

## Bond Committee Gets Tour of FHS Troubles



(Crystal A. Proxmire, 7/14/2011)

Troubles lurk above and below at Ferndale High School, as multiple repairs and projects have the School District exploring the possibility of asking voters to approve a 7 mil bond extension. The public vote is expected to be in February 2012. If approved it would extend the taxpayers' obligation from 2023 through 2033, and would generate approximately \$26.5 million for the District to use on multiple infrastructure projects.



The School Board has approved creation of a Bond Issue Planning Committee as a sub-committee of the Operations Committee. This group of about twenty interested parents and residents will be meeting each Thursday through August 4. The meetings typically will be held at the Harding Administration building, however some will be held at other locations.

The July 14, 2011 meeting was held at Ferndale High School, so that members could get a tour and see first-hand what problems the bond could be used to fix.

Throughout the school there were obvious visual issues – rusty light fixtures, stained or worn carpet, patches in the ceilings, and heat vents falling down from the walls. The school was built in 1958, and much of it is original.



Operations Director Gary Sophiea, along with representatives

from the architectural firm and technology department, explained the problems with fixtures that are so old. The lighting, for example, is built right into plaster ceilings with asbestos issues. Whenever a fixture needs repair, the process is expensive because of the regulations of working in asbestos-filled areas.

The district is unable to find replacement parts for many aspects of the building, including lighting, heating, computers, phone equipment, and other infrastructure.

On top of the repairs necessary to keep the building functioning, the district hopes to make improvements that will make learning better for the students. One focal point of the tour was the overview of potential renovations to the auditorium. Former teacher Roger Smith said that Ferndale's auditorium would get a C- if it were graded on acoustical quality. Potential improvements include replacing a noisy heating and ventilation system, changing stage curtains, a platform lift from the seating area to the stage to make it ADA [Americans with Disabilities Act] compliant, lowering the stage to allow for "fly room," an electronic projection screen, and having a professional acoustical expert come in to improve the quality of the sound in the room.

Another enlightening excursion was made into The Tunnel – the area below building where much of the maintenance takes place. The group marveled at the three large boilers used to heat the school, and at the vast system of pipes, barrels, and antiquated heating system that makes up the underside of the school's swimming pools. The concrete is stained in spots where rust has eaten away at the half-century old piping and caused drips. "Some of these pipes are so bad that they'd

crumble if you touched them,” said Sophiea. He added that on top of the risk of leakage or a break, if a flood were to occur, the drainage in the area below the pool would not be sufficient to keep the water contained in the pool area alone.



The tunnels run below the school, sometimes as low as the equivalent of three stories below the surface. Because it falls below the water table, drainage is inadequate, and water seeps in through cracks and up through drains. Melissa Auchter, who gave the technology tour, showed a particularly problematic area where water routinely leaks in through the walls in the area where the school has its main electronic communications center. Recently water short-circuited a switchboard, causing melted wires and a loss of internet service.

On a more optimistic note, Auchter and Sophiea were able to show places where previous improvements have made a difference. Auchter showed Committee members an example of a Smart Board in a classroom, pointing out how it provides much more interactivity than a traditional projector or blackboard. Also, the wall-mounting and teacher station keeps them from having to run extension cords or use a device on a cart which blocks students' views. (for a previous story about Smart Boards in use, see <http://oaklandcounty115.com/2011/01/16/smart-board-and-super-teacher-get-kids-excited-about-math/>) The District hopes to add more of this technology.



There are seven pages worth of projects that the committee is now taking into consideration, including: parking lot and walkway repairs, rest room improvements, remodeling the front

office area of the high school, kitchen remodeling at Roosevelt Primary, gym wall pads at Coolidge and Taft, the addition of an elevator at Jefferson Center, re-roofing the bus garage/warehouse, and \$7,500,000 allocated to remodel the Hayes-Lemmerz property that the District is currently working towards purchasing. Much of the bond will be used for less-visible projects, such as behind the scenes mechanical upgrades and equipment replacement.

The list of projects is simply a matter of discussion for the committee, which is still in the information-gathering stages. They will meet weekly to discuss the Administration's plans and make recommendations to the School Board. The Committee is expected to meet through August 4, and then there will be public information sessions leading up to a Feb 2012 election on the bond issue.



For more information about Ferndale Schools, go to [www.ferndaleschools.org](http://www.ferndaleschools.org). Also check out the [School News Section of The Ferndale 115 News](#). Also read the previous story on this topic: <http://oaklandcounty115.com/2011/05/13/school-board-approves-two-projects-purchases-property/>.

The website used by the Committee for sharing documents is <http://ferndaleschoolbondcommittee.pbworks.com/w/page/41960105/FrontPage>.



