

TOM TERESINSKI

Community volunteers developed the DeKalb School District's comprehensive facilities plan over the last two years. After they considered the current overcrowding at the high school (328 students more than functional capacity) and at the elementary schools (195 students more than functional capacity), as well as the impact of expected growth, the current plan was unanimously supported by the Facilities Planning Committee members. Anchored by a new 2,500-student high school and a new 500-student elementary school, the \$110 million plan addresses the capacity needs throughout the district.

The plan has been well covered by the Daily Chronicle and can be viewed at the district's Web site, <http://www.-dist428.org>. In addition to developing a long-range facilities plan, the district has been addressing some other important items that were of concern in prior referendums.

These issues include:

- Capital/impact fees: The city of DeKalb and the town of Cortland have approved substantially higher fees at the request of the school board (\$5,400 for a three-bedroom home plus transition fees, for a total of \$1,200). These fees were developed with the help of consultants who specialize in this area to ensure they were fair and properly reflect our district's costs. It should be noted that the agreement has an annual Consumer Price Index adjustment to keep the capital fee current as costs rise.
- TIF agreement: A new Tax Increment Financing agreement was reached with the city that makes the school district “whole.” Working with the city resulted in a unique agreement that offsets any negative impact that a TIF district might have on our schools. One consultant remarked that this was one of the best such agreements that person had seen anywhere in the state. It certainly reflects the cooperative relationship that exists between the city and District 428.
- The district's fiscal responsibility: I believe the district has responded to the community's comments and concerns about fiscal responsibility that were raised during prior referendums. In four of the last five years, including the year just ending, the district has attained the state's highest level of financial recognition. While maintaining adequate fund balances and balancing its budget, the district earned this solid financial ranking, which will lower interest costs for all of us.

In addition to developing an efficient facilities plan that incorporates the data gained from community surveys, the district has addressed these other important concerns. Now it is time we address the most important concern - the need for adequate school facilities. Vote yes on Feb. 5.

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