

SLSD Town Hall #1

Jan. 17, 2017

FAQ's (Frequently Asked Questions)

The below questions / answers were posed at the Jan. 17 Town Hall meeting. Several were spoken to aloud, others were not... After each Town Hall meeting, we will post the questions and answers that were put forth.

Q1: When are the Whitewater Valley Elementary flood plain reviews expected?

A. February, 2017

Q2: Can this wait until 2018?

A. Sure. The longer we wait, the further behind our students fall – in terms of the 21st century education they receive. The environment where they learn matters. More now, than ever before. From a safety and technology stand point, to capacity issues.

Q3: Where do the funds for the LIFETIME levy to build this building go to?

A. The funds generated from the income tax are accounted for in the general fund. They are used to pay the general operating expenses of the District. As for the money raised from the passage of the bond issue to build the activity center, those funds are placed in a bond retirement account. These funds can only be used to pay for the interest and principle on the bonds.

Q4: How long are the “pods” intended to be used at Crosby / Junior School? Would they be permanent if funding not approved?

A. The modular classrooms (Pods) are expected to be used for 2 – 4 years, and are purely a short-run solution. We would need to consider the modular, and more than likely, several more modular units, to handle the future enrollment growth potential. The potential for the modulars to become permanent instructional spaces is not the intent.

Q5: What are the expenditures besides personnel? There were 3 fixed areas listed – but only one category was stated? Why does it cost \$9,399 to educate ONE child, for ONE year?

A. Fixed costs for the District would include utilities, county and State fees for the collection of taxes, transportation costs, special education cost, tuition for students that leave the District through open enrollment or community schools, and property and liability insurance. When the State calculates the cost per student, they take into account all general fund expenditures, including those items listed above as well as personnel costs. They break the cost down in five categories: Administrative (\$1,077.57), Building Operations (\$1,566.31), Instructional (\$6,106.86), Pupil Support (\$545.96), and Staff Support (\$102.41). Based on the State's fiscal year 2015 calculation, SLSD has the 2nd lowest expenditure per pupil among Hamilton Counties 22 districts.

Q6: What will the state share look like in 2018? 2019? 2020? Is there any way to predict this?

A. Because the state share/equity ranking is calculated based on “relative wealth per student for all of the 612 school districts in Ohio” each year, we don't believe there is a way to accurately calculate the future state share.

Q7: Why can't they build a 2nd floor on the old flat top buildings – thus providing extra classrooms + improve the roof... especially at Crosby and Miamitown?

A. If the original roof structures and foundations were designed for a future 2nd floor, this could be a relatively economical approach to adding additional classrooms. If the structures were not designed for a 2nd floor, adding the floor structure and foundations to support a second floor would likely be more expensive than building a school on grade and would likely require closure of the school for a year.

Q8: Will INTER-District transfers no longer exist or be allowed?

A. INTER-district transfers are permitted where room exists, and on a case by case basis.

Q9: How do we better bet the word out on the financial history of the district? The TPP information, etc.?

A. Meetings like this assist in getting this information out. Newsletters, social media and the Harrison Press also help. The message needs to be consistent and make sense to folks not in the field.

Q10: SHP – How are individual groups picked in terms of the Community Advisory or Education Visioning Team? Will the “No” voters be added? We don't want to repeat the previous campaign struggles...

A. Our goal for all community engagement is to received balanced input from the entire community so we can achieve common ground that is supported by the community at-large. The goal for the teams is to recruit representatives from all stakeholder groups in the community, including the past opponents. District leadership is working to identify and invite community members that represent the entire community.

Q11: If we use state co-funding, are there certain standards that must be met, in order for us to accept state funding?

A. Yes, there are specifications that must be met in order state monies to be used in our construction projects.

Q12: What types of efficiencies / savings of new buildings can off-set some operating expenses to possibly lower the operating needs in the future...with a bricks / mortar levy?

A. Operational impacts of facility master plan options include the following major categories: Staffing costs, busing costs, utility costs, and maintenance costs. Because staff costs are the district's greatest expense, it's also the area of potentially greatest savings. Utility costs would be least with all new, super insulated, high performance buildings. Maintenance costs should be lowest with either fully renovated or new schools.

Q13: How many total students are enrolled in SLSD in 2015, 2016 and 2017?

A. 2015: 3,745

2016: 3,791

2017: 3,862

Q14: Can we remodel Whitewater Valley if it is in the flood plain?

A. Yes, with local dollars only. State monies cannot be used to remodel or rebuild in areas where the flood plain is impacted.

Q15: How long will this take? When do you project the new updates to be done?

A. We expect the Facilities Assessment to be completed by the end of this month (January). Once a bond issue is passed – to update / replace school facilities, it typically takes 18 – 24 months to complete the construction.

Q16: When will all-day Kindergarten start in SLSD?

A. We hope to start offering full-day kindergarten when spacing permits. Currently, cost / space issues are hindering us from offering all-day Kindergarten.

Q17: Does SLSD lose property tax income on industries located in the Harrison Joint Economic District?

A. There are currently 3 Community Reinvestment Area Agreements in Whitewater Township as well as 1 Enterprise Zone Agreement in Harrison. We are also aware that 2 applications have been filed for an Enterprise Zone Agreement in Harrison. Each of these agreements are for property tax exemptions at various percentages. The District receives real estate income on the reduced property value as outlined in the agreements. Each of these agreements are for a designated number of years and are reviewed annually to ensure the company is meeting it's agreed upon obligation.

Q18: How much property / Tangible Tax Revenue does the school district expect from the Texas Gas Compressor station?

A. Until the Hamilton County Auditor determines the property value of the Texas Gas compressor station, we do not know how much it will bring in. Also the fact that there is nothing in the area to compare the property against to even estimate a value, makes it even more difficult to determine the revenue it will generate.

Q19: Has the district dropped the idea of a centralized elementary school?

A. No. Nothing is off the table at this point. All options are under consideration.

Q20: For 9 years, no maintenance? No money? What about the \$12M in the general fund? Why would we allow no maintenance?

A. Our Permanent Improvement (PI) fund was replaced with an earned income tax 8 years ago. PI money is dedicated to building maintenance, explicitly. The earned income monies go in to the general fund. The Business Manager position was cut 8 years ago as well. We have 4 full-time maintenance men on staff, district-wide. A plumber, an electrician, and HVAC specialist and a jack of all trades. The four individuals repair what's broken - every day, for all 6 buildings. We spend money out of the general fund to repair what needs repaired, when the time comes. Last year alone, we spent \$1,189,780 on the maintenance of our schools. So yes, maintenance is occurring each day, throughout the district. The specific revenue stream that was dedicated to maintenance alone was replaced with the earned income tax. Not having a business director shifts the maintenance oversight to the Superintendent.

Q21: So new buildings could increase open enrollment, pay themselves off?

A. We get approximately \$6K from the state, for open-enrolled students. We get around \$3,500 per students that live in our district from the state. As a result, we generate around \$350K total per year for our open-enrolled students. It still costs money to educate these students and that money comes off the \$350K that is generated. Would this cover a \$100M building project alone? No.

Q22: So the state said Whitewater Valley and the High School were the only two buildings allowed to be updated?

A. The state will allow the district to renovate any of the existing schools above 2/3 of replacement cost with a “compelling reason” from the district, but if the final cost exceeds the cost of a new replacement building, the district is responsible for all of the overage. Whitewater Valley renovation is currently less than 2/3 of replacement cost, but is currently indicated by Federal Flood maps to be in the flood plain and the state will not fund renovation of a school in the flood plain. Overall, the HS is less than 2/3 of replacement cost, but the original 1968 building is above 2/3 and could be replaced.

Q23: Does April mean we need to approve a levy by then?

A. No. Early April is when the state wants to know if SLSD would like to pursue state funding and how much funding so that the state can prepare agreements for Southwest approval in May/June and State approval in July; these actions would allow SLSD to be on the November 2017 or May 2018 ballots. As a separate action, the board would need to approve a bond issue around July for a November ballot.

Q24: How do you convince those not hear?

A. Great question... it is our hope, that with a concrete communication plan and a robust community engagement effort, that we reach as many folks as possible with our message - that our schools need attention. That our students and their futures matter. This is something we will continue to work on – for many, many years to come... regardless of a bond issue. We have much work to do on the communication front.

Q25: What liability do we have for vacated buildings – if we build new ones?

A. It is our intention to have vacated properties sold, if the land is not in our use plan for the future. For example, Hooven Elementary and E-Town land will be up for sale in early March, 2017.

Q26: Can a community center be included in a new campus?

A. Yes. Anything is possible at this point. More and more school districts are partnering with other public entities. We would welcome this idea.

Q27: Have you assessed pay to play sports?

A. Yes, we do this on an annual basis.

Q28: Could the schools rent out facilities during the off-season?

A. Yes, and we do. The activity center garners the most in terms of rental use / funds.

Q29: Last time social media bashed the lack of HS bus service. Anything being looked in to on this front?

A. An extensive study was completed last year, looking at HS bus service. The cost is around \$300K per year. The average ridership for HS busing did not warrant this expense. We continue to look at this area, however, knowing that it is a hot-button issue.

Q30: Year-round school, good or bad for expenses?

A. Great question! The tricky part would be negotiating with our two unions on this (classified and certified staff). Current contracts speak to the number of days we have serviced. For teachers = 183. Academically, there are many advantages to going year-round. There are also some drawbacks. We continue to look in to this possibility however... much of it hinging on air quality control (air conditioned buildings).

Q31: Instead of passing a levy on property taxes, has any thought been given to raise the earned income tax – from say .75 to 1.5%? This would spread the burden among area employees...

A. Yes, all options are being explored at this point. Nothing has been finalized.

Q32: Why would the general maintenance fund been discontinued? Why would we not have a fund for 9 years?

A. Prior to 2007, the District had a permanent improvement levy that was approved by the community. By law, revenues generated from a permanent improvement levy are restricted on how they can be used. The revenues generated from this levy were used for building repairs and maintenance which is an allowable expense. The levy generated about \$320,000 per year and was accounted for in the permanent improvement or maintenance fund. When the community approved the income tax, the District eliminated the permanent improvement levy thus eliminating the maintenance fund. It also caused the shifting of expenditures from the maintenance fund, for building maintenance and repairs, to the general fund, which is where the revenues from the income tax are recorded.

Q33: Does renovation cost include expansion for over-capacity?

A. Yes. All new or newly renovated buildings will plan for future growth in enrollment.

Q34: What happens to the property of each school, once the new school is built?

A. Depends on the property. If we use the property for a new school, other than demo / site prep for the new building, nothing happens to the property. For buildings or properties we no longer need, selling them would make the most sense.

Q35: Can we use the \$12M the school district currently has to off-set the cost of the new schools?

A. The \$ we have currently is used for operating expenses, not new construction or renovations.

Q36: How long does the state monies remain available to SLSD?

A. After August 2016, the state monies are no longer reserved for SLSD. SLSD's CFAP (Classroom Facilities Assistance Program) agreement has "lapsed" and if SLSD now wants to obtain state funds as a "lapsed" district, must update their master plan with the state, enter an agreement with no state monies reserved, pass the local share of the master plan and then wait for state monies to become available.

Q37: The projections for future students seems low for my community – how are these projections made? By who?

A. These enrollment projections were provided by the state through a consulting firm "Future Think" based in Columbus. In recent years, enrollment projections have trended toward the conservative/low side (there are several districts in Ohio that have unoccupied new schools co-funded by the state based of previous projections that were high). SLSD has requested updated projections and we will thoroughly review, and challenge if needed, before accepting. In any case, with the potential in SLSD for future development and enrollment growth, planning for future student capacity is recommended.

Q38: Do you think it's too soon to put another levy on the ballot?

A. Good question... let me answer with another question – when is a good time? To think that even after a bond issues is secured, it will still be close to 2 years prior to kids walking the halls, the longer we wait, the more students pass through our antiquated and in some cases, over-populated schools.

Q39: What does the income tax pay for? I thought it was for operations?

A. The revenues generated from the income tax are used for the general operations of the District.

Q40: How do you plan to update the facilities here, to accommodate future growth, but keep the tight-knit, small town feel?

A. Architecturally, there are ways to keep schools "small" but still have the perks of large-scale efficiencies. Sharing common areas – cafeterias, libraries, gym space, computer labs, etc. help to keep costs in check for larger buildings, yet keep the schools feeling smaller. In terms of keeping the community small – it's tough to do when significant land is available for development.

Q41: How will you divvy up the resources between the schools – when a tax levy passes?

A. Our goal is to have a master plan created in the next several months, with extensive community input. The plan would ideally benefit ALL students that attend our schools.

Q42: How do I become part of the Community Advisory Team?

A. We have reached the max capacity for this team – as of Jan. 18. We do still have room on the Educational Visioning team and finance team. We want as many folks involved as possible and that may require you to be part of one of the two aforementioned teams.

Q43: Busing needs to return. Please address whether this is being considered.

A. Yes, it is being considered. As is all-day kindergarten.

