains. Additionally, Murray Park and Barlow Park will also have space available after school for youth football teams and other recreational programs.

### **Railroad Safety Questions:**

In a meeting with Wisconsin Southern Railroad, the City of Ripon Police Chief, CG Schmidt and the Business Manager from Ripon Area School District, there was an in depth discussion of the impact of the railroad tracks and their proximity to the high school with the new proposed project in the upcoming referendum. The WS Railroad brought their operational staff and leadership and answered all of the questions the RASD and City of Ripon had very openly and in a very cooperative manner. The following is a brief summary of the discussion, specifically addressing what will be commonly asked questions by constituents.

**Q. What is the condition of the tracks near the high school?**

A. The railroad right of way and tracks near the high school are actually owned by the State of Wisconsin who recently invested nearly \$2 million in improving the line that runs through Ripon. There is a federal agency that regulates and rates all tracks and dictates the speed at which trains can travel based on many safety criteria. The track in Ripon is in very good condition. It is rated for a top speed of 25 mph; a relatively low speed not prone to catastrophic derailment. In addition, due to the number of businesses that the line serves in Ripon, this top speed is seldom achieved in the area of the high school. Typical train speeds are 5-10 mph when operating through Ripon.

**Q. How often is the track inspected?**

A. Wisconsin Southern Railroad who operates this line inspects this length of track twice a week to make sure it meets all the regulatory safety requirements including switches, rail and base.

**Q. How many trains go through Ripon?**

A. Currently, only one train uses the track daily but it runs northbound and southbound daily. In addition, because it services several businesses in Ripon, it pulls loads up and down the track as it

switches cargo for the businesses in Ripon. When the trains are in this switching and transfer operation, they rarely come close to the top speed allowed on the tracks. Also, there is a curve on the north end of Ripon that has a speed limit of 10mph for all portions of the train which also limits the speed on other sections of the track.

**Q. What materials or cargo are shipped on this line in Ripon?**

A. Generally, anything that is hauled on the highway can be hauled on railroad tracks. Currently, however, there is no ethanol or petroleum hauled on this line. Other sensitive materials like this are rare, but, current regulation doesn't preclude the use of these tracks for those materials. The vast majority of the materials hauled are bulk materials such as sand, grain and aggregate.

**Q. Even though accidents on railroads are extremely rare, what can be done to improve safety beyond the extensive work that has already been done to improve and maintain the safety of the tracks?**

A. Some of the very infrequent accidents (per the AAR 99.9% of cargo reaches its destination without incident) are caused by trains and pedestrians or vehicular traffic interacting with trains within the train right of way. Some of the improvements focus on eliminating those potential interactions, while others focus on increasing safety if such interactions should occur. It is important to note that the train tracks are not public property per the agreements that exist for their use and should not be trespassed for any reason.

**Pedestrians-** To mitigate the potential for pedestrian interaction on the tracks there are two steps that could be taken whether the referendum is passed or not. 1) Fencing on either side of the tracks to restrict trespassing on the right of way and crossing of the tracks could be implemented, and 2) further education of the students and residents using the existing training programs that exist for this purpose called "Look listen, live" could be reinitiated and presented by the private firms that do this or facilitated by the Office of the Railroad Commissioner

**Vehicles –** If a referendum is passed, the impact on the two key intersections close to the school could be studied and submitted to the State for consideration for upgrades at the crossing including signals and gates. These requests would be made formally through joint request with the City of Ripon and the School District. The Office of the Commissioner of Railroads manages these requests and reviews whether the improvement is necessary by the standards they have established and if there is available funding for the improvements. It is likely that the traffic pattern particular at the crossing on Sullivan Street may change. A traffic study is anticipated if a referendum is passed to assess and resolve any traffic issues created by the new configuration.

**Q. What else can be done to make this site safer for the staff and students?**

A. There are a number of other steps that could be taken. A regular planned drill for evacuation can be implemented for the very outside chance that something does happen requiring precautionary relocation of the school occupants. More education about avoiding the interaction of pedestrians and trains can be implemented. These programs already exist and are typically focused on younger students but could be revisited for middle and high school students. Finally, other physical features such as berms along the railroad right of way could be considered to help divert a spill away from the high school. All of these steps would be proactive approaches to improve the safety of the overlap of the



railroad with the neighborhood around the high school and some steps could be taken sooner than the project timeline itself.

### **Referendum**

#### **Q. When is the referendum?**

A. The vote will be held on Tuesday, November 4, 2014. You will be able to vote at all poll locations within the Ripon district.

#### **Q. Where can I get more information?**

Visit the Ripon Area School District website at [www.ripon.k12.wi.us](http://www.ripon.k12.wi.us) and click on the Community Header and select the Facility Planning drop down menu. You will find everything from enrollment projections, facility reports, to the Power Point presentations from the community engagement sessions. Please direct your questions or comments to Dr. Mary Whitrock, Ripon Area School District Superintendent at [whitrockM@ripon.k12.wi.us](mailto:whitrockM@ripon.k12.wi.us) . Watch for the Submit a Question feature on the website.