

# D-99 facility plan scaled back to \$70M

By **EVAN SHIELDS**  
eshields@shawmedia.com

**DOWNERS GROVE** – Community High School District 99 has scaled back its master facility plan for upgrades at the two high schools to \$70 million.

Superintendent Mark McDonald said the master facility plan grew out of the 2011 strategic plan, which required a facility plan. The initial proposal in April was well more than \$100 million for facility upgrades.

“We have reduced this project’s scope substantially,” he said.

McDonald added although this doesn’t address all of the district’s needs, it meets the most pressing issues for the district.

The priorities listed from the staff and community were enhancing safety and security of the buildings, installing air conditioning, improving fitness areas, completing outdoor site plans, creating classrooms focused on online learning and creating flexible learning spaces.

Downers Grove South Principal Ed Schwartz said flexible classroom spaces are important because students have different ways of learning, including sharing documents, video conferencing and Internet learning.

“I just look at it as how are we going to sell this. I think we have a very difficult task in front of us in how are we going to convince the community.”

**Don Renner**

District 99 Board member

“That is the world in which our kids learn,” he said.

At Downers Grove North High School, the proposal includes \$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.

Bleachers, a squad room and a new press box would cost \$2.5 million. Air conditioning for classrooms would cost \$3.3 million.

Ken Sorensen, associate principal for operations at Downers Grove North, said a majority of the upgrades would include an open collaboration space for students on the first floor, classroom changes and eliminating

the White Gym to create a new loading dock.

Board members wanted more information about the future of the school’s gymnastics program, which mostly uses the White Gym for practices.

Downers Grove South High School’s plan would call for \$17.7 million in redesigned instructional commons and fine arts improvements and \$7.2 million for rebuilding administration offices, student services and the library.

The second phase of the project would include \$4.4 million for bleachers, a squad room, a press box, a second turf field and a ticket booth. Air conditioning in classrooms would cost \$1.7 million.

The grand total for the proposal is \$69.9 million.

Omar Davis, associate principal for operations at Downers Grove South, said work at the school would include a new main entrance to the school, new administrative offices and renovated classrooms.

One of the items cut from the original proposal was a renovated auditorium at Downers Grove South, which board member Michael Davenport said

**See PLAN, page 14**

---

## • PLAN

Continued from page 4

he thought the district should look at adding to the proposal. He said the program there is good and they should have a good facility as a result.

He also said if they are planning to go to referendum, they should have a selling point that would benefit the whole community. An auditorium, he said, would draw in shows and performances the community could enjoy.

"To have a focal point sort of project at each school, I think, would be important. And that's where I see the auditorium," Davenport said.

Cutting the renovated auditorium from the proposal saved \$20 million, and Schwartz said all options they looked at would have cost around \$20 million.

District 99 Controller Mark Staehlin said it's too early to talk specifics about financing, but he has some ideas about how it would work.

Currently, the district's referendum bonds approved in 2000 are scheduled to expire after the 2018-19 year, which would result in a decrease of \$146 in property taxes on average for a \$300,000 home. Staehlin said the district likely would look around that time to approve the bonds, which would mean a "very modest increase" in property

taxes, as opposed to a drop.

"These changes will last a very long time," Staehlin said. "This will serve future generations. Board documents suggest the upgrades could be useful for more than 20 years."

One of the biggest cuts from the earlier proposal was air conditioning costs. Jim Kolodziej, director of operations for the district, said they cut proposed air conditioning costs by one third.

Davenport said he also was concerned about some of the large collaborative spaces proposed at both schools.

"I think it's important to have them," Davenport said. "I'm not sure we couldn't be using some of the existing spaces we have."

Board member Don Renner said the board needs to find a set dollar amount to bring to the community to find how comfortable they are with it.

"I just look at it as how are we going to sell this," he said. "I think we have a very difficult task in front of us in how are we going to convince the community."

The board agreed it would be willing to spend \$80 million on facility upgrades.

McDonald said the board is getting close in terms of cost, but isn't ready to bring it forward to the public yet. It's possible the board could look at facilities again in January.