

ICC plans bigger, safer school with cash in bank

Written by EMILIA TEASDALE
Monday, 10 February 2014 11:13 -

KINDERHOOK--The Ichabod Crane Board of Education discussed a \$2.3-million construction project this week that would improve security at all three school buildings, add four classrooms to the Primary School and purchase a digital sign along Route 9

At the board's regular meeting Tuesday evening, February 4 schools Superintendent George Zini had already closed the district schools for the next day. But since the snowstorm hadn't hit yet, the board met as planned. At the top of the board's agenda was a presentation from James Baldwin, the district superintendent for Questar III/BOCES. After Dr. Baldwin's talk, which touched on the history of the BOCES, or Board of Cooperative Educational Services, the federal Race to the Top funds that BOCES used and Common Core initiatives, Mr. Zini thanked the staff at Questar III for all the help they have given the district.

Mr. Zini also said the board would be discussing Common Core at the next meeting, February 25. He said teachers and administrators would discuss the pros and cons of the new standards.

The board then talked about the construction project, which will be referendum on this May's annual school budget vote ballot. The project will be funded with \$900,000 the board put aside to deal with over-crowding at the Primary School and with state aid, which is predicted to cover about 73% of the project's costs.

"We can fund the \$2.3-million project without any impact to the taxpayers," Mr. Zini said of the project. He said it would not increase either the school budget or the amount to be raised by school taxes.

The project would include adding four classrooms to make more space in the Primary School for art and music programs, as well as the physical and occupational therapy and the program for English Language Learners. Primary School Principal Suzanne Guntlow said that these programs are mandated by the state and currently the district is trying to fit three to four programs in one room.

Steven Thesier from the district's engineering firm BCK presented the plan that would add a second set of doors at both the primary and middle schools so that visitors would wait in a

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vestibule before entering the schools. He also talked about adding a card swipe system to enter all schools during the school day. "There is a lot more discussion about security," Mr. Thesier said, mentioning cameras as a possibility if they would fit in the \$2.3 million budget.

The addition on the Primary School would cost about \$1.4 million and the security upgrades would be about \$470,000, Mr. Thesier told the board. With incidentals and construction contingencies, and the new digital sign for outside the high school along Route 9, the cost of the project comes to \$2,385,000.

For the proposition to appear on the May ballot the board will have to approve the language of the referendum at the next meeting. If voters approve the project in May it will still be another school year before the construction gets started. Mr. Thesier said that approval from the state Education Department could take up to six months. Construction could not start until July 2015.

The board also discussed the 2014-15 school year budget. Mr. Zini stressed that numbers would change in the coming months. Right now the district is looking at a \$35-million budget. District Business Manager Michael Brennan said there was a budget gap of \$197,705 from last year.

There will also be a bus purchasing proposal as a separate referendum on the May ballot. The board will be asking for authorization to purchase five new vehicles of different sizes for a total of \$372,000. All the budget information will be posted at www.ichabodcrane.org.

Mr. Brennan also discussed a tax exemption for veterans that the board could approve if it acts by March 1. Mr. Brennan recommended that the board not approve the exemption for this year but wait and have a public hearing. "Our district has the largest number of vets and the largest number of tax exempt," he told the board.

Mr. Zini said that though he supported giving veterans some tax relief, "Other people's taxes will go up because of this." And he said there was no way to know by March 1 how it will impact the district's taxpayers. "It's too quick, too fast to know everything about it," he told the board.

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In attendance at the meeting was former board member Regina Rose. She will be interviewed by the state Assembly Committee on Education and the Committee on Higher Education next week for one of the four open seats on the Board of Regents. Ms. Rose is being endorsed by the New York State Allies for Public Education (NYSAPE). She told the Columbia Paper that there are two at-large seats open and two seats for specific districts, including the one that includes ICC. Ms. Rose said that she will know whether she has been appointed in March and the term starts in April. The Board of Regents sets education policy statewide.

The next board meeting will be a special session Tuesday, February 25, at 7 p.m. in the High School Library.

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