



The Insider Newsletter



Spring Lake Park Schools **School District 16** Proudly Serving Blaine, Spring Lake Park & Fridley

April 20, 2007

School district land acquisitions enhance safety and security

A Message from Dr. Don Helmstetter, Superintendent

Running today's schools takes more than providing teachers, textbooks, and school lunches.

There are security issues, countless health and safety initiatives to address, and we continually strive to meet or exceed a myriad of changing state and federal guidelines.

In the last 12 months, Spring Lake Park School District 16 acquired four properties. Each was an important part of the district's Facilities Improvement Plan, each involved an improvement in safety and security, and each will not produce an increase in taxes.

Prior to this, it had been decades since land was acquired.

The district has changed dramatically in the last ten years, and the projected increase in student enrollment has created even greater needs on the district's aging facilities.

In 2004, the school district began an extensive review of its facilities and also formed a Facilities Improvement Task Force to examine the results and to present its findings to the School Board.

Then, after consultations with a specialist at the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE), the Task Force made a series of recommendations to the School Board. A substantial

portion of the plan would be funded through the \$95.9 million bond referendum, and some additional funds would be provided through MDE-approved health and safety funds.

The MDE determined that the properties on which each of our schools are located were too small for needed facility expansion.

It was only after months of negotiating that several compromises with the MDE were able to be reached, and those decisions also became a part of the Facilities Improvement Plan.

New Elementary School

The MDE informed us that no new construction could begin at the Spring Lake Park High School site unless all non-high school activities and programs were ultimately removed from the site.

This meant that Kenneth Hall Elementary School would need to be demolished and its students, as well as our many Early Childhood Program students and families, would need to be moved to other locations.

The MDE also stated that the District Office needed to be demolished and its services relocated as well.

The initial plans were to relocate the District Office to the first floor of the two-story complex of the high school.

Because Kenneth Hall Elementary would no longer be a school by the fall of 2008, property for a new school was purchased near the intersection of Cloud Drive and Highway 242 (Main Street) in Blaine.

This property was one of only two sites available within the school district that were 17 acres or more. The MDE specifications require that any new elementary school with a student capacity of 700 have at least 17 acres before the construction of the school would be approved.

This site has approximately 19.5 acres. Construction of the new K-3 school will begin this summer.

Woodcrest Elementary School

The second property acquisition occurred near Woodcrest Elementary School. The MDE required that a house surrounded by the Woodcrest playground be purchased and moved/demolished before any new construction could take place on the Woodcrest site.

The school district located the owners, who were renting the property to another family, and ultimately purchased the property. That paved the way

for additional green space and for additional construction to occur. Construction is already underway.

Former HealthPartners Building, Future District Services Center

Last spring, the former HealthPartners building, located east of Highway 65 on 81st Avenue, went up for sale. The school district's offer was ultimately accepted by HealthPartners.

This property enabled the district to better facilitate the transition of the three-year construction at the high school complex, and it also allowed the district to have its Early Childhood Program students relocate to the site until its new wing is completed at Woodcrest Elementary School.

This site will also become the new home of the District Office and Community Services programs, completely eliminating non-high school programs on the high school complex.

It will also be the first time in decades that all district and student services are in one location instead of scattered throughout the district.

Finally, having fewer programs on the high school complex site will greatly enhance safety as well as the parking capacity.

Property on the East Corner of 91st and Westwood Drive

This property, purchased only a month ago, also became available for purchase at a very opportune time.

Because there is only one entrance/exit at the busy Westwood Intermediate and Westwood Middle School complex, there have been a

number of security and safety issues, including three situations within the last year that occurred at a time when traffic was at its peak, creating potential hazardous conditions as safety vehicles tried to enter the site.

The acquisition of this property will enable the district to widen the main entrance to the complex, creating easier access for buses and a safer, more visible access for parents and emergency vehicles as well. A walking path on the east side of that road is also being considered.

The district is also communicating with Blaine city officials about gaining an additional access point on the west side of the Westwood complex, towards Jefferson, between the tennis courts and the private property.

The desire is for an easement at that location to enable emergency vehicles to enter and exit that site under certain conditions. Further discussions will be necessary before any final determination is made.

These land acquisitions have been made to enhance safety and security at all sites and to further the district's pursuit of academic opportunities for all children and all ages.

These projects are all a part of the district's Facilities Improvement Plan and will be funded through existing revenue sources.

No increase in taxes will occur as a result of these purchases, and no additional purchases are being planned or foreseen at this time.

Student health, safety, and security is, and will always remain, priority one for this school district.

To follow our progress on the Facilities Improvement Plan, look for our continual updates on the district's website: www.springlakeparkschools.org.