

School district hopes to consolidate Red Rock, HMK, build vocational center

Public invited to attend information forums March 26, April 30

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The Grand County School District is holding monthly forums through April to share concepts and hear concerns regarding the district's master plan, which is predicated on passing a \$31 million bond election June 24.

At the Feb. 27 meeting, at Helen M. Knight Intermediate School, district officials revealed plans for a new elementary school and vocational center, as well as improvements to the Grand County Middle School.

The deficiencies in the current district facilities have been well-documented and discussed since the release of the district's facilities assessment last year. The assessment, which is available at the library, the schools, and the district office, recommended replacing Red Rock Elementary School, Helen M. Knight Intermediate School, and Grand County Middle School.

Before the presentation, volunteers from the Vote for the Bond Committee led tours of HMK to highlight the building's problems. Along with the laundry list of crumbling brick, warping floors, unsupported glass-block walls, inadequate plumbing and electrical, tour leaders offered insights that might not be so apparent.

The open-quad design of HMK, with its grass courtyard, might seem like a Socratic ideal to educators. However, by today's standards, it's a security concern, school officials said. "Littleton changed everything," School District Maintenance and Grounds Supervisor Rob Welch said. "When these were built in the '50s, everybody was still lovey-dovey."

Many things have changed since

the district built the three schools that have been identified as problems. Bruce Barnes, a principal with MHTN Architects, the firm which prepared the facilities assessment and the planning concepts, explained that modern changes in building code and technology have left the structures behind. "Codes change every three years, so over 50 years there's been so many different code changes," he said. "It's not that the buildings weren't designed right, it's that the codes have changed."

Not only would the new buildings meet safety codes regarding catastrophes like fire and earthquake, which the current buildings do not meet, the new structures would address modern technology and energy standards, and they'd be designed to enhance learning, school district officials said.

"We really feel strongly that the kids need adequate, if not better, learning environments," School District Superintendent Margaret Hopkin said. "We want to see our students in the best learning environments we can provide. The buildings right now are not meeting the health and safety standards we want to set for our kids."

Just a week earlier, the Grand County Board of Education voted to hold the bond election in June. At that point the concepts weren't ready for release, and even the total amount of the bond wasn't available. At the forum, the district presented completed concepts of a new, kindergarten through sixth grade facility to replace Red Rock and HMK, as well as plans for a new vocational center at the high school. They also announced that they'd need to bond for \$31 million, which will mean

\$113 in taxes per year for residences valued at \$100,000, or \$205 for businesses with the same valuation.

The delay in presenting the concepts is due to the speed of the planning process, according to the district. The district is facing potential inflation in construction costs of 15 percent a year, so officials have been moving quickly to identify their needs and their options. Concurrently, maintenance expenses for the old buildings are mounting, so the board has been meeting weekly to develop and implement a plan. That steady progress has made for an evolving plan.

Still, Barnes said the plans presented at the forum are solid, workable concepts. "What we show you here tonight is something that can be delivered. We don't want to show you something then have to cut back and have it not meet your expectations," he said. "That's why we went to the trouble of coming up with a concept that we could put a cost estimate to. That estimate also includes inflation to the construction start."

The Grand County School District will host two more forums. Each event begins at 6 p.m. with a tour of the respective facilities, followed by a 7 p.m. forum. March 26 will be at Red Rock Elementary; and April 30 will be at the Grand County Middle School.

Information about the facilities planning, and the forums is available on the school district's website, www.grandschools.org. Click on the "Our Schools Need Help" banner.