

Superintendent Heuer
Master Facilities Community Meeting
4.18.12

As I was thinking about what to say to all of you tonight, the Charles Dickens story “A Christmas Carol” kept coming to mind. I really like the part where Scrooge asks the spirit of the future -- “Is this the future as it will be, or the future as it may be?” The lesson learned is that the future can be changed by taking advantage of opportunities in the present.

If we do nothing, let’s look at our future. To address our deteriorating school facilities, we will be forced to spend at least \$40 million on critical repairs that will continue to mount. That money will not update our schools, or allow us to avoid more costlier repairs just down the road. It is essentially a very expensive band-aid that addresses the most critical environmental and safety issues.

If we do nothing, the state of our facilities means that, right now, we are forced to overspend approximately \$4.5 million every year just to maintain our current space. That’s a lot of money that we can’t use for repairs and upgrades to our facilities, and that we can’t target to academic programs and student opportunities.

And if we do nothing, our facilities, beyond being outdated and expensive, are also environmentally unfriendly and structured in such a way to be a hindrance to educational performance. Basically, our students do not perform to their capacity, in part because of our facilities.

If we do nothing, the state’s new core curriculum standards mean that we will fall further and further behind with every year, and student

success rates on Ohio assessment instruments will drop by one-third (1/3) to one-half (1/2).

If we do nothing this is the future we face. We have a window of opportunity to change that, however. Some people feel that we are pressing too hard to reach a final plan. That may be the case, but it is only because the stakes are so high and our window of opportunity gets smaller with every passing day.

That window is defined by many factors, including timing. For example, the goal is to finalize a plan that can be put before voters this November, during the presidential election.

That's ambitious, but during that election, more than 70% of registered voters in this community will vote. Next year's November election could see turnout of less than half that. On an issue that will define education, and a large part of our communities, for decades into the future, we have an obligation to ensure that we put this question before the largest possible group of residents.

Over the last two years, the community has given us valuable feedback -- through the year of work the Citizens Facility Committee invested, our eleven large and small community meetings, and through email, blogs, social media, ongoing dialogue with citizens, and also through a scientific survey we conducted last month.

After all that feedback and conversation, we've learned that there exists a set of statements upon which a great many of us substantively agree.

1) Something needs to be done beyond just putting a \$40 million dollar band-aid on the current facilities.

2) We need to have modern, updated schools to meet the educational needs of our children and remain competitive. This is necessary in order for Cleveland Heights and University Heights to be the first choice for new residents moving to the Cleveland area.

3) High quality public schools help maintain property values, so they help determine the overall health of our communities.

4) The overall plan needs to be comprehensive. It must address all levels of educational programs.

5) The plan needs to be comprehensive and transformational for all students, but not put the District in financial jeopardy. We all know any comprehensive plan is going to stretch us financially. There are limits to the number of buildings that can be renovated or replaced.

What are the areas upon which the community does not substantially agree?

While we know we cannot sustain seven elementary schools, the most obvious and understandable concern from all corners of the community is the closing of schools. Idea C, which you will learn more about tonight, involves re-purposing Fairfax, Noble, and Gearity schools.

Most of the concerns we are receiving around Idea C, the community's plan, are related to the closing of Gearity.

Under this plan, there would be no building with primary-age students (grades PK-3) in University Heights. One intermediate school (grades 4-8) would remain in University Heights, Wiley Middle School, which would be fully renovated and expanded to include fourth- and fifth-grade students. This campus would educate more children than are currently being educated in University Heights.

Maintaining the income tax base for University Heights has been a priority since the beginning of this process, so our Board of Education,

as well as our transportation and maintenance departments, would remain in University Heights.

I know the Gearity supporters are here tonight, and I'm glad you are. Our plans have evolved in response to great ideas that have come from the community and that meet the criteria of being both educationally sound and fiscally prudent. There will be plenty of time tonight for you to offer viable alternatives, and we look forward to hearing them.

We've also heard from our Noble and Fairfax families. The idea of closing any school causes pain and fear for our staff, our families, and those living in that neighborhood, as well as for the City of Cleveland Heights for having to close two primary schools.

At these neighborhood meetings, the major point made was that we all must sacrifice a little in order to gain outstanding, state-of-the-art buildings for all of our children. They also made it clear that they don't want to see empty, boarded-up buildings. They said that the buildings must be re-purposed in a way that will benefit the community.

This brings us to another well-known concern -- the District's Millikin property.

We definitely want it put to good use again, and as soon as possible.

The board has authorized an appraisal of the property, which is expected to be completed by May 7. Once the board has that information, they will be able to determine how to proceed.

I know I haven't mentioned every concern, but those that I've mentioned are the most frequently mentioned concerns around Idea C.

This evening is designed to give everybody an opportunity to gather more information, ask questions, express concerns, and offer more suggestions. Nine stations have been set up throughout the room, each focused on a particular aspect of the Facilities Master Plan. Representatives from the District and the Master Planning team will be at each station to listen to your ideas and provide information and answers.

After that, we will bring everyone together again to hear comments and suggestions.

After tonight we will, once again, use all of the input we receive here to help refine the plan further. We will make the first formal presentation to the board on Monday, April 23. At that same meeting our bond counsel will meet with the board to review funding options.

After the board has had time to process the plan, funding options, and additional community input, they will give us their feedback on the plan.

Using this information, it will be my responsibility to craft a resolution for them to act upon.

We have a tremendous opportunity to create something greater and more sustainable for our children and their children and all of us who now and in the future call these cities our home.

Together, we can ensure our children have access to world-class schools that not only give them the first-rate education they need and deserve, but schools that are more efficient and affordable.

In summary, we know what the future will be if we do NOTHING. Now we must ask ourselves what we can do to create the future we desire for our children and our communities.