

West Deptford board of education to consider list of \$15M in building improvements

By Jason Laday/South Jersey Times

on November 13, 2013 at 2:59 PM, updated November 13, 2013 at 3:19 PM



WEST DEPTFORD TWP. — The board of education on Monday discussed for the first time the prospect of undertaking a series of improvements and renovations, both to specific schools and district-wide, that had been put off while the district was paying off its debt.

While BOE President Chris Strano said the board has used capital budget funds to address certain needs, he added that the fact that the district is now without debt allows officials to address long-standing needs at its schools. He added that, in the past, facility and school improvements had taken up about 1 percent of the budget, while debt service consumed “3 or 4 percent.”

“Buildings have been maintained with certain capital improvements along the way,” said Strano. “However, last year, we retired some debt from the last referendum, and we’re now debt free.

“Members of the board have toured the buildings, and today what we have is a needs list, along with the estimated total cost of each one.”

The list, prepared by the district’s engineer and director of facilities, includes an estimated \$15 million in potential construction projects, upgrades and renovations.

Possible improvements at the high school include, among other things, a new gymnasium floor, new science classrooms and labs, renovating the library, replacing student lockers and repairing a section of the roof.

Another potential project, which was not included in the official list, is the installation of an elevator at the high school, at a cost of about \$646,250. However, it could be added at the discretion of the BOE.

At the middle school, needed upgrades include an upgraded HVAC control system, new hallway ceilings and new HVAC units on the roof.

At Green-Fields elementary, among the listed improvements is a proposal to replace the windows in the school atrium.

Previously, glare from the sun shining off the glass atrium had damaged a nearby residence. The owners of the home eventually took legal action against the school, resulting in the current situation in which the atrium is covered with a blue tarp for parts of the year.

Possible improvements at Oakview and Red Bank elementary schools include bathroom renovations, fire alarm upgrades, electric system upgrades and window replacements.

The list also included about \$2.7 million in improvements benefiting district athletics, such as a \$1 million project to replace the high school stadium field with synthetic turf and install a new drainage system. Also included are new home-side bleachers, bathroom upgrades and a new press box.

Unlike the projects benefiting schools and other district buildings, the improvements focused on athletics are not eligible for state grants.

According to Strano, the district can apply for grants that would help pay for 40 percent of certain projects.

“We have to start thinking about it — there are several different ways to pay for this,” he said. “You see this and you say, ‘Wow, I wish we could have all of this,’ but you’d have to hit the Powerball for that.

“The finance committee needs to meet, and we need to start thinking about it ahead of next year’s budget process.”