

Bond would build vocational center, new K-6 school

by Ron Georg
contributing writer

At the most recent Grand County School District public forum on the upcoming bond issue, a facilities tour of the Grand County Middle School highlighted the complications administrators face with the current configuration, which includes high school vocational instruction space located at the middle school. District officials also outlined how a new vocational center will resolve the issues, and they reiterated information from the previous forum about how the bond will affect taxpayers.

“You’re constantly having trouble with kids being tardy or truant, with the opportunity to just leave school,” Grand County School Board member Jim Webster said of the logistics of moving students between schools. “When they’re coming from that school to the vocational center, some students wander into the creek bottom, and we do have problems with high school students interacting inappropriately with the middle school kids.”

With the proposed \$31 million dollar bond, the district will be able to spend \$6 million on a new vocational center for the high school, and they’ll be able to renovate the current vocational space at the middle school for programs there. The bond revenue will also be used to build a new kindergarten through sixth-grade facility to replace Red Rock and HMK.

During the facility tour, middle school principal Melinda Snow explained how the school’s wood shop had been turned into a computer lab, where the dust of a wood shop is unacceptable. Now, students meet the core curriculum requirement for wood shop through virtual instruction.

Not only would the vocational center address these issues, it would allow the high school to expand vocational programs, partly through partnerships with other entities. “We’ve talked a lot about partnerships without outside organizations and entities,” Webster said. “One of the visions is to

have some adult education and concurrent college enrollment for both high school and credit earned by high school students in applied technology.”

School board president Kaaron Jorgen also talked about how the facility could provide specific training for students. “One other thing that would be a very juicy vocational option, is something called ‘custom fit,’” Jorgen said. “That is for businesses in town that have certain requirements for their employees to know how to do certain things. One of the partnerships that we could do is to offer our high school kids an opportunity to learn that via an apprenticeship with the business.”

District officials referred specifically to opportunities in medical services. The new vocational center, which would be located in the current empty lot in front of the Youth Garden Project, would be designed to include space for medical technology as well as automotive, agricultural, business, building trades, computer, and food service training.

Webster emphasized the district has long recognized the need for a vocational center. “On the last go around, a prior, successful bond, they had a plan to build a vocational center at the new high school,” he said. “But it got knocked out before it even went to voters because of the cost. The intent for the school district has always been to have a vocational center at the high school.”

This time, the vocational center will remain part of the package which will be presented to voters June 24. District officials are working to make sure voters understand what the bond means.

“What’s the cost to us, the taxpayers? That boils down to \$113 per \$100,000 of a home’s assessed value,” Webster said. “The legislature requires the school district to calculate what it costs the average homeowner. So the county assessor has figured out that the average home’s assessed value is \$152,541. That’s certainly not what everybody has, others are lower, and

others are higher.”

The dollar amount cited by Webster is for a primary residence, which is taxed at 55 percent of assessed value. Businesses, which are taxed at 100 percent of value, will see a \$205 increase for a business valued at \$100,000. Second home owners, a growing category in Grand County, also pay at the 100 percent rate.

If growth continues in the county, the tax base will spread and the bill per taxpayer will go down. That’s what happened with the high school bond, which initially, in 1997, cost taxpayers \$105 per \$100,000, but now costs \$45 per \$100,000.

When some in the audience wondered why district officials and school board members aren’t more impassioned in their bond discussion, architect Bruce Barnes explained. “The school board’s hands are tied; they have to present the facts in a non-political way.”

That includes referring explicitly to the bond issue as a tax increase. However, citizens don’t have to view it that way, as Moabite Nikki Hazlett pointed out. “It’s really too bad we have to call this a tax, because in a way it really isn’t a tax,” she said. “To me a tax is something that flies through the air, and I don’t really know what happens to it. But this is something that has a very tangible result. Unfortunately we have to call it that, but it’s really a mortgage on better schools.”

Barnes, who’s worked with many school districts to create new facilities, said that’s a common perspective. “The citizens groups who want to promote better schools refer to it as an investment in the community, an investment not only in the community, but in the children’s future.”

District officials are making presentations to various community entities, and they’ll hold a final forum to summarize the issues on June 10, at 7 p.m. in the Grand County High School Auditorium. All of the district’s master planning information, including facilities assessments, is available online at www.grandschools.org.