

Help Mt. Hebron Update

Board of Education Work sessions

The HCPSS Board of Education held two work sessions (9/21 & 10/01) on their capital budget. The Board voted 7-0 to approve the capital budget as is for transmittal to the state. With this action, the Mt. Hebron Project (E1005) went forward as a renovation comprising of \$46.65 million (\$27 million in FY09 + \$19.65 million FY 10) for construction and \$250,000 for equipment and furnishings. These funds are in addition to the \$3.1M previously approved for planning purposes, bringing total funding to \$50M.

However, not all of the \$46.65 million will be for actual construction. Included are costs such as construction management fees along with portable trailer rentals and other “temporary measures” needed while the process is underway. The most critical question which the Mt. Hebron Community needs answered is how much is truly available for improvements in the modernization process. HMH is attempting to learn this as well as what the scope of the project’s work is.

Is this a done deal?

No. Plain and simple, there are many opportunities to affect change. The Board submits its capital budget to the County Executive March 2008. A lot can change between now and then. We will look for the Facility Planning Team’s (see info below) answers to our questions, and the cost specifics. Diane Mikulis stated in a Howard County Times article (9/27/07) that the Board will not vote on the plan until HCPSS sends them detailed cost estimates.

What exists right now is a “cap” with no details as to what the money will buy and what funding contingencies will be available when walls and ceilings are torn apart. HMH will continue working with Hebron’s teachers, parents and feeder schools to convince our elected officials to support a design solution that meets Ed Specs and spends our tax dollars shrewdly.

2B is no longer to be?

At the September 21st work session, HCPSS staff Ken Roey stated option 2B is no longer a financially viable option because it is now necessary to include another 1 or 2 firewalls in the project. The additional firewalls are required to adhere to building code requirements if HCPSS is adding any square footage to the existing building. The original 2 firewalls costs were \$15 million. With up to 4 firewalls needed, the project’s new cost level would be several million dollars above \$50 million “cap”. Therefore, HCPSS no longer recommends 2B due to the project’s complexity and high costs.

What to do?

HCPSS suggested two approaches. One option is to renovate only the mechanical infrastructure of the existing building (\$20 - \$30 million). Another option is to construct

1 or 2 annexes and to renovate/modernize the existing building without adding additional square footage to the footprint.

A new design concept

Constructing 1 or 2 annexes and renovating/modernizing without increasing square footage of the existing building allows HCPSS to meet codes' requirements with easier to install fire barriers instead of structural firewalls. The concept is preliminary and no specific information on design details, costs, or implementation requirements was available, Mr. Roey stated. Mr. Roey also stated that the objective of what HCPSS was trying to do in 2B could be substantially achieved at "somewhat" lower costs (approximately \$40 million) by putting in annex plus renovating/modernizing the footprint. Chair Diane Mikulis questioned whether modular classrooms would be of any use. HCPSS staff stated that modular facility's costs had increased to a level where bricks and mortar solutions were less expensive.

What are annexes and where would they be placed?

Annexes are similar to additions but are freestanding buildings not structurally connected to the existing building. A representative from Smolen (authors of the April 2006 report) stated one annex would be placed on the "back left corner with minimum impact on the playing fields". No specific use was proposed, although HMH speculates this annex would contain classrooms. The second annex placed to the right (east) of the athletics department would include "a wrestling room and locker room" said the Smolen representative. Also stated was that covered breezeways would be used by students to travel to the annexes.

Will Mt. Hebron meet HCPSS 1999 Educational Specifications?

On 10/01/07, Mr. Roey stated that **"significant portions of the existing building will not meet ed specs" when the project is finished.** He also stated that the top priority will be to repair the physical plant facilities (mechanical, electrical, etc) and code compliance. It was implied that Ed Specs improvements will be limited to whatever construction funding is left over. While the annexes are constructed to meet Ed Specs, however, large portions of the existing facility will not. There was no discussion of whether too small sized classrooms would be de-certified from the count or reconfigured.

As HMH stated in testimony, HCPSS Policy/Regulation 6020-R clearly requires that schools receiving capital improvements via renovations, modernizations or replacement should be designed to achieve Ed Specs. This has been the practice in the recent renovations like Howard High School which was brought the school above the 1999 total Ed Spec space square footage requirements. In other cases, while each classroom or space might not meet Ed Specs, there has been a conscious and deliberate effort to bring a school up to global requirements and in some cases exceed Ed Specs depending upon individual school needs.

Community Questions about New Concept Developed

HMH is very interested and concerned about the specifics of the new concept. In a July 2007 meeting, the Superintendent mentioned, as an aside, that annexes were a possible solution to avoid the firewalls' costs. With HCPSS' continued support of option 2B in subsequent public meetings, HMH didn't explore it further simply because we were unaware it was a possibility. Again when annexes were not mentioned during the HCPSS' capital budget presentation to the Board of Education on 9/6/07, we thought the idea had been withdrawn.

With only vague reassurances being presented to the Board on 9/21, HMH's Steering Committee formulated 20+ questions to assist the Board in evaluating whether the new concept yields a safe, compliant code compliant building where the educational programs, as provided for in HCPSS' 1999 educational specifications, can be delivered effectively without compromise in a positive building environment. Mt. Hebron staff also submitted 20+ questions on how the design concept would work programmatically. (see <http://www.mhhspts.com/8.html> for all questions). The questions were provided in advance to the entire Board of Education; MTH's representative, Sandra French, was to present the questions on our behalf. Since the concept was never publicly shared prior to the 9/20 public hearing, public testimony on the concept was not permitted. Submitting the questions through Mrs. French was the only immediate way available to get these issues to the Board before it voted.

However, at the 10/01 work session, the Board did not require staff to answer to our questions nor did they call for staff to return with the answers at a future date. Instead, Chair Diane Mikulis stated that the questions would be dealt with by the Mt. Hebron Facility Planning Team that would be re-formed in late October. We will have to wait for the Mt. Hebron Facility Planning Team to meet to see if that is the case.

What about existing safety issues and ADA code non-compliance?

On 9/21/07, Chair Diane Mikulis requested HCPSS staff to examine the costs and timeframe needed to address the safety issues, ADA non-compliance findings, to completely and finally exterminate rodents, and what it would take to make the building environment more pleasing and conducive to learning such as carpeting, ceiling tiles, lighting, and floor and wall tiles. Ken Roey stated that for the life safety violations, he did not have an exact number on what it would take to fix those items identified in the Gilbert Report (6/28/07). He noted that the Gilbert Report identified \$900,000 in fire and life safety needs over two years.

On 10/01/07, Ken Roey stated that after meeting with Howard County Government Officials rectifying the fire and life safety issues could be postponed until a renovation/modernization begins. No maximum time limit was given. As for ADA non-compliance, Mr. Roey stated, all schools have basic compliance. A total upgrade is not needed until the renovation/modernization. Until then, the school is compliant. If a student with needs attends Mt. Hebron, then HCPSS would individually address needs

with accommodations. No information was provided on 10/01/07 on the Chair's request for dealing with rodent infestation and the building environment.

What's happening in the near future?

The Mt. Hebron Facility Planning Team will be named by the Superintendent or his designee (Mt. Hebron Principal Dave Brown). The team is comprised of school-based personnel, parents and community members, central office personnel and the consultants. We are hopeful that Help Mt. Hebron will be included in the team. The result of the Team's work will be a schematic design along with a detailed cost estimate developed by the Architect for the Board, according to HCPSS Policy/Regulation 6020-R.

What happened to the idea of minimum Ed Specs?

Ken Roey stated (10/01/07 work session) that minimum Ed Specs would be developed for Board review in 2008. No one raised the question as to why the Mt. Hebron project, if it is prevented from being brought up to 1999 HCPSS Ed Specs, would continue to move forward when new minimum Ed Spec requirements would be unavailable to the Facility Planning Team when developing a proposed schematic.

Help Needed!!!

Anyone experienced in administrative law? Cost Accounting? We would like a chance to talk with you. Contact helpmthebron@yahoo.com or call Cindy Ardinger at 410-461-7576.

Thanks for your commitment and active involvement. We have made considerable progress. The original Option 2-B is off the table; although its spirit appears to still live on. Sometimes the steps are small, sometimes they are more obvious. Put altogether, they amount to progress nonetheless for the Mt. Hebron community.

Please feel free to forward!

Help Mt. Hebron Committee