

Steering and Planning Draft Position Paper: Bond Program Process Improvement (Revised 09-21-15)

Introduction. The purpose of this position paper is to outline initial thoughts on the future of the Bond Program including specific ideas regarding “restarting” the Master Plan process. The District has initiated some of the improvements outlined here though details on the Master Plan Process are evolving.

With respect to the role of the CBOC, the September 9, 2015 Special Meeting indicated our desire for a more expansive role with the recognition that the Board of Trustees has the ultimate decision on spending decisions. There were two major outcomes of this Special Meeting:

- As prescribed by law we will continue to act independently and report our concerns to the Board and Public. In short, we will continue to be there as the eyes and ears for the Public and Taxpayers.
- The CBOC wants to be “relevant”. There are opportunities to work together while still being independent bodies.

This Position Paper is consistent with the approach discussed at our Special Meeting. Our role is not just to report on expenditures after they are made but to be involved in all aspects of spending decisions of bond funds. It is hoped that mutual concerns can be discussed at a Special Meeting to be scheduled this calendar year.

Summary. The Bond Program needs several significant changes and initiatives that entail process improvements on the way projects are prioritized, analyzed, funded and communicated both publicly and internally. The focal point concepts are Trust and Communication.

Trust must be rebuilt and restored in a number of areas particularly between District Bond Program staff and the public and Board of Trustees. There also needs to be improved Communication between the Bond Program and other District Departments/Functions.

There are four specific areas recommended for implementation:

- Reinvigorate the Master Plan process through the development of a robust **Strategic** Facility Plan with intense input from District employees and the Community (Significant Progress has been scheduled with the Community Meetings in October)
- Establish an Annual Capital Improvement Plan (CIP)

- Develop a Policy Level Process for Prioritization of Projects and Initiatives
- Integrate the Bond Program with other District functions and priorities through significantly improved communication and sharing of information among internal and external stakeholders

These are all process improvement concepts that can draw upon the experience of others. In many ways the past challenges of Sweetwater have related to not doing what is accepted Best Practice of Good Government. We do not need to reinvent the wheel but tailor it for the specific environment of this District. The sections below will deal with each of the four bullets above.

Reinvigorate the Master Plan process through the development of a robust Strategic Plan and intense input from District employees and the community

Discussion: The key to a successful Master Plan is to have all the stakeholders feel their input has been listened to and considered before a final plan is adopted. There will be disagreements but people must feel “at least you listened.” What has been heard over and over is that the Master Plan process so far was flawed with regard to this listening issue.

Real input must be sought not just consultant controlled input or questionnaire forms. Moreover many of the rank and file employees and Senior Management Personnel were not fully consulted. This has got to stop.

The District needs buy in to what is being developed in an iterative process of feedback and not a take it or leave it approach. The challenge is to not discard all the hard work to date but expand it by getting more feedback particularly in the area of priorities.

Recommendations: The recommendations are as follows:

1. Conduct in depth “brainstorming” interviews with Principals/Designated staff at each school to ascertain additions, comments, and further input to the Strategic Facility Master Plan (Note: this appears to have started with the Master “Reboot and Superintendent Outreach to schools)
2. Reach out to elected officials and other governmental bodies of the District to seek their input on the future facility plan for District Schools
3. Frequently seek the input of a CBOC

Establish an Annual Capital Improvement Plan (CIP).

Discussion: Project approvals seem often iterative in nature without a “Grand Plan”. Perhaps in the past this approach was by design in order to “reward” certain schools at the expense of others. That is hopefully behind us.

The District functions need to annually assess what they need and whether priorities may require adjustment from time to time. A CIP allows the Board and the public to see in one place what is planned and why. More certainty is created in the overall management of projects when you are in a proactive rather than reactive approach.

Perhaps there are many change orders that have been denied if viewed in the context of larger priorities of the District. The perfect example was the National City Middle School Employee Parking Lot in which construction contracts were awarded without the Board or CBOC knowing about it.

Recommendation. The recommendations are follows:

1. Establish a Board Policy “Annual Capital Improvement Plan”
2. The Annual CIP be part of the Operational Budget Approval Cycle
3. Create an Administrative Procedure for Preparing Annual CIP Request Forms

While initially painful to staff, this process forces all District Departments to focus on their facility needs and identification of problems before they occur.

Develop a Policy Level Process for Prioritization of Projects and Initiatives

Discussion: The current Draft Master Plan, while containing an extensive amount of information on Facility conditions, technology considerations, and educational components, does not significantly present an organized framework and criteria to allow the decision makers to set the priorities for ranking and evaluating projects and initiatives.

Whether or not these criticisms are true is not the point. If there is the perception the Master Plan was not properly vetted then it will hurt its credibility. Gaining confidence in the process must be initiated. What goes along with this is the Establishment by the Board of Trustees, in concert with the Superintendent’s Office, the proper priorities for evaluating projects and proposals.

As examples, Priority criteria could include:

- Supports District-wide Initiatives (e.g. Common Core)

- Consistency with Ballot Language
- Critical Life Safety Security or Emergency Need
- State and Federal Mandate or Binding Commitment
- Operating Budget Impacts/Savings
- Maintenance Budget Impacts/Savings
- Student/Teacher Educational Benefits
- Equity with other campuses
- Cost avoidance

The County of San Diego uses such an approach when evaluating annual requests for the Capital Improvement Plan. In addition, when a specific Federal Grant's project priorities were developed, there was a detailed matrix of evaluation criteria. For example a Stimulus Grant (Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant) had factors such as estimated energy savings, "shovel ready" project, time to complete, and consistency with County Strategic Initiatives Criteria were developed. Then a team of internal subject experts evaluated and ranked projects.

Recommendation. The following is recommended for this issue:

1. Convene Cabinet Level Positions or their designees to develop a list of issues/criteria for evaluation of Proposition O Bond Projects
2. Conduct detailed one on one and Group interviews (Parents, Teachers, Community) at each school on their views of future educational needs (started in the rebooted master plan process)
3. Prepare a detailed list as possible of expenditures to date, bond language, and remaining Projects not funded that were listed in the ballot
4. Develop a list of District wide Collateral Initiatives-Metrics that relate to overall Bond Project Priorities (e.g. WIFI will be at XX per Classroom, Air Conditioning will be in all Classrooms) Note: This relates to the first bullet above
5. Conduct detailed "brainstorming" interviews of Board members and the new Superintendent on Project Priorities
6. Appoint an ongoing "Project Review Committee" that would evaluate annual and one time requests for funding, Change Orders, and/or Scope changes against established criteria before submission to the Board of Trustees

The end result of this would be a structured approach to Project Approval.

Integrate the Bond Program with other District functions and priorities through significantly improved communication and sharing of information among internal and external stakeholders.

Discussion: When the Chair presented his First Bond Chair Report, it was indicated the District needed the Three “T’s” Trust Transparency and Thoroughness. This still applies. This is not rocket science. There must be better Communication among the various functions of the District and its internal and external stakeholders. While Policy can dictate, it can not be the only method.

The *Culture of the District* must change from a Sweetwater Way to the Best Practice/Good Government Way. For instance every significant facility decision should seek the input from multiple stakeholders and constituencies.

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