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OC school options outlined

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By JUDITH O. ETZEL
Staff writer



Oil City Area School District superintendent Joe Carrico leads a discussion at the forum.
(By Jerry Sowden)

The first public meeting to outline options to deal with the Oil City Area School District's aging elementary schools and shrinking enrollment drew a small but attentive group to the high school auditorium Tuesday night.

About 70 people listened to a condensed report prepared by HHSDR, a Sharon/Pittsburgh architectural and engineering firm hired nearly a year ago to analyze the district's buildings, project enrollments, estimate renovation costs and offer options on how best to configure classrooms.

"Tonight is the first step in taking a holistic look...at our four elementary schools," said Joe Carrico, district superintendent.

Noting changes that affect school buildings are "highly emotional decisions because they affect our children," Carrico said the Oil City school board is committed to "keeping these discussions open to the public throughout the process."

Details presented

Andreas Dometakis of HHSDR presented information on enrollment, capacity, building conditions and options as to renovations and consolidations. The district's elementary buildings — Seventh Street, Smedley, Oakland and Hasson Heights — have an enrollment of 798 students in grades K-4 and a capacity of 1,225.



Andreas Dometakis of HHSDR Architects and Engineers of Sharon explains the condition of each of the Oil City elementary schools.
(By Jerry Sowden)

"All your buildings are structurally sound — they will not fall down," said Dometakis who then briefly described the condition of each elementary school building. Hasson Heights, Oakland and Seventh Street are deemed in fair condition overall with Smedley, the only elementary school that has had no extensive renovations since it was built in 1963, listed in poor condition.

Options	Construction (Hard) Costs	Soft Costs	Total Project Costs
1	17,243,000	3,520,000	\$ 20,763,000
2	20,000,000	4,093,000	\$ 27,133,000
3	24,364,000	4,345,000	\$ 28,709,000
4	13,207,500	2,613,000	\$ 15,820,500
5	14,864,000	2,909,000	\$ 17,599,000
6	22,574,000	4,362,000	\$ 26,936,000
7	25,344,000	4,501,000	\$ 27,845,000

One of the slides in a powerpoint presentation

Describing the high school and middle school, each relatively new, as in excellent condition, Dometakis told the group the study also considered the district administration offices on Grandview Road and the maintenance building on East Second Street. Both are in fair condition, he said.

At the heart of the building study are seven options that include elements of consolidation and new buildings. Those options focus solely on the elementary schools, administrative offices and

included the cost estimates for the seven possible strategies. (By Jerry Sowden)



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maintenance garage and do not affect the high school or middle school. The estimated costs do not include any state reimbursement monies, sale of buildings or potential savings.

Those options are:

-- Option 1 — Renovate Hasson Heights, Seventh Street, Oakland; make addition and renovations at Smedley; renovate administrative offices and maintenance garage; total cost of \$20.8 million

-- Option 2 — Construct new K-4 elementary school; close Hasson Heights, Seventh Street, Oakland and Smedley Street; renovate Hasson building for administrative offices and maintenance facility; total cost of \$27.1 million

-- Option 3 — Construct new K-4 elementary school; renovate Oakland; close Hasson Heights, Seventh Street and Smedley Street; renovate Hasson building for admin/maintenance; total cost of \$28.7 million

-- Option 4 — Renovations and addition to Hasson Heights; renovate Seventh Street; close Oakland and Smedley Street; renovate district administrative offices and build new maintenance building on high school site; total cost of \$15.8 million

-- Option 5 — Renovations and addition at Hasson Heights; renovate Smedley; close Oakland and Seventh Street; renovate district administrative offices construct new maintenance building; total cost of \$17.2 million

-- Option 6 — Renovate Hasson Heights; construct new (grades 3-4) elementary school with district administration office attached; close Seventh Street, Oakland and Smedley Street; construct new maintenance building ; total cost of \$27 million

-- Option 7 — Renovate Hasson Heights and add new administration office; build new (grades 2-4) elementary school; close Seventh Street, Oakland and Smedley Street; construct new maintenance building; total cost of \$27.8 million

Changes can be made

Dometakis said any of the options can be tweaked.

"There are several changes you can make in every option and you can do any of them in phases," he said.

As to a possible site for a new elementary school building as listed in some of the options, Dometakis said no location has been identified. The ideal size would be 15 to 20 acres, he said.

Carrico told the audience there is another option, too.

"There is an eighth option and that's to do nothing. In good conscience, I'm not sure that's the best option," he said. "...But, when you look at those numbers, we've learned we can peel those back like we



Oil City superintendent Joe Carrico was peppered with comments from the audience. A decision on whether to make any changes will come within the next two years. (By Jerry Sowden)

did at the high school. These won't be Taj Mahals...(because) it boils down to what can we afford and what do we want."

Carrico was peppered with comments from the audience in a casual exchange that included suggestions, questions about a timetable for changes, the potential disposition of school buildings, transportation concerns, possible staffing changes and more. A decision on whether to make any changes will come within the next two years.

The superintendent stressed the public will have the opportunity to ask questions, offer suggestions and participate in the planning phases of any projects that affect the district's four elementary schools. Carrico said neighborhoods would be affected by school building expansions as well as closures and those issues will be talked about at length in a series of public forums.

"We are not going to knee-jerk this. It is not about automatically shutting down buildings. It's how do we maximize our buildings," Carrico told the group during the 90-minute session.

"And we will make sure that no one will be able to say they didn't have a voice in this. I can't tell you that everyone will be happy but I can say everyone will have a chance to have the conversation about this."

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