

School district releases facilities assessment

Report recommends replacing five buildings

**by Ron Georg
contributing writer**

At the same time Grand County School District officials are preoccupied with the business of running a school district with rising costs but stagnant funds, they are trying to face up to the challenges spelled out in the recently released Grand County School District Facilities Assessment, the first major phase of the district's master plan, which is available for review at the Grand County Library.

Of nine buildings owned by the district, the assessment by MHTN Architects recommends completely replacing five.

"The team would recommend that this school be scheduled for replacement as soon as reasonably possible," was the conclusion for Red Rock Elementary School, Helen M. Knight Intermediate School, and Grand County Middle School. The schools were built in 1958, 1955, and 1962, respectively.

The Vocational Education Building next to the middle school is recommended for replacement and relocation to the high school property to better serve the high school population. That need provided some of the impetus for the assessment, according to Grand County Board of Education member Jim Webster.

"That was one of the things that was left out of the original high school bond," Webster said, referring to the drawn-out bond initiative in the mid-'90s for the high school, which resulted in numerous compromises. "It was raised again recently as an issue, and we, as a board, asked, 'Is this really our top priority?' and we decided to take a professional and comprehensive look at the entire district."

It turns out that much of the district is a priority. Through comprehensive

lists of structural, mechanical and electrical issues, the assessment describes, with photos, a collection of schools with problems involving safety, health, efficiency, and comfort. Among them, the buildings are out of compliance with codes regarding access, seismic stability, health, and fire safety.

"One of the things that it does is puts the district into a position of liability," Webster said. "If somebody gets hurt because of an out-of-compliance, identifiable issue, we're obviously liable. And we don't want anyone to get hurt."

The assessment also highlights the need for the upcoming master plan. It includes enough district history to show how the district has responded to shifting needs by varying the uses of the buildings, and it describes how the future uses of one building could be dependent on the fate of another, as in the complex of buildings including the high school, middle school, and vocational center.

The Vocational Education Building could be renovated to serve the middle school, assuming the middle school isn't replaced, but it will need substantial upgrades. It did receive a "fair" rating for seismic performance, unlike the elementary, intermediate and middle schools, which all received "poor" marks for earthquake stability due to their unreinforced masonry construction.

The high school, which is only 10 years old, received perhaps the best all-around rating of any building in the district. Nonetheless, even it could face constraints if the student population grows. (Enrollment numbers have been relatively flat this decade.)

With the addition of a vocational center, which could include computer and English labs, the school would be

able to accommodate up to 25 percent growth—assuming the middle school is expanded to accommodate the ninth grade.

Perhaps the least adequate building in the district's inventory is the one where district officials will make the decisions regarding all the other structures — the Grand County School District office building. From parking to office space, the building doesn't meet the district's needs, the study concludes, and, despite renovations in the early '80s, the 1955 structure is out of compliance with modern structural codes.

The buildings that were approved for continued use are the Sundwall preschool, the district's maintenance and transportation building, Grand County High School, and the historic Shafer Home at the Youth Garden Project. The latter was the only structure to receive unqualified praise — along with the programs it supports — although the assessment does note the 107-year-old home won't be able to endure much of an earthquake.

While the more alarming aspects of the assessment regard safety issues, the team from HMK also identified problems with light, noise and ventilation which could interfere with classroom performance.

"They're noisy, they're not insulated — they're not conducive to a progressive education," Webster said. "When you compare what they've got in Salt Lake [City] with what we've got here, well, there is no comparison. You feel shortchanged. We, as a community, are not supporting the teachers and administrators with quality facilities to teach our children."