

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS REGARDING SPRING-FORD'S HIGH SCHOOL RENOVATION/ADDITION PROJECT

As many residents are already aware, the Spring-Ford Area School District is in the final planning stages of a renovation/addition project at the Spring-Ford High School (10-12 Center) to accommodate an increase in student enrollment. Current enrollment at the 10-12 Center is 1,507 students and this number will increase to over 1,614 students for the coming school year. Based upon the current enrollments at the elementary and middle school levels, the student body will continue to grow by at least 100 students per year over the next several years.

As a result, the Spring-Ford Area School Board has approved a high school addition and renovation project. General construction bids were accepted at the March 23rd Board meeting. The total cost of these bids is \$22,093,196 – an amount that is approximately \$6 million below what had been projected 18 months ago when the process was initiated. What follows below is a series of questions and answers that will help community members to better understand the project and the reasons behind decisions to include various project components, known as “alternates.”

Q. What was the original estimated cost for the construction of the project?

A. When a school district undertakes a major construction process, a Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) process known as PlanCon is initiated. This process is designed to document a school district's planning, provide justification for the project to the public, assure compliance with state laws and regulations and determine the level of state reimbursement for the project.

In October of 2007, the first stage of the proposed high school project, PlanCon Part A was approved by the Board and submitted to PDE. At that time E.I. Associates, the architects responsible for the design of the project, estimated that the construction costs would be approximately \$28 million. PlanCon Part A was reviewed by PDE and formally approved in April of 2008. It is important to note that PDE will continue to closely monitor the high school renovation project through the PlanCon process until its completion in 2011.

Q. So why did the district take out a bond for \$36 million?

A. The original \$28 million figure represents construction costs only. It does not include “soft” costs such as architectural and engineering fees, underwriting and legal fees, movable fixtures and equipment, furniture for the new classrooms, fees for permits and contractors, and other construction related costs as well as any change orders that might be needed once the project is under way. Spring-Ford's architectural firm, E.I. Associates, estimated that these additional costs would be approximately \$8 million. As a result, the total project cost was projected to be \$36 million and the Board agreed to take out a bond for that amount.

Q. Why did the high school project come in so far below projected costs?

A. Construction costs, like everything else, have been affected by the economic crisis. Instead of rising, however, construction costs have fallen due to lower fuel costs, reduced pricing in construction materials and increased competition among contractors for much-needed work. When Spring-Ford's architect originally estimated the construction costs for the high school

project at \$28 million approximately 18 months ago, no one could have forecasted what has happened with the economy over the last several months.

Q. When the School Board approved the construction bids March 23rd, there were numerous “alternates” listed as part of the work. What are alternates?

A. To understand what alternates are, let’s talk about the overall design process. When the high school renovation/addition project was originally designed, it was done so with the main purpose of adding approximately 30 classrooms to accommodate the district’s growing enrollment at the high school level. While the new classrooms will go a long way toward easing crowding concerns, School Board members and administrators realized that other parts of the high school building would also feel the strain of these additional students as well. Areas such as the cafeteria, the media center and locker rooms, as well as classrooms for art and family and consumer sciences, would also be affected by an increase in students. In reviewing the breakdown of costs for the project, the School Board and administration were focused first on being able to provide the classroom space so urgently needed, and requested that expansions to other areas of the high school be listed as “alternates.” As “alternates,” these additional project components were reviewed individually as part of the bidding process and either accepted or rejected.

Q. It seems like the School Board and administration decided that because the project came in lower than expected that lots of “alternates” are being added to the project. Is this true?

A. When it became apparent that the project would cost less than anticipated, the School Board and administration revisited the list of alternates with the intention of making improvements that would ultimately save the district in the long run. Let’s take a look at some of the alternates that were approved:

- Two Art Classrooms – Currently the high school has three art classrooms and five art teachers. The addition of two art classrooms will help alleviate some of the classroom juggling that has to take place now and ensure that the high school will have sufficient room to serve increased numbers of students in the years to come.
- Two Family and Consumer Science Classrooms – As stipulated by PDE standards, all students are required to take a Family and Consumer Science course at some point during their high school career. Currently there are only two rooms to accommodate all of our students. Similar to the art rooms, building these rooms now will ensure there is space to meet the future needs of more students.
- Two Health Classrooms – There are no classrooms specifically designated for the health curriculum. The new classrooms would be located closer to the gym, improving the high school’s ability to deliver a quality health education program.
- A Large Group Instruction Room and Accompanying Furniture/Equipment - Currently there are few places in the high school where two or more classes can participate in a simultaneous videoconference or large group presentation. The new LGI will seat approximately 150 students and provide some much needed instructional space.
- Renovations to the Media Center (Library) – The existing media center was built to meet the needs of the student population when the high school was originally built. As such, it needs to be modified to handle the additional students that will be entering the high

school in the future. This area will include more student work spaces as well as additional shelving for books and student computers.

The decision to include many of these alternates as part of the project will help ensure that the district will not incur additional costs by making a series of small changes in the future to accommodate the increasing student enrollment.

Q. Two new tennis courts were also approved as part of the alternates. Why were these necessary?

A. To accommodate the growing student population, the high school will have the need for additional space for participation of our students in the physical education program. Equally important, Spring-Ford is a member of the Pioneer Athletic Conference. As such, it is desirable to have at least 7 courts for both the girls and boys tennis teams to accommodate league competition. Currently, the school has only five courts and must play matches in two shifts. These courts will also benefit the community, as residents will have access to play on these courts throughout the year. In addition to the practical reasons, including the addition of the 2 new tennis courts in the project is fiscally responsible. The cost alone to resurface the existing courts last year was over \$100,000. By including the construction of these courts in the project, the \$95,000 cost is significantly less than building them at a later date.

Q. How much money do the alternates account for?

A. The list of alternates totals approximately \$3 million of the overall \$22 million construction costs.

Q. Because the project bids came in \$6 million lower than originally projected, how will the district be using these funds?

A. It is too early to determine that. As the high school project begins, it is possible that the contractors may encounter unforeseen conditions, obstacles, and unexpected problems that must be addressed. Rather than designate the \$6 million for something before the project even begins, Spring-Ford administrators and Board members feel it is more responsible to wait. It should also be noted that this \$6 million is part of a bond issue and can only be used for capital projects (items with a long-term life).

Q. When is work on the high school project slated to begin and wrap up?

A. Groundbreaking for the project will occur sometime within the next three months, depending upon the receipt of all required permits and approvals. The district is anticipating the addition will be complete by the fall of 2010, and work on the other areas of the project will conclude by the fall of 2011.