

Mariemont City Schools

Superintendent's Recommendation to the Board of Education

Comprehensive Facilities Master Plan

Paul W. Imhoff, Superintendent
9/15/2009

Introduction

The Mariemont City School District and its residents have been actively engaged in a formal Facilities Planning Process to develop a carefully considered, comprehensive Master Plan. The plan will provide a framework to guide long-term decisions as the district deals with aging buildings with failing infrastructure (i.e. heating, plumbing, electric, windows, doors, etc.)

The Mariemont City School District remains committed to our mission of preparing the Scholars of Today and inspiring the Leaders of Tomorrow. Maintaining the district focus on the excellent academic program is essential as the realities of the facilities needs are addressed. This document will serve as a formal recommendation to the Board of Education and is submitted respectfully by the Superintendent of Schools on September 15, 2009.

Background

The process began with a clear goal – Insure that the community investment in the school district remains focused on preparing the scholars of today and inspiring the leaders of tomorrow. In order to achieve this goal we must develop and implement a comprehensive facilities master plan.

The Board of Education commissioned a study of school facilities in 2005 that culminated in a report from the District Advisory Committee in 2006. That study and subsequent analysis by the Ohio School Facilities Commission in 2008 form the foundation of the current facilities process. In February of 2009 the high school was removed from the planning process due to the generally favorable condition of the facility. The high school will be reevaluated in ten years.

Over the past thirteen months we have hosted community meetings, conducted on line surveys and a scientific telephone survey, attended meetings of community organizations, organized coffees in people homes, and participated in countless conversations at concerts, open houses, athletic competitions and in the aisles of the local grocery store. Our community is unique in its support of public education and its expectation of academic excellence while meeting the individual needs of every student.

The Board of Education takes pride in the history of this school district and the high expectations and accountability that residents have always demanded. They value this community's desire to participate in the decision making process and provide input. The Board has demonstrated a commitment to transparency in all decisions made regarding the school district.

The Process

The Mariemont City School District has spent the past thirteen months (September 2008-present) in a comprehensive community engagement and facilities planning process that has included:

- two community wide meetings that were very well attended
- an online survey completed by over 500 residents
- countless small group meetings
- the formation and utilization of the Facilities Advisory Panel comprised of three individuals from each of the four communities that comprise the Mariemont School District
- five building teams representing each school building and comprised of parent and staff volunteers
- a professionally conducted public opinion telephone survey conducted in August 2009

The next phase of the process is the Decisions Phase. During the Decisions Phase the Board Education will determine timing, financing, sequencing, and further details. The Decisions Phase is scheduled for completion in December of 2009.

A large amount of data has been gathered as a part of the comprehensive process and these reports may be accessed at www.mariemontschools.org/facilities.

Realities

The Mariemont City School District is facing a number of realities in regard to the current facilities. These facts are key to understanding why a comprehensive plan is needed.

1. Building systems (i.e. heating, plumbing, electric, windows, doors, etc.) are beginning to fail and the district is facing the costly prospect of addressing these system failures in a piecemeal fashion if a comprehensive plan is not adopted.
2. A piecemeal approach to addressing these system failures is very expensive and threatens to divert money from the academic program (estimated to cost \$42,868,000).
3. The most cost effective approach to dealing with the building issues is to adopt and implement a comprehensive and proactive plan that provides for improved facilities at a lower cost than the piecemeal approach.
4. The current elementary and junior high facilities have been well maintained and the life of the building systems has been extended beyond the expected lifecycle due to this history of maintenance.

Key Findings

Throughout the process many points of view have been shared and the community has demonstrated the sincere interest for the well being of their school district. There have been a number of key findings that have become clear during the process. It is important to note that no point of view should be considered to be universally held by all community members.

1. A firm commitment to maintaining a world class academic program should remain the top priority.

2. Sound fiscal management should be practiced at all times.
3. The schools are a key element to the success enjoyed by all four communities within the school district.
4. Ongoing communications must continue in order for the school district to hear all points of view and for community members to stay informed.

Recommendation

The facts gathered in this comprehensive process indicate that the facilities infrastructure problems within the Mariemont School District are significant and are growing with each passing day. It is imperative that a comprehensive proactive plan be approved and subsequently funded in order to avoid a very costly “band aid” approach. My number one concern is that we would divert an ever increasing amount of money away from the academic program. The dollars for the academic program must be protected. The most cost effective approach to solving the facilities problems within the school district is to approve a comprehensive plan and begin implementation of the approved plan. Doing nothing only makes our problems worse and costs more money in the long run. I recommend the following:

1. Construct a new 7-8 junior high school on the current Fairfax Elementary Site and integrate the current cupola into the new structure.
2. Utilize the composite approach for Mariemont Elementary School (K-6) and, at a minimum, save the front facade of the current school and the auditorium. The composite approach includes a combination of new construction and building renovations. Students who currently attend Fairfax Elementary School would attend Mariemont Elementary School.
3. Utilize the composite approach for Terrace Park Elementary (K-6) and, at a minimum, save the front facade of the original portion of the building. The composite approach includes a combination of new construction and building renovations.
4. Utilize the Dale Park (current junior high) building as “swing space” to house junior high and Mariemont Elementary School students during the construction/renovation of those buildings, thus saving the district money on modular classroom rental fees.
5. Engage the community and research possible options for the Dale Park Building after the completion of all projects (schedule to be determined in Decisions Phase).
6. Appoint a committee of district residents to study the different options for financing the needed facilities work while protecting operating dollars for the academic program. The committee would be asked to submit a recommendation to the Board of Education at the December meeting.
7. Explore “green” technologies and design buildings that are energy efficient
8. Relocate the Board of Education office to Mariemont Elementary School

TOTAL ESTIMATED COST – 37,900,000

Rationale

These recommendations insure that the community investment in our school district remains focused on preparing the scholars of today and inspiring the leaders of tomorrow. The rationale for these recommendations is divided into three categories: instructional benefits, cost efficiencies, and community values.

Instructional Benefits

1. Electrical systems to support full use of the technology that is critical in today's classrooms
2. Modern science labs for all students
3. On-site facilities for junior high after school events
4. Fully accessible spaces for individuals with disabilities
5. The creation of flexible spaces to allow individualized, small group and large group learning opportunities
6. Space flexibility to accommodate future instructional needs
7. Modern buildings that provide a constant level of indoor air quality

Cost Efficiencies

1. Replace failing systems (i.e. heating, plumbing, electric, windows, doors, etc.) to avoid costly piecemeal approach
2. Reduce overhead costs (staffing and building operations) by reducing the number of schools
3. Design energy efficient buildings to guard against rising energy costs
4. Avoid the greater expense of retro-fitting new systems into outdated buildings
5. Utilize sites that offer flexibility and ability for future expansion if needed
6. Use the Dale Park Building as "swing space" to reduce rental fees for temporary modular classroom spaces

Community Values

1. Maintain schools in communities that traditionally have housed a school
2. Keep 6th grade in the elementary environment
3. Modernize facilities to support the quality of the academic program in the district
4. Design structures that preserve the historic elements of the current buildings and fit seamlessly into the architectural fabric of the community
5. Enhance safety and security throughout the district

Conclusion

I want to thank everyone who has participated in our facilities process that began in 2005 when the District Advisory Committee conducted an initial facilities study. I have been continually impressed during the process as I have worked with residents who care deeply about the communities that make up our school district and the school district itself. It is always difficult to discuss change, but our community has embraced the conversation as we come together to plan for future generations. Our school district was built by those who came before us, and now it is our turn to provide the facilities for future generations of Mariemont students. We will continue to make the schools available for community use because the buildings belong to every resident. From girl scouts and boy scouts to adult education and village meetings – the schools are an important asset for all residents. It is an honor and a great responsibility to take part in this work. I look forward to the final phase of our process – the Decisions Phase - as we decide when to begin the work that needs to be completed and how to provide the resources to fund the plan. The future is bright for the Mariemont School District!