Virginia moves forward with school expansion project (originally published 3-08-12)

Jody Woltman

Star-Gazette publisher

The Virginia School Board is wasting no time on the school expansion project discussed at the February 27 school board meeting. Architect Joe Petty from J H Petty and Associates resurrected building plans previously submitted once the approval of a $12+ million approval came from Governor Quinn's office.

All board members were present at the regular school board meeting when board member Gary Hish asked for an addition to the agenda, requesting to speak before Petty and his architect report. After the approval of the agenda, bills, payroll, and financial reports, the board discussed all committee reports, including the athletic report.

In a previously held special open meeting regarding the future of junior high sports in Virginia, an open meeting was set for March 13 at 6 p.m. in the cafeteria to discuss the potential number of students for boys baseball and girls softball. A decision will be made after the meeting on the status of the upcoming season. High school track has started and the number of participants has more than tripled in size compared to the recent past. The team stands at 35 on the co-ed team. It was also noted that Virginia will host a Triopia jv baseball game on April 9 at 4:30 p.m.

Elementary principal Christy Brinkley informed the board that the National Successful Network Practices, which Virginia has been a part of for seven years, has announced that Superintendent Lynn Carter has been named “Outstanding Educator of the Month” for June 2012. Brinkley went on to say that “there was not a request made for this honor.”

It was also announced that two Virginia students took first place out of sixteen teams at the “Mathathon” held over the Feb. 25th weekend: Jake Werner and Dirk Winkleman.

As the school architect report was next on the agenda, Hish stood to address the board and Petty: “I have a little bit of an issue moving forward with this building project. If we could redo the heating in ’12 (circa 1912 construction of the school building) and the ’38 (circa 1938 construction of the school building) I’m not too sure about. I still have an issue with the roof problem (flashing connection area of the ground level building to gym). It upsets me very much. If we could save this school district $5 million, I think we should.” Hish went on to say “The roof issue has been stopped twice because it wasn’t done right.”

Petty agreed Hish’s point on the roofing issue is valid, but added that “as far as I know, all parties involved are willing to make it right. How that relates to the new project, we will not be setting any equipment on that part of the roof.”

Further discussion brought Hish back to the ’38 building: “What is wrong with the ’38 building? There are great marble floors, hardwood that just needs to be sanded and refinished.”

“It has fabulous floors, but the way it is attached and not insulated is a big issue”, to which board president Matt Werner stated “It has to be ADA compliant.” Werner went on to say that “This is the plan that went to the voters and this is what they want.”

“I am playing devil’s advocate. But I am only one vote,” stated Hish. There was no motion made or action taken after the discussion.

During the architect report, concerns were voiced over small amounts of asbestos, which poses no threat to students, on end fittings on some piping in the ceiling of portions of the school that will remain. Further discussions will take place on the subject.

Petty discussed a tentative plan of action for the upcoming building project: Bids going out now for demolition equipment. It will begin to be put in place right after classes are finished for the school year, and demolition starting mid-late summer. The project is estimated to take approximately 1 ½ years to complete.

In other board meeting news, the board discussed the fact that Virginia elementary/junior high are the only Illinois “Spotlight School” recipients in Cass County and the district should be proud of the accomplishment. This is the second consecutive year Virginia has achieved the award and are one of only 167 schools state-wide to receive the honors.

The board also approved the following actions and trips: “Under the Dome-UIS”, Youth Day and Youth to Washington Tour, 45th Annual New Berlin Art Fair, Senior Class Trip request, Junior High National Honor Society St. Louis Zoo trip request, and sixth grade St. Louis Arch trip. Action items approved were: approve Pehlman and Dold as District Independent Accountants for the 2012-2013 school year and approve SAPCO agreement.

The board went in to executive session at 8:39 p.m.

At a March 2 Virginia school board building committee meeting, Architect Joe Petty presented copies of the proposed school floor plans, topical/geographic view and the timeline leading to the school project. A proposed interim student classroom layout was presented to the committee and staff/student parking alternatives proposed. Final versions will be presented and published by the Cass County Star-Gazette and on the www.beardstownnewspapers.com website once finalized.