

Report reveals “hair-raising” facility conditions in Grand County schools

School district begins public forums to raise awareness of facilities needs

by **Ron Georg**
contributing writer

Bruce Barnes, a principal architect from MHTN Architects, was simply reviewing the Grand County School District’s seven-month-old facilities assessment at a Jan. 23 public forum, but his matter-of-fact presentation seemed to have a far greater impact on audience members than the document he was summarizing.

“Thank you for this presentation,” Jayne Dillon said to the school board and team of architects. “When you put it all together like this, it’s hair-raising.”

That phrase ran through the rest of the conversation during this first phase of public planning for Grand County’s school facility needs. Almost everyone who spoke acknowledged the “hair-raising” conditions, whether or not they supported a tax rate increase to deal with the issues.

The information Barnes presented, along with a team from MHTN and the Grand County Board of Education, is included in the facilities assessment.

But where the facilities assessment simply lists “continuous glass wall” as a problem, Barnes spelled out what could happen if a seismic event, or even a significant wind, caused a failure of one of the glass block walls at Helen M. Knight Intermediate school. “Imagine a

box,” he said. “Now cut the end off of it.”

Generating support for a property tax increase to fund a bond for new schools is a central purpose of the public forums, which will be held the last Wednesday of each month through April, at 7 p.m. in the Grand County High School auditorium.

At each meeting, the Grand County Board of Education will highlight a different aspect of the facilities planning process.

On Feb. 27, the board will focus on constructing new facilities. On March 26, they’ll discuss financing, and on April 30, they’ll look at the community need for a new vocational center.

Looming over the whole process is last year’s failed attempt to convince voters to pass a voted leeway to increase the district’s operating budget.

While money for facilities improvements will come out of a different budget, the end result is a higher tax rate for property owners, although the higher tax rate doesn’t always result in an increase over the previous year’s tax bill.

Common refrains among voted leeway protestors was that the school district hadn’t demonstrated a need for extra funding, and that there wasn’t enough information.

Grand County School District Superintendent Margaret Hopkin

said that this time she wants the community to be well-informed, and she hopes that will increase support for a bond issue.

Dillon, a member of the high school’s community council and a longtime district supporter, suggested that everyone who attended the first meeting should help inform the rest of the community.

“This may be preaching to the choir,” she said. “That’s why I’d propose we all bring three people to the next forum – and not people who agree with you. That’s who we have to reach.”

Dillon said she also hopes the community is truly open to information.

“I would like to see the people who took the time to write a letter to defeat the leeway, saying they weren’t well enough informed, put the same amount of effort into learning about the bond issue,” Dillon said. “With the district holding evening meetings, and bringing the presentation to the city, the county, the chamber, to whoever will listen – to not even show up at the meetings, well, I don’t understand that.”