

THE CHARGER

USD 329 board discusses bond options at town hall

Emma Frey
@_emmalfrey_

The USD 329 Board of Education held a town hall meeting Tuesday to discuss the bond options.

The meeting format involved splitting attendees into three groups with board members spread throughout to allow for more opinions to be heard.

Board members Jim Vopata and Callie Meinhardt presented option 10, which includes closing all buildings in the district and constructing a Pre K-12 building. Vopata explained that although the bond says all closed buildings would be demolished, selling them is also an option and they wouldn't necessarily be demolished.

Concerns for the placement of the proposed new school in Alma were brought up by community members. Vopata and Meinhardt explained that everything involving location and the layout of the building is still up in the air.

The plans presented by HTK Architects are mainly for a general idea construction options. The architects have created plans for other schools in the Linn and Emporia areas successfully. HTK was hired with information collected by su-

perintendent Brad Starnes comparing several architects in the area. Along with location, price is only a rough estimate and is not entirely figured at this time.

A large part of the architects findings concerned wasted space. The district is 100,000 square feet over what is needed to provide adequately for the number of students enrolled in the district. This bond solves this problem and would ultimately save \$45,000 a year for the district that is spent on upkeep for unneeded square footage.

Justin Frank and Donald Frank presented option 12, which includes closing both Maple Hill Elementary and Paxico Middle School and repairing the remaining buildings. "Operating budget, safety and security are our main goals," Justin Frank said. Continuing with this bond would only remove 40,000 of the 100,000 extra square footage that the district maintains.

This option is not a permanent fix for many of the problems in district buildings, and those same concerns would need addressed again in the next 20 years.

Several community members also voiced their concern over the possible destruction of the old high school building, as it is nearing

100 years old. HTK architect Keith Blackburn explained that doing so would be an endless expense to keep the building running.

pened, many decided to stick it out and try the new district layout. Potential losses have already been figured in to the proposed plans.

Buildings like (K-State's) Hale library cost roughly \$114 million to renovate with the whole state being taxed. We only have one community to fund this.
— HTK architect Keith Blackburn

"Buildings like Hale library cost roughly \$114 million to renovate with the whole state being taxed. We only have one community to fund this," Blackburn said. WHS is currently up to the safety standards for the fire marshal, but if renovations began it would only cost more money in the long run to keep up with the safety standards.

Community member Matt Moser raised concerns about losing students and funding by shutting down Maple Hill and Paxico schools. Board members explained that after speaking to several schools in the area that had switched to a Pre K-12 building about losing students, and they came up with the figure of roughly a 25-student loss. Many schools said that while some families swore to take their kids out of the district if these changes hap-

Option 16 was the final option, presented in depth by board members Jerome Hess and Tony Conrad. Option 16 includes closing both the middle school and Maple Hill Elementary, along with demolishing the old junior high building. Wabaunsee Elementary School would be placed on the current junior high location.

Conrad explained to community members that it is not economical to continue paying what we do to keep unused space up and running in our district's schools. "Mission Valley pays (for propane) for their entire school what we pay for only one of our buildings," Conrad said.

WHS teacher Brandi Miller shared her opinions on having a more condensed district. Miller hopes that bringing teachers closer together would eventually help to

form a stronger curriculum and better learning environment for students. "Collaboration is essential for teachers," Miller said.

Every option includes demolition of modulars. In total, the district has six modulars, one of which is not currently in use due to black mold. By demolishing modulars, the district hopes to take care of some of the extra square footage in the district and create a safer environment for students. This would involve less time spent outside traveling between classes.

Board members will meet Monday, February 10 and facilities will be an action item on the agenda. They hope to find the most efficient option that will provide the best education for USD 329 students.

This meeting will be the last opportunity if the BOE wants to have a special election prior to the November general election. The special election would be in May.

Superintendent Brad Starnes said the meeting was beneficial. "I think it allowed BOE members the opportunity to dialogue with the patrons, hopefully answer some questions and help both the BOE and patrons in understanding how to solve our problems."

EDITORIAL

K-12 building would be best for USD 329

With the board set to take action on a bond, the Charger staff believes option 10 is the best choice for the future of our district.

The option, which calls for a new K-12 building, unifies the school district, which will make the district more financially efficient and benefit many aspects of the students' experience.

Consolidating the buildings will mean fewer locations to manage, and it will centralize the management of the existing facilities, creating the potential for better security and easier maintenance. With fewer buildings, the district saves money by owning less square footage.

Having one building also gives the district the option of hiring a school nurse, security guard and other hires that wouldn't have to travel to other buildings. Again this will save money for the district because it eliminates traveling staff and the cost of gas.

All students will be in the same building, giving elementary kids the chance to interact with the high schoolers and learn from them. Moving the junior high students to the high school gives them the chance to start vocational classes sooner, earning the district extra funding from more students in the classes. Vocational classes also benefit the students because they can start exploring career interests earlier in their education.

Most of the board members, especially President Justin Frank, want this bond to last much longer, so the community isn't paying bond to bond. Option 10 gets rid of the "old" buildings and builds additions on to the "newer" buildings. By getting rid of the older buildings, the district will no longer have to deal with the problems that aging facilities present.

The community is going to change anyway, no matter what we do. The normal passage of time brings students and teachers in and out of the district. We can't dig in our heels and refuse to adapt, because if we don't take action now, the change will be forced to happen, and we may not like it.

What the community needs to focus on now is taking control of the changes while we still can, and benefiting from them. Option 10 will help ensure that in the future we'll be able to take changes in stride.

The editorial is the opinion of the Charger staff. Send letters to the editor to whscharger@gmail.com.

PLAYING WITH PRIDE



Left: Members of the K-State pep band play with the Charger pep band at Friday's Winter Royalty game against Riley County. "I thought it was a lot of fun. It was nice to have people who knew cheers and would cheer for a team. That big of a band changes things, it was a lot louder," senior Brendan Dugger said.

Above: Sierra Quathammer plays trumpet with members of the K-State band. The band was invited by the WHS Booster Club. Photos by Eleanor Badeker.

K-State pep band members join WHS for Winter Royalty

Hannah Mumpower
@Hlmump01

At Friday's home basketball game, 43 members of the K-State Catband joined the WHS pep band in cheering on the Chargers.

The band was originally set to attend a home football game in 2017 but, due to unforeseen issues, it had to cancel.

Through more communication and scheduling, Booster Club member Angie Barber was able to ensure that the band would have the opportunity to play at Wabaunsee.

"I think our students enjoyed having the college band," WHS band director Jaime Rogers said. "I think some were a bit star struck and some just jumped right in and interacted with them."

This was not the first time the K-State

band has travelled and played at a high school game. Two years ago the Catband played at Riley County High School. Dr. Alex Wimmer, the director of the band, believes that being involved in the community creates an aspect of family, which is important.

"Band families exist everywhere," Wimmer said. "In every single school they have a tight community: that play in band, sing in choir, that are on a football team or a basketball team, and those relationships stay with you for a lifetime. The same thing happens in college, and so we can share that experience and cheer on the basketball team and play some music together, have some fun, I mean that's a win-win for us. We want to be able to give back and music is a powerful tool that can bring people together and whenever we can be able to share that with people,

we like to do that."

"The benefits of K-State coming here are our students seeing and hearing the "next level" sound of young musicians," Rogers said. "Any of our students can continue to be in the shoes of the K-State players if they so choose."

Also in attendance at the game was former NFL star and Super Bowl Champion Jordy Nelson. Nelson graduated from Riley County High School and attended Kansas State University where he played football.

"I think it's pretty cool," Nelson said of the K-State band. "I didn't know they did things like that. I have heard they have gone to area schools, so it's fun to see them in the community and supporting the local high schools. It raises the atmosphere as well."