

# Master Plan Update 5

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## Introduction

The process leading to a revised Master Plan for the Cleveland Metropolitan School District's facilities renovation and replacement program is entering its final phase. After a series of delays stretching back at least until June 2007, the District Administration now is aiming for a late-May 2008 vote by the Board of Education on the revision.

The revision is required by the Ohio School Facilities Commission (OSFC) to adjust the original Master Plan for a steep drop in enrollment that has occurred since the program began and that is expected to continue. The program's next phase, Segment 5, cannot begin until a revision is adopted by the Board and by the OSFC, which pays 68 percent of the program's basic costs.

The plan will govern which schools are included in the program, whether these schools will be renovated or replaced with new ones, the size of the schools, and when the work will be done. Ultimately it will also determine how much the program will cost and, consequently, how much additional local tax money will be requested.

The Master Plan revision will decide the type of schools available to Cleveland's children for generations to come.

As stated in our previous reports on this subject, the program is an opportunity to change the face of Cleveland in a constructive way, to give the children of Cleveland school facilities on par with those in the suburbs – and to have the state pick up more than half the cost.

Because of its importance to the community, the program – and its Master Plan revision – merits an extensive and inclusive effort to solicit and consider the opinions of the District's citizens. This report focuses on the District Administration's community engagement effort and ways in which it could be improved.

Previous BAC reports have dealt with numerous issues involved in revising the Master Plan. Those reports may provide some insight to citizens wishing to get involved in the process. Some elements of those previous four reports are summarized below on these pages, and the full reports are available at <http://www.cmsdnet.net/administration/BAC.htm> on the District's Web site or by request to the BAC at (216) 987-3309 or [bondaccountability@hotmail.com](mailto:bondaccountability@hotmail.com).

## Community engagement

The OSFC says “a well-developed community engagement plan is a critical factor in obtaining community support for a project. ... School administrators, in collaboration with the Commission, are strongly encouraged to hold community-wide meetings to gather input from stakeholders. ... The more the community is involved, the better the chances are for support of the overall master plan and funding to support it.”

The “Community Engagement Guide” (KnowledgeWorks Foundation, June 2005) distributed by the OSFC says, “Whereas some people refer to community engagement as a way to achieve “buy-in” from community members on plans that have already been developed or decisions that have already been made, KnowledgeWorks Foundation defines community engagement quite differently. ... The Foundation has adopted the term “authentic community engagement” to describe community engagement that creates ownership rather than ‘buy-in.’ Authentic community engagement is not about informing people, but educating community members so that they can make informed decisions.”

The premise of the foundation’s recommendations is that “people are much more likely to support what they have helped create.”

The School District’s community engagement efforts in most of 2006 and 2007 have fallen well short of those outlined in the above advice. However, the District Administration is now laying the groundwork for a renewed program of community engagement that holds promise. However, the fledgling program could benefit from improvements that would expand the scope and depth of community involvement in the decision making.

As BAC reports have said previously, the few forums that have been held should be regarded as merely the start of a dialogue that continues until the school facilities program is concluded. In such a large school district, facilitating such a dialogue will be a burden for the District Administration, but the results will be worth it in terms of better decision-making and community satisfaction.

The Administration’s May target for Board approval of a revised Master Plan is five months later than the previously announced target and nearly a year later than the Administration’s initial goal. The latest delay is designed to allow time for meaningful community engagement.

The Administration held two community-wide forums last Fall that included an initial presentation and discussion of its proposal for a revised, 10-segment Master Plan. Because the District had already begun work on Segment 4, the focus was on Segments 5 through 10. Follow-up meetings that were to be held at each school in October were canceled after the tragic shooting at SuccessTech High School.

The Board of Education subsequently advised the Administration not to attempt to reschedule the meetings during the pre-holiday period in December. Then, in December, Board members raised questions about whether there had been adequate community engagement for the already-begun Segment 4. The

roster of schools for Segment 4 was radically different from the list outlined in the original Master Plan. It was changed in late 2006 with little or no public input.

After Board members raised the issue in late 2007, the Administration designated a community engagement administrator who facilitated "Core Group" meetings at 10 of the 11 Segment 4 schools in January. The meeting for the 11<sup>th</sup> school was postponed, and new arrangements were still pending as of this writing.

Responsibility for the Core Team process was assigned to each school principal. The principal was to identify and recruit members of the Core Team and schedule meetings. The Core Teams are supposed to represent the community in working with school design and construction professionals. Most Core Teams recruited for Segment 4 consist of the City Council member and community development corporation representatives for the school's area, some teachers and school administrators, some nearby business owners, and representatives of the Student Parent Organization. The architect for each school was to attend the meetings to explain the District's plans and receive feedback on the plans. Parents were to be invited via notes sent home with each student.

Because design work for Segment 4's schools is already in the second or third of three phases, changes to the schools resulting from the meetings will largely be confined to cosmetic considerations, such as color of the exterior brick, landscaping and interior finishes.

Nonetheless, these Segment 4 meetings provide a good template for a process that should be repeated for each school in each future segment. The Administration is planning to hold meetings for the future segments in a timely manner, so that stakeholders can have more impact on important decisions regarding the schools.

The process could also be improved by expanding outreach to potential Core Team members. Judging by the sign-in sheets from initial Segment 4 Core Team meetings, some principals did a better job of recruitment than others. Most attendees at some meetings were teachers or other school employees.

Although SPO representatives were usually present, the Segment 4 operation did not include an effort to contact residents of the neighborhoods around the schools who do not currently have children attending the schools, even though such residents clearly have a stake in the decisions being made. Such outreach could include posters at local food markets, churches and libraries, door-to-door solicitation, and requests for local pastors to spread the word, as well as requests for public service announcements in various news media.

The process at some of the schools also appeared to exclude residents who work during the daytime. Meetings were typically held in late afternoon.

In fairness to the principals, it should be noted that they were notified on Jan. 4 that they were to identify their Core Team members by the end of business on Jan. 7 for team meetings that were to be held beginning Jan. 14.

And in fairness to all concerned, Segment 4 Core Team meetings are to continue, which provides the opportunity for expanded participation and better accessibility of meetings.

The Core Team members are expected to relay concerns from the community to District officials and the school facilities project team, and to relay news about developments in the program back to the community.

Although the launch of community engagement for Segment 4 was not perfect, it was far preferable to the lack of activity that preceded it and, as stated above, it can serve as a template for future, more timely efforts at each school in each future segment. Indeed, the Administration has outlined a five-step plan for engagement in each segment:

1. Identify and select each Core Team.
2. Hold a "kick-off" meeting with Core Teams for all schools in each segment before design work begins on the segment to explain how the members can be active participants in the design and construction process. For Segment 5, that could mean meetings in late Spring or early Summer this year.
3. Two weeks later, begin individual Core Team meetings to begin the process of relaying community concerns to the Administration, providing input with respect to design and construction, and communicating developments in a project to the community at large.
4. Continuing working with the design team as it develops plans for each school, which can take about a year.
5. Monitor construction until the building is completed and continue relaying developments to the community.

The effort will be enhanced with the start of a CMSD school construction Web site, which we understand is imminent. The Administration says the Web site will include details about the proposed Master Plan revision and news about upcoming community meetings on the Master Plan, news about bidding opportunities for construction contracts, the building repair assessments that were done for each school in 2001, aerial site photographs, the OSFC's Design Manual, photos of completed schools, drawings of proposed designs for new schools, details about the community engagement process itself, and contact information for Core Team members.

This development will remedy another shortcoming cited in several previous BAC reports, which noted the lack of any substantive updates about the program on the District's current Web site since 2006. (The outdated information, which lists schools that are no longer in the program, is still posted on the Web site, and we suggest that it be deleted to prevent confusion.)

Before the community engagement improvements outlined above can begin for Segments 5 and beyond, the District and OSFC must adopt a revised Master Plan. Community engagement is needed for that process as well.

For that purpose, the Administration announced Feb. 13 that the community meetings once scheduled for October at each school in the District

will be held this week. High school meetings are to be held from 6:30 p.m. to 8 p.m. Wednesday Feb. 20, and meetings at elementary schools are to occur on Thursday Feb. 21. All meetings will be from 6:30 p.m. to 8 p.m., and the public is invited.

After people have been briefed on the proposal at these meetings, which are expected to be led largely by school principals, follow-up sessions will be needed to provide an opportunity for informed feedback. Multi-neighborhood gatherings such as were held last Fall at the Michael Zone and JFK recreation centers may also be desirable to allow for the interactive give and take that can occur at a forum attended by a diverse group of residents and staffed by knowledgeable members of the school facilities project team.

The Administration also has established a voicemail telephone hotline (216-574-8413) for residents to call with questions or comments about the Master Plan proposal. It has also set up a link on the CMSD's Web site at which written comments or questions of 100 words or less can be submitted. (Go to <http://www.cmsdnet.net> and click on "Talk to the CEO" at the top of the page.)

## Conclusion

Welcome and long-sought improvements in the community-engagement process will give the District's residents an opportunity to play a meaningful part in the development of their schools.

We strongly urge everyone who is interested in this program, whether or not they have children in school, to attend this week's meetings at the schools to learn about the Master Plan proposal and voice any concerns they may have. Further, we would suggest that parents of children in elementary school attend not only that meeting but also the meeting at the neighborhood's high school, which their children may later attend.

As the Bond Accountability Commission has advocated since May 2007, these forums should be just the beginning of a process that will continue throughout the remainder of the program. The master plan will have to be revised again, perhaps because of resurgent enrollment, perhaps because of further declines, and an ongoing engagement effort will make the outcome better in either case.

The Bond Accountability Commission will continue to monitor the process to ensure that residents' concerns are heard and seriously considered.

To further promote understanding of the Master Plan revision and the overall school facilities program, read the BAC's previous series of Master Plan Updates, excerpts of which are included below, and Program Progress Updates on the District's Web site at <http://www.cmsdnet.net/administration/BAC.htm>.

For ideas on improved community engagement, see the KnowledgeWorks Web site at <http://kwfdn.org/>.

## Master Plan Update Review

**Enrollment is the key** – The Ohio School Facilities Commission (OSFC), which pays for 68 percent of the basic program cost, decides the amount of school space that it will co-fund using a formula based on the enrollment projected for the end of construction, in 2015. The latest projection is for about 41,000 students, some 31,000 fewer than when the facilities program was launched in 2002. That means the OSFC will co-fund renovation or replacement of substantially fewer schools than the 11 originally planned.

The OSFC will commission another enrollment projection in 2008 which, like the previous ones, will take into account past enrollment, dropout and withdrawal rates, city population, birth rates and other demographic factors as well as current enrollment. That means the Master Plan might have to be adjusted again.

**The Administration's proposal** – The plan calls for 69 new or renovated elementary schools (including one that would be combined with the School of the Arts high school), seven new high schools and five renovated high schools. Each of 10 academic neighborhoods would have at least one larger elementary school suitable for transformation into a junior high if the District abandons the PreK-8 format.

The plan calls for 10 construction segments. The original plan had nine. The first four are completed or under way. Most of the elementary schools would be built new, rather than renovated, and most would be smaller than those they would replace.

Most high schools would be in Segments 8 through 10. However, the \$335 million from Issue 14, approved for the program by voters in May 2001, will run out in Segment 7, meaning that work on the elementary and high schools in Segments 8-10 will depend on approval of more tax money. Last Fall's decision to install extra security features, including metal detectors, at all schools may mean that some Segment 7 work might have to be cut for lack of funds as well.

The plan assumes that the OSFC will co-fund more high school space than current enrollment projections allow. Unless the OSFC changes its rules, the extra high school space will be co-funded only if the District is able to curtail the steep enrollment declines of recent years. Otherwise, some high school plans may have to be cut.

Outside the co-funded program, 39 schools would be only maintained. These include some schools that were not even included in the 2002 plan and a number that are being maintained only as swing space, that is, schools to accommodate students displaced by construction projects.

Six high schools would be maintained only, and two others, Collinwood and East, would receive a total of \$10 million in improvements beyond routine maintenance, funded only by local taxes.

The maintain-only schools may be closed after several years if their enrollments do not increase. Closed schools may be demolished, sold, or donated for a community purpose.

A list of segment and maintain-only schools follows this report.

The Administration has calculated a need for \$217 million in additional local tax money to match the OSFC contribution for the co-funded portion of the program and for local-only, Locally Funded Initiative (LFI), work that is not supported by the OSFC. The Administration has offered conditional assurances that the \$217 million is sufficient to complete the work as proposed, including any demolitions that are needed. Conditions that could cause the extra money to be insufficient include the above-noted high school space assumptions as well as program rule changes by the OSFC, unforeseen spikes in construction-cost inflation, or a substantial increase in projected enrollment.

According to the project team, voter approval of the \$217 million would not increase the tax rate being collected from property owners at the time of the vote, but it would extend the collection period.

**Options --** The basic options for disposition of schools is to replace them with new ones, totally renovate them, only maintain them, or close them and perhaps demolish them. The Administration has focused its plan on building new elementary schools that are closer to the OSFC's minimum size of 350 students rather than on renovating existing schools, which tend to be larger. The smaller size would permit co-funding of more schools and better geographical balance while minimizing transportation costs.

The maintain-only schools would maximize neighborhood coverage for as long as possible, but they would not fulfill the vision of a top-quality school environment for every child. If enrollment continues to decline as predicted, the District simply will not need all of these schools, and keeping them open will cause unnecessary operational expenses.

Demolitions of maintain-only schools probably would not occur until Segment 10 (2012-2015).

**A question of balance –** The District can maximize neighborhood coverage and geographic balance and minimize spending by matching chosen school locations with student population densities and limiting construction and renovation to the square footage that the OSFC estimates will be needed. Landmark schools pose a thorny problem for planners in this regard because they tend to be too large to properly reflect expectations of declining enrollment. They end up either costing a lot of unmatched LFI money or using up co-funded enrollment capacity that is needed elsewhere in the District.

Because of limited local funding, it is likely that some landmark schools will be neither renovated nor replaced, but only maintained until they can no longer be used.

**Is high school space adequate?** – The Administration has based its Master Plan proposal on high school-centered academic neighborhoods. These high schools are Collinwood, East, East Tech, Glenville, Adams, John F. Kennedy, South, Marshall and Lincoln-West. The proposal groups elementary schools around the nearest high school, though some elementary schools feed more than one neighborhood high school.

By several methods of mathematical analysis, either Marshall and Lincoln-West as planned will be significantly too small, or the other neighborhood high schools will be too large. In either case, the adjoining Marshall and Lincoln-West neighborhoods would not have the same relationship of co-funded elementary school space to available high school space as the District's other academic neighborhoods.

The original Master Plan called for construction of a new "West Side Relief" High School for 1,600 students. The Administration bought land for the school on West 65<sup>th</sup> Street, between Marshall and Lincoln-West. The school had been planned for Segment 3, but the idea was dropped in 2006. The project team cited OSFC projections of declining enrollment as the reason.

The threat of overcrowding at Lincoln-West and Marshall suggests that reconsideration of that decision may be in order. Such a school could add up to \$30 million to the District's program tab, although contingency funds in the proposed budget may be sufficient to cover that. An advantage, depending on the timing of construction, would be that such a school could provide swing space for Lincoln-West students while their school is being renovated. Renovating Lincoln-West while it is occupied at maximum capacity could be very difficult for all involved.

Other options would be to reduce co-funded enrollments at other planned high schools to give more to Marshall, which, if built large enough, could accommodate some Lincoln-West neighborhood students. Or, Marshall could be built larger than currently planned, with the extra capacity financed by unmatched LFI money. This would increase the District's overall program cost, but much less so than a new West Side Relief High School.

**Future uncertainties** – The school projects proposed for Segments 8, 9 and 10 are not assured. First, voters must approve additional tax money if they are to be possible. And even if they do, enrollment could decline faster than currently projected, suggesting that the OSFC, after new projections are done, might not co-fund some of the schools.

Also, the Administration's Master Plan proposal is contingent on gaining city approval to replace or alter a number of landmark schools: Audubon, Wilbur

Wright, Watterson Lake, William Cullen Bryant, Joseph M. Gallagher, Tremont, and Luiz Munoz Marin. Residents in the areas of these and some Segment 9 schools should be aware that what is proposed might not occur.

City planners may prevent the proposed demolitions. If that happens, the District would be forced to either simply maintain these schools or to renovate them at larger co-funded capacities than currently planned. Consequently, the Administration warns that some school projects proposed for Segment 9 may also not occur, because the co-funded capacity that would make them possible would have been used up in renovating the landmark schools.

The elementary schools in Segments 8-10 are generally those that the Administration deems as least necessary or in least need of major repairs.

**How much will it cost? --** Estimates in 2002 that the total project would cost \$1.574 billion for 111 schools had a fatal flaw: They did not allow for construction cost inflation, even though the program was to last at least 13 years, so they underestimated the actual cost by at least several hundred million dollars.

This time, a more experienced administration has made an effort to accurately estimate co-funded construction and LFI costs, and it has factored those estimates for inflation at the rate of 5 percent a year for Segments 7 through 10. It also did not allocate what it put at \$29.4 million in expected revenue from interest and government technology subsidies, and the interest and subsidies may total substantially more than that.

In short, the Administration's calculation that it needs \$217 million in additional tax money to execute Segments 8 through 10 as proposed appears adequate.

**The proposed segments –** See next page or, if you are reading this online, go to <http://www.cmsdnet.net/administration/BACdocuments/SegmentListFix.pdf>

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