

Albany School Board discusses possible changes in multipurpose building

Asked to research expanding structure to accommodate future growth

BY MIKE KOSIK | STAFF WRITER

The Albany Area School Board discussed the possibility of adding some height to the multipurpose building at the new early learning center.

That would allow the district, at a future date, to put in an elementary school gym.

The board took no action during its Jan. 4 meeting other than to follow up with communication to interested parties who have approached the district in regards to fundraising to enhance the project, which is converting the former Albany Hospital and Clinic into an early learning center.

The board was asked at its Dec. 14, 2022, meeting to consider expanding the multipurpose building from 8,500 square feet to 10,000 square feet to accommodate future growth. The district's Project Oversight Committee met after that and presented its recommendation during the board's Jan. 4 meeting.

Board members Ozzie Carbajal, Matt Kreuzer and Scott Hansen are on the committee.

Instead of expanding its footprint, the board would rather increase the height to about 25 feet instead of the

planned 17 feet.

The board learned at the meeting that expanding the proposed multipurpose room to 10,000 square feet would significantly add to the cost.

Discussing the plans with the board were Chris Rear, from ICS, and John Kretchmer, from Wold Architects & Engineers.

ICS is the project manager for the project. They answered a number of questions from the board.

It was during the discussion with them that the board learned it would cost about \$750,000 more to go to 10,000-square-feet, but adding just height would cost an additional \$250,000.

As for future expansion, there is in the present plans space to add another 16 classrooms. Carbajal said it may be another 30 years before that space is needed, but it is there.

Hansen said he liked the idea of building up and not out and added, "We have a fixed budget," and cannot go beyond that, he said.

One suggestion was to include two bidding options for the multipurpose building. One would be for the 17-foot height and the other for 25 feet. That could give a bidder the option of donat-

ing the material for the extra 8 feet.

In wrapping up the discussion on the project, board member Kreuzer said, "The project is going to be fantastic for the kids and sets us up for the future."

The board will need to approve final plans fairly soon if the project construction is to get underway late summer.

Rear said planning to start construction in late summer could likely work in the district's favor because contractors would have finished other projects during the summer months and would be looking for work in the fall.

Also related to the project, Cassandra Novak, community education director, showed the board how information about the project will be presented and updated on the district's website, OurHuskiesOurFuture.org.

Novak also has the role of managing the district's communication and was a key administrative member in the referendum process. Also, about one-half of the learning center will be for early childhood students, which is run through community education.

Once the project gets further along, public meetings are planned to keep district residents up to date.

In other board news:

— Oaths of office were administered to the three re-

cently elected school board members — Amy Sand, Steve Rueter and Dean Dirkes. Sand is an incumbent. Rueter and Dirkes replace Don Winkels and Lynn Pennic who chose not to re-run.

— Kreuzer was elected board chair, Hansen vice-chairman, Sand clerk and Tim Sands treasurer.

— Remuneration of board members will remain the same — \$50 per meeting, \$350 for the chair, \$300 for the clerk, \$200 for the treasurer, workshops or conferences of one-half day of less \$50 and for a full day \$100.

— The board will meet the second and fourth Wednesdays of each month, except if there is a holiday.

— In approving school resignations and retirements in the consent agenda, board member Dirkes noted Eileen Ritter's retirement as a school bus driver after more than 40 years of service deserved special recognition.

Dirkes said she was very well liked and was "good to my family and other families."

— Novak also updated the board on the community education departments process of developing birthday packages for the Blattner Energy Community Center. Plans were in progress before COVID-19 and now that things have returned to a more normal routine, those plans have been revived.

Community education would develop packages that will allow families access to the Blattner Energy Community Center or the swimming pool for birthday celebrations. Currently, it is in the planning process, and once more information becomes available it will be made public.