

# **Spring Independent School District Bond Steering Committee Minutes Thursday, June 30, 2016**

The second meeting of the Bond Steering Committee was held on Thursday, June 30, 2016, in the Boardroom at the Gordon M. Anderson Leadership Center, located at 16717 Ella Blvd, Houston, TX 77090. The meeting's focus was on facilities, beginning with an overview of district facility needs and options, including information about potential ninth-grade-only campuses, middle school needs, early childhood education centers, and other district facility needs and options.

## **Attendees**

Bond Steering Committee Members Present: 64

## **Call to Order**

At approximately 6:03 p.m., Spring ISD Chief Financial Officer Ann Westbrook began the meeting and introduced Superintendent Dr. Rodney Watson, who briefly welcomed participants and thanked them for coming.

## **Agenda**

- **Meeting Overview and Objectives**
  - Ms. Westbrook directed attendees to the new packets of information to add to their steering committee binders, then briefly introduced the agenda for the evening.
  - She reminded the committee that, before a bond is placed on the ballot, the district will face a number of alternatives and “tough choices,” with more potential projects than funds.
  - District demographics were briefly discussed, including the fact that Spring ISD’s demographics are essentially those of an urban district, a fact which could influence the kinds of projects to be prioritized in a bond measure.
  - The potential bond funding capacity was reviewed, along with the fact that, even at the high end, tradeoffs would be required.
  
- **Potential Facility Elements (presented by Chief Operations Officer Mark Miranda)**
  - Attendees reviewed district capacity forecasts, including information about all three comprehensive high schools and the majority of district middle schools are currently over capacity and utilization, with no room for additional growth.
  - In addition to the likely need for a new middle school, the acute facility needs at the secondary level could be addressed in several possible ways, including the construction of a new comprehensive high school or the establishment of “ninth-grade academies,” where ninth-graders would make the transition from junior to senior high.

- Basic specifications were discussed for a potential new high school and potential ninth-grade academies, including student capacity and costs for construction.
- **Smaller Schools (presented by Chief Academic Officer Dr. Lupita Hinojosa)**
  - In response to priorities discussed during the strategic planning process – such as increased opportunities and choice, academic rigor and improved school safety – district administration has been discussing the idea of incorporating smaller schools into Spring ISD’s structure.
  - A range of research and information on the benefits of smaller schools – in particular, their potential benefits for students and their families – was introduced.
  - Along with other potential benefits of smaller schools, the potential for stronger relationships between students, teachers, and parents was emphasized.
  - In particular, an overview was given of the “freshman academy model” – a model that was developed to help ease the transition from eighth to ninth grade, improve attendance rates and combat dropout rates, and generally offer ninth-graders added support to ensure a solid foundation for long-term academic success.
  - A panel of speakers was brought in to discuss the ninth-grade academy model and to answer questions from the committee on the topic. Panel members included:
    - Dr. Doris Delaney, Deputy Director Region IV ESC (Retired),  
*Served as first principal of Aldine 9th Grade School*
    - Ms. Jennifer Merryman, Principal of Aldine 9th Grade School,  
*Served as a teacher and counselor at Nimitz 9th Grade School*
    - Ms. Sheneria Perry, Spring ISD 2015-16 Teacher of the Year Finalist,  
*Former Nimitz 9th Grade School student*
    - Mr. Isaac Carrier, Spring ISD Assistant Superintendent of High Schools,  
*Former assistant principal of Nimitz 9th Grade School and member of the administrative team that opened the school*
  - Specific questions were posed to panel members, including those that follow:
    - Q. What are some of the biggest challenges of the model?  
A. Ensuring an adequate number of administrators and counselors on campus. Also, dealing with some of the major tests given during the ninth-grade year.
    - Q. How specifically do students feel they benefit? (asked of a former student)  
A. The ninth-grade-only setting helped ease the nervousness of moving into high school. The administration and teachers’ specific focus on ninth-graders made for a very nurturing and supportive environment, and one that encouraged strong and lasting bonds with teachers, administrators, and fellow students.
    - Q. What are some other benefits of the model?  
A. Increased student scores and achievement, as well as a smoother relationship between the “administrative” and “instructional” functions at the school. Another benefit can be the opportunity to focus on the needs of ninth-graders while still

allowing for collaboration with nearby senior high school campuses (e.g., for higher-level AP coursework or fine arts classes, as required).

- The floor was opened for steering committee members to ask general questions about the ninth-grade model, some of which included:

- A question about the placement of potential ninth-grade academies.

Answer: Several options are under consideration. Sharing land/building space with an existing high school is a possibility, but this approach has pros and cons.

- A question about AP coursework and how G/T students would be served by the model.

Answer: Many ninth-grade academies offer a range of AP courses available to the freshmen; others collaborate with nearby high schools to offer specialized courses as needed.

- A question about how many such schools are being considered.

Answer: This is still under consideration, but an option being discussed is one ninth-grade academy to correspond to each of the district's comprehensive high schools.

- A question about why the "results" of this model aren't already being implemented within the district.

Answer: While ninth-grade teachers and administrators in the district do everything they can to provide a strong, personalized learning experience for every ninth-grade student, Spring ISD's high school building plans/layouts in general do not support implementing the ninth-grade academy model.

- A period of small-group discussion followed, in which committee members brainstormed pros and cons of Spring ISD building three ninth-grade centers. Items brought back to the full group for further consideration included:

- Pros: Improved discipline, smoothed transition for ninth-graders, improved academics.
- Cons: Potential staffing complications, as well as infrastructure and maintenance needs associated with the new ninth-grade centers.
- Additional considerations: Transportation (if required) between ninth-grade centers and nearby senior high school campuses for some coursework and activities.

- The topic was also broached of how the district's UIL status might be affected by the building of a new comprehensive high school vs. the establishment of ninth-grade centers.

- **Potential Facility Elements (cont.)**

- Attendees reviewed information on potential middle school(s), including capacity, estimated construction costs, and possible locations.
- The possibility of establishing an early childhood center was discussed, including capacity, cost range, and potential locations (new building vs. repurposed facility).

- The benefits of early childhood education were also briefly enumerated, including the potential impact prekindergarten programs can have on overall education outcomes for a community.
- Ms. Maria Solis, the district’s director of Early Childhood Programs, was introduced to the committee as a resource for information on the benefits of early childhood education.
- Another period of small-group discussion followed, in which committee members discussed the pros and cons of Spring ISD building a new center or purchasing and repurposing real estate in the community. Items brought back to the full group for further consideration included:
  - Pros: Early childhood enrollment might go up if more full-day prekindergarten programs could be offered within the district.
  - Cons: Some committee members brought up the “hidden costs” of purchasing and repurposing an existing facility.
  - Additional considerations: Could one facility effectively serve the whole district, especially given potential early childhood enrollment increases?
- Additional potential facility elements were discussed, including:
  - Stadium
  - Police Command Center
  - Leadership Center improvements
- Spring ISD Director of Athletics Willie Amendola was introduced to give a brief history and overview of the current district stadium and the potential need for renovations or a new stadium facility.
- A few factors introduced for consideration by the committee regarding the stadium included:
  - The current stadium was built in the late 1960s, with bleachers expanded in the 1970s.
  - Parking is a challenge, especially since the parking layout doesn’t allow for separate home-team and away-team parking.
  - The stadium has no dedicated locker rooms, and teams use Spring High School locker rooms, which can cause issues, especially when school and stadium events are scheduled in close proximity.
  - The need for dedicated accessible seating (for visitors in wheelchairs, etc.) is currently unmet.
  - The stadium’s lighting system is beyond its service life.
  - The concession stand is sub-standard.
- A potential new stadium location was discussed, along with construction cost and other factors. Another option – renovations to the existing facility – was also introduced.
- Several questions related to the potential stadium needs were posed by committee members, including the following:

- Could the district build, along with a new stadium, a facility that could house graduations, convocations, and other events for which Spring ISD currently rents out facilities in neighboring districts?

Answer: This has been considered as a possibility, but may not be an accessible goal at the current bond level under consideration, given other district needs.

- What would happen to the current stadium if a new stadium were to be built?

Answer: Under consideration.

- The topic turned to discussion of the district's need for a new police command center, as well as potential improvements to the Anderson Leadership Center (e.g., increased office space and board room improvements).

- **Wrap-up and Questions**

- A number of additional questions were posed by committee members for further consideration, including:
  - A question about whether delaying the bond would increase the funding capacity. Immediate answer: It's hard to predict what will happen with property taxes, and, while there are certainly gaps between the potential funding and the district needs, the process was initiated knowing that this would be the case. In short, the district never expected to be able to address all these elements on one bond measure.
  - A question about how deferred maintenance is being weighed in the overall potential bond balance.
  - A question about prioritizing certain potential bond elements (e.g., police command center, new middle school).
  - A request for some additional details to be shared with the committee so they can better understand the specific facility needs under consideration.
  - A follow-up question about the valuation of the Exxon property and how that ongoing case will affect bond funding.
  - A question about how much revenue might be generated for the district by a new stadium and whether that revenue might help to offset the costs of a new stadium facility.
- In wrapping up the evening's discussion, the main topics were reiterated, including the district's demographics, the research around the benefits of smaller schools, the possibility of ninth-grade centers as a means of alleviating capacity and utilization issues at the secondary level, and the potential positive impacts on the community through the expansion of early childhood education.
- Committee members were encouraged to reach out with follow-up questions (e.g., via email or the "elevate" communications tool on the district website).
- The meeting schedule was briefly revisited, and committee members were reminded that there would be no meeting the week of July 4th.

**Adjournment**

After final thanks were offered to attendees, the meeting ended at 8:04 p.m.