

D99 mulls facility upgrades

District revisits budget for building improvements

BY ANNEMARIE MANNION

Chicago Tribune

Downers Grove Community High School District 99 has taken another look at its master facility improvement plan, and is revising it downward to focus on critical needs for its two high schools.

The plan is to continue to review the proposal that could lead to a ballot question some time in the next couple of years, asking voters if they approve of making the expenditure to improve facilities at Downers Grove North and Downers Grove South high schools.

The current proposal to make upgrades at the schools is estimated at \$69.9 million, rather than more than \$100 million that had been suggested by staff in April.

Superintendent Mark McDonald said the new plan would address critical needs on the two campuses.

"Does this address all our



ANNEMARIE MANNION/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Downers Grove North High School could see improvements if the District 99 board and community endorse a master facility plan.

For more local news, go to TribLocal.com.

needs? No. It's inconceivable to have a budget big enough for us to meet all

our needs," he said.

The district interviewed staff members in the buildings, and had community forums, to get feedback on what should be the priorities for improvements.

The top needs identified by staff and community members included improving safety and security of

Turn to **Improvements**, Page 8

Proposals for Downers Grove high school upgrades revisited

Improvements, from Page 1

the buildings, installing air conditioning, upgrading fitness areas, completing outdoor site plans, creating classrooms that enhance online learning, and creating flexible learning spaces.

At Downers Grove North High School, the proposed plan calls for \$18.9 million in creating instructional commons and fine arts improvements; \$2.8 million for upgrades to the cafeteria, library and classrooms; and \$11.4 million in improvements to instruction and building services. In addition, bleachers, a squad room and a new press box would cost \$2.5 million. Air conditioning for classrooms would be about \$3.3 million.

The proposal at Downers Grove South would entail \$17.7 million in redesigned instructional commons and fine arts improvements and

\$7.2 million for rebuilding administration offices, student services and the library. Air conditioning in classrooms would be about \$1.7 million. A second phase of the project would include \$4.4 million for bleachers, a squad room, press box, a second turf field and ticket booth.

School board members said they need more time to review the proposed plan, and plan to revisit it by January. They agreed they need to start considering whether the community would accept the idea of issuing bonds for the improvements.

"We can craft the perfect plan that never has the chance to succeed," said board member Don Renner. "At some point, we have to take the temperature (of the community)."

Controller Mark Staehlin said the district's referendum bonds approved in 2000 are on track to expire

after the 2018-19 school year, which would bring a decrease of \$146 in property taxes on average for a \$300,000 home. If bonds are approved for the proposed improvements, he said it would likely result in a "very modest increase" in property taxes, rather than a decrease.

He said the improvements the district is considering to the schools would be useful more than 20 years into the future.

"These changes will last a very long time," Staehlin said. "This will serve future generations."

One of the largest reductions from the April proposal was in air conditioning costs. Jim Kolodziej, director of operations for the district, estimated they cut costs related to air conditioning schools by about 30 percent.

amannion@tribpub.com