

Master Plan Update 7

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Introduction

After more than a year of work, the process of revising the Master Plan that governs the renovation and replacement of Cleveland's schools is drawing to a close. The Board of Education is expected to adopt a version this summer. Although the plan will have to be revised again, probably next year after the Ohio School Facilities Commission (OSFC) has a new enrollment forecast, this revision will govern at least the next segment of the facilities program and will establish the foundation for future revisions

It is safe to say that there are tough choices to be made and no easy answers. It is also clear that whatever proposal is finally adopted will not satisfy everyone. The decision is made all the more difficult by one-size-fits-all state co-funding rules that seem inappropriate for a large urban school district in a depressed, manufacturing-oriented economy. But the OSFC pays for 68 percent of the basic program costs. It calls the shots. The best that can be hoped for is that the District can reach consensus on the options that, under the rules, seem best.

Given the constraints placed on the District by limited financial resources and the state's co-funding policy, it is imperative that the District judiciously consider population and enrollment data in deciding which schools to renovate or replace, how big they should be, and where new schools should be located. Where feasible, the District should also give timeline priority to addressing the most severe problems, including crowding and poor structural conditions.

Community engagement through public forums and discussions has only served to improve the chances that the right choices will be made

Finally, it bears repeating that the \$335 million in bonds authorized by voters in May 2001 under Issue 14 did not provide close to enough money to complete the originally envisioned program of replacing or renovating 111 schools. In fact, Issue 14 does not even provide enough money for the scaled-down program being considered now. We view voter approval of the inevitable request for more tax money as absolutely crucial to establishment of first-rate school facilities that will serve Cleveland's children well into the 21st century. It is up to the District to earn that approval by adopting a needs-focused, cost-effective Master Plan and successfully executing it.

The Proposal

This report will focus on the District Administration's latest preferred option for a revised 10-segment Master Plan, which differs in important ways from a proposal offered by the Administration in September 2007.

The underlying impetus for both proposals is the same, however: They are responses to the OSFC's co-funding requirement that the Master Plan include only enough school space for the enrollment predicted for the program's conclusion, in the year 2015.

The revision is therefore necessary because the latest forecast by an OSFC consultant is for a District with 40,743 students, not the 72,000 for which the original Master Plan was designed.

K-8 schools. Under the Administration's latest proposal, the 10-segment co-funded plan would have 66 K-8 schools, compared with 70 in the 2007 proposal.

One difference is that four community landmark schools have been excluded – Audubon, Tremont, Wright and Franklin.

The other major difference for K-8 schools is that fewer are proposed for construction at the OSFC minimum of 350 students. In the latest effort, 450 is the most common school enrollment, a size that the Administration says makes better use of its construction dollars.

High schools. The new proposal calls for co-funding of nine new or renovated high schools and one partially renovated high school (East Tech). The former proposal called for 12 new or fully renovated high schools.

The changes are that South, Kennedy (both new) and Lincoln-West (renovation) were deleted, East Tech was changed from a full renovation to a partial renovation, and a new West Side Relief high school was added.

The District Administration had noted last September that its proposal called for the OSFC to co-fund more high school space than provided under OSFC rules. The new proposal limits high school space to that allowed under the OSFC formula.

Meanwhile, the Administration has appealed to the OSFC for a variance from its enrollment forecast/funding formula to provide for more high school and grade 6-8 students.

Maintain only, limited improvements. Under the latest proposal, 46 schools (compared with 39 previously) would be excluded from the co-funded program but would be maintained at least for a few years.

Some of these schools would receive limited improvements under the new proposal, but the work would be funded only with Issue 14 money under what is called the Locally Funded Initiative (LFI); it would not be co-funded by the OSFC.

These include Collinwood and East high schools, which would each get \$5 million in improvements; Fullerton K-8, \$2 million; and Audubon, Baker, Franklin and Tremont, \$4.5 million each.

As in the previous proposal, each of the District's 10 academic neighborhoods would include a larger elementary school that could accommodate a junior high school if the District later elected to switch from the K-8 format.

Segments 1-4 of the program have been completed or are under way, so the emphasis of the revision is on Segments 5-10. A segment-by-segment breakdown of the Administration's latest Master Plan proposal, including whether a school is to be built new or renovated, is attached.

Appeal to OSFC. The District is asking the OSFC to change two major components of its funding policy, either of which would give the District more flexibility in planning schools and paying for them.

One is the OSFC's enrollment projections for grades 6-8 (8,335 students, of which 4,808 have already been allocated in Segments 1-4) and for high school (8,903 students, of which 3,972 have been allocated in Segments 1-4). The other is the classification of the CMSD facilities program, which determines the OSFC co-funding

rate for basic costs, currently 68%. If the classification is changed, the co-funding rate would be 81%.

If both requests were granted, the District would be in a vastly better position to plan and build for the future.

The District chief executive wrote a letter in March to the OSFC executive director, challenging assumptions that 59 percent of the students who enter kindergarten will leave District schools by 12th grade. He has suggested a grades 6-8 enrollment allowance of 11,391 and a high school allowance of 15,188.

To the extent that the OSFC agrees to increase year 2015 enrollment allowances for the District, the District will be qualified to draw co-funding for more or bigger schools, although doing so could increase the District's need for local matching money beyond current estimates.

The Administration's contingency plan, should the OSFC grant the full high school request, is to restore previous plans for South (new, 750 students), Kennedy (new, 750) and Lincoln-West (renovated, 1,500), fully renovate East Tech (1,681), and renovate Collinwood (1,085) and East (1,000) as well.

The contingency plan does not rank the additional projects in order of priority should the OSFC grant an increased allocation that is less than the full amount requested.

The District is asking for reclassification from the accelerated urban program under which it began its partnership with the OSFC to the program that applies to most school districts in Ohio. If the change were granted, the OSFC's share of future program costs would increase from 68 percent to 81 percent.

If the reclassification is granted, the District's need for additional local tax money would decrease from the Administration's current estimate of \$217 million to an estimated \$183 million, a figure that would also provide additional LFI money for items such as sports facilities that the OSFC does not co-fund.

Possible Changes

Board of Education member Denise Link is leading a Master Facilities Plan Work Group that is considering whether to suggest changes in the proposal. The focus appears to be on making sure that building plans match enrollment and population data.

Other members of the group are Board members Lawrence Davis and Rashidah Abdulhaqq. The Administration is represented by various members of the facilities project team, including Chief Operating Officer Dan Burns.

The Administration itself may also adjust its proposals based on public comments at recent community forums, or in the event that the OSFC should grant its requests for changes in enrollment assumptions and program classification.

Details and Analysis

When, how big, and where? If a new **John Marshall** High School is built for 1,400 students as proposed in Segment 5, as the Administration has proposed, it might not be large enough to accommodate the school's enrollment at completion, planned for

2010 or 2011. The enrollment in January 2008, including Marshall overflow students being taught at **Carl Shuler** High School, was 2,037. The Administration says that no decision has been made on how to accommodate any excess Marshall enrollment but that keeping the old Marshall open along with the new one is an option.

The budget supporting the proposed Master Plan option includes money for replacing the Marshall stadium, as that would be the site of the new school. To the extent that the old Marshall would have to be kept open, however, it is unclear where the new stadium could be built. In any case, Marshall outdoor athletic activities during construction would have to be accommodated at other District facilities.

Placement of Marshall in Segment 5 “may or may not” affect the extent of interim repairs that are done to the existing building, according to the Administration. Attendees at community forums have strongly complained that the building is in immediate need of attention.

While building a new Marshall in Segment 5 may address part of the current school’s need for repairs, that solution would be less than ideal if the old school still had to be kept open.

Waiting for relief. Building a new Marshall for 600 fewer students than the current enrollment would seem to do nothing to alleviate crowding that exists currently at all three West Side neighborhood high schools.

Under the latest proposal, a new **Max Hayes** vocational-education school for 800 students would be built on property that the District acquired a number of years ago for the then-planned **West Side Relief** high school. The Relief plan was eventually abandoned, and now it is resurrected as a new Segment 9 (2012-14) school to be built on the current Max Hayes site at West 45th Street and Detroit Avenue.

Two sets of District planning documents put the co-funded size of the proposed West Side Relief high school as 550 students, although 600 has been mentioned,

In explaining why, in view of the current crowding at West Side high schools, the West Side Relief school is best scheduled for Segment 9 (2012-2014), the Administration said that it had no site options other than the current Hayes at this time. Hayes students should be in their new school by the fall of 2011 if all goes according to schedule for Segment 5, meaning that the Relief school could be in Segment 8 if not 7.

The Administration this Spring did offer the Board of Education an option that combined Hayes and West Side Relief on a shared campus for 1,550 students on the West 65th Street site. Schematic drawings showed how both could be fit on the site, using some shared facilities, such as auditorium and cafeteria. In that option, Marshall was in Segment 8, built new for 1,200 students. Later, the shared campus was declared inappropriate without explanation.

One West Side member of City Council, citing the current need to relieve crowding, has suggested building the new West Side school on West 65th and building Hayes elsewhere. He suggested the Berea Road industrial corridor.

Alternatives and costs. If a West Side Relief high school, a new Marshall and a new Max Hayes were all built before Issue 14 tax money is exhausted at the end of Segment 7, at least two elementary schools from Segments 5-7 in the current proposal would have to be postponed until after Segment 7. The Administration has been committed to building as many elementary schools as possible before the money runs out, in the belief that new elementary schools will prompt more parents to send their children

there, rather than charter schools, which would bolster the Administration's argument for more co-funded high school space.

One alternative, possibly not acceptable to residents of the Marshall area, might be to go ahead and do expensive repairs to Marshall this summer, but wait for the new school while easing overcrowding with a new West Side Relief. The Administration might not want to "waste" the repair money, but one could take the view that the money was supposed to have been spent in Segment 1's Warm, Safe and Dry phase in the first place.

Some community education advocates have noted that plans for large high schools run counter to educational studies suggesting that smaller schools yield better educational outcomes. The Working Group recently heard a suggestion that if numerous small high schools were not possible, then the Administration should consider implementing a schools(each with separate principal and staff)-within-a-school concept at large high schools, such as the proposed Marshall and Glenville. While academic programming is beyond the scope of the BAC's mission, it would seem that if such a concept were to be implemented, then it should be done beginning with each school's design.

The plan to partially renovate **East Tech** leaves open the question of what would be done with the rest of the high school. The annex is a candidate to be torn down or used for another purpose, including administrative or operations facilities, or a volunteer center. Any work done on that portion would be funded by the unmatched LFI, and no LFI expenditure is currently budgeted.

Calculating contingencies. The contingency plan, should the OSFC grant the requested additional high school space allocation, is to fully renovate East Tech at 1,681 students and **East** at 1,000, as well as build a new **Glenville** for 1,150 – a total of 3,831 for three contiguous academic neighborhoods. That may be a bit optimistic for the year 2015, considering that the January 2008 combined enrollment at those schools was 2,858. Even if the OSFC agreed to co-fund the space, the District should not spend precious local tax dollars to accommodate students who do not exist.

By comparison, the contingency plan calls for building a new **South** and a new **Kennedy**, each at 750 students, for a combined enrollment in these adjacent academic neighborhoods of 1,500. The January 2008 combined enrollment was 1,874. This part of the contingency plan therefore appears more realistic, but perhaps a bit too low.

All dressed up, no place to go. Rhodes High School has been renovated at a co-funded capacity of 1,005, yet its January 2008 enrollment was 1,416. The problem is compounded by what the Administration has described as a shortage of smaller classrooms for special-education students at Rhodes. This has required the continued housing of more than 300 Rhodes students in "swing space" at **William Rainey Harper** school, even though the Rhodes renovation is complete. At community forums, conditions at Harper were described as substandard.

The Administration plans this summer to re-examine space usage at Rhodes with an eye toward eventually teaching all Rhodes students at Rhodes. However, the Administration does not foresee being able to end the use of Harper for Rhodes overflow until at least the 2009-10 school year. At a recent community forum, the Administration acknowledged the possibility that an additional year beyond that would be required.

Elementary elements. The situation at Rhodes/Harper could affect when the proposed new **Charles Mooney** K-8 could be built. Mooney is to be built new for 650 students in Segment 5 (2008-10), but Harper is planned to accommodate the Mooney students during construction. Since each segment timeline provides for a year of planning and design before construction, keeping Harper in use one more school year for Rhodes students would not materially affect the Mooney project, but if Harper must be used for two more years, then Mooney de facto would become a Segment 6 (2009-11) project. That would threaten to delay the new **Denison** K-8 in Segment 7, as Harper is to be the Denison swing space beginning in the fall of 2011.

The **Case** K-8 at East 40th and Superior Avenue, which in January had 536 students, is proposed for renovation in Segment 6 for 375 students. If it proves to be too small at that time, the District plans to assign some students to the new **Willson**, being built some 40 blocks to the east at 574 students in the ongoing Segment 3.

Master Plan option materials compiled by the Administration say **that Rickoff, Roosevelt, Jefferson and Baker** K-8s “are being considered for designation as K-8 program schools.” This suggests that these schools are being considered for some type of what used to be called “magnet” or citywide-draw programs, but no explanation has been provided.

Some K-8 schools are already below the minimum enrollment for an elementary school (350) but are being proposed for co-funding at larger sizes. These include **Willow**, at 244 students in January but proposed to be built new for 450 in Segment 10; **Buckeye-Woodland**, at 272 students in January but proposed for 450 students in Segment 10; and **Dunbar**, with a January enrollment of 315 but proposed for 450 in Segment 5.

In general, building in excess of current enrollments seems to make sense only if the District expects to close or scale back nearby schools. Otherwise, the District will face the prospect of building too much capacity where it is not needed, as has been the case with the **Franklin D. Roosevelt** K-8, built with a co-funded capacity of 1,115 in Segment 2 but with a January enrollment of only 324. If only a certain amount of co-funded space is available districtwide, then overbuilding in one neighborhood can only mean that another neighborhood will be underserved.

The Budget

The budget attached to the Administration’s latest Master Plan preference includes inflation adjustments for Segments 7 through 10 in recognition that as time passes, construction costs tend to rise. It also attempts to make reasoned estimates of the need for LFI money for each school, and it provides what appears to be a generous allowance of more than \$30 million in contingent LFI expenses. In addition it does not include perhaps \$50 million in revenue from interest and federal technology subsidies that the District probably will – but might not – receive.

This leads us to conclude that the budget appears to be a conservative, workable plan. We offer these observations:

- No inflation provision is made for Segment 6, scheduled for spring 2009 to spring 2012. Given the current energy situation, it may be wise to begin factoring for inflation then, instead of waiting until Segment 7.

- Segment 7 and Segment 8 both have the same timeframes in the budget plan, Spring 2010 to Spring 2013. This appears to reflect the exhaustion of Issue 14 funds, non-bond proceeds and interest by the end of Segment 7. The OSFC will not let a segment start unless there is money in the bank to finish it. That means Spring 2010 would be the latest that the District could seek voter approval of additional tax money to avoid delays.
- The co-funded cost estimates for a new Marshall (Segment 5) and West Side Relief (Segment 9) are based on 167 square feet per student and \$200 per square foot. The cost estimate for a new Glenville in Segment 9 does not list the square footage. If it were priced at 167 square feet per student and \$200 per square foot, as the others are, the cost would be \$38.4 million, but the listed cost is \$35.7 million.
- The program as outlined has been tailored so as not to exceed the \$217 million in additional taxes that the District's financial adviser, Fifth Third, has calculated will not raise the rate at which residents currently pay for the construction program (and for the end of the Cleveland Public Library construction bonds) but will merely extend the years of payment. Possible reductions in the tax valuation of Cuyahoga County homes, as well as an increasing rate of tax payment defaults, may change those calculations.
- If the District wins its appeal for reclassification in the OSFC program, the need for additional tax money declines to \$183.1 million under the Administration's calculations, and this figure appears to include \$62 million in additional LFI money to do even more work that is not co-fundable under OSFC rules

Community Engagement

The District held four large community forums from May 20 to 29. According to a report by the Administration, a total of 205 parents, community members and students attended the meetings. Based on personal observation, attendance seemed better than that, but the District report says that more than half of attendees were CMSD employees.

We continue to believe that community involvement would be improved by earlier and more widespread publicity. Notes sent home with schoolchildren and automated phone messages sent to the homes of students still appear to be the predominant means of communication about community forums. These methods do a poor job of getting the word to the public at large. Notices sent to the news media, when they have been sent, have been last-minute, which minimizes their effectiveness and misses the deadlines of weekly newspapers.

The Administration's presentation about the Master Plan was consistent at each meeting, and it was refined after the first forum to allow more time for public comments.

Community forums on the facilities program should continue for its duration, because the people of the District have valuable insights to offer and because taking their desires into consideration will broaden public support for the program.

Finally, we note that Segment 5 is to be launched soon after adoption of a revised Master Plan. That means the District Administration must be prepared immediately to

begin recruiting Core Team members for the Segment 5 schools. Core Teams with a broad membership representative of the neighborhood can be a vital link between the community and the District's facilities team, helping to ensure that each school reflects the neighborhood's desires.

Conclusion

Sometimes good work takes a little longer. Indeed, it is our hope that the lengthy deliberations over this Master Plan revision will result in a strategy that produces first-rate schools for Cleveland's future generations in a cost-effective manner, that is, well-equipped schools of the right size and in the right places.

The latest proposal appears to be headed in that direction because it is based on the high school space that the OSFC will co-fund under current rules, not the space that may be allowed in the future. At the same time, it wisely provides the outline of a contingency plan that could be implemented if the rules change for the better.

In addition, this plan recognizes community desires to preserve landmark schools while also recognizing that these schools, because they are generally too large for current needs, cannot be included in the co-funded program without excessive expense, both for construction and for costs of transporting students to fill them up.

And this plan follows several rounds of community forums at which Cleveland residents could voice their opinions and desires about the city's schools. To the extent that the revision reflects the community's input, it will enjoy greater support. . The BAC commends the dedication demonstrated by many who participated in the recent forums and hopes that the community-engagement process will continue in improved fashion for the remainder of the school construction program, including any further revisions of the Master Plan.

Once a new Master Plan is adopted, it is imperative that the District immediately commence the process of recruiting and consulting neighborhood Core Teams to advise the project teams on designs of schools in Segment 5.

We agree that the OSFC's estimates of high school enrollment seem far too low, in part because they assume that students who attend charter K-8s will attend charter high schools that don't yet exist. The OSFC's standard space for special-education students also appears unsuitable for a large urban district, forcing crowding of classrooms when schools are built to the OSFC's specifications. Further, we feel that allowance for 706 vocational-education students is patently inadequate for such a large urban district in a manufacturing region that is in dire need of a highly trained workforce.

That said, we must deal with the situation as it is, while hoping it will change. To that end, this plan largely is limited to work that the OSFC will co-fund, minimizing unmatched LFI spending in recognition that citizens of this depressed economy are unable to turn over unlimited tax money.

The Master Plan Work Group, attempting to match schools with student population, should be able to hone the latest proposal to a keen edge.

We look forward to seeing the final product and the speedy launch of the rest of the program.

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