

Master Plan Update 4

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Introduction

Officials of the Cleveland Metropolitan School District have expressed the opinion that every child in Cleveland should have the opportunity to attend a public school as good as any public school in the suburbs. It's a laudable sentiment that we have embraced in analyzing the District Administration's proposal for revising the Master Plan that guides the districtwide school renovation and replacement program.

The importance of the program cannot be overstated. For while academic achievement is paramount for the success of the children, first-class schools can only improve the opportunity for learning – schools that are easily accessible, comfortable, well equipped, spacious and secure. This program will decide the type of schools available to Cleveland's children for generations to come.

The current District Administration inherited a program that was seriously behind schedule and which built some schools that did not reflect enrollment needs. That complicated the task now at hand, but neither expediency nor mistakes of the past should dictate the Master Plan revision now before the community.

Indeed, the Administration recognized upon taking the District's reins in mid-2006 that technology provisions in schools that were already completed or under way were not what it deemed the best, so it undertook improvements even though they required significant expenditures and delay. Even in the face of budget overruns, the Administration has correctly insisted that technology will not be sacrificed in the program's remaining schools. The children deserve nothing less.

In the same vein, the Bond Accountability Commission recognizes its responsibility to represent the public interest in monitoring the construction and renovation program funded by Issue 14.

The proposed Master Plan is important not only because it will govern issues of bricks and mortar that will shelter the children, but also because it decides how Cleveland taxpayers' money will be spent.

The Administration has correctly emphasized that although the current proposal has taken many months to develop, it can be changed based on public input.

The planned start of the program's Segment 5 next spring depends on adoption of a revised Master Plan by the school board and the OSFC. However, there is still time to schedule more public forums to give the community an opportunity to be engaged in the process.

As stated in our previous report on this subject, this is an opportunity to change the face of Cleveland in a constructive way, to give the children of Cleveland school facilities on par with those in the suburbs – and to have the state pick up more than half the cost.

The proposal

The Master Plan of 2002 envisioned 111 new or fully renovated schools allotted among nine construction segments for a student enrollment of 72,000. The Administration's proposal for a revised Master Plan envisions 81 new or fully renovated schools to accommodate a predicted 2015 enrollment of about 41,000 in 10 construction segments.

Most of the elementary schools in the new plan would be built new, rather than renovated, and most would be smaller than those they would replace. The smaller size is necessary to qualify for state co-funding and to reduce unmatched local spending, and the Administration also sees smaller schools as a way of maximizing neighborhood coverage and promoting academics.

Most high schools will be relegated to Segments 8 through 10, after money from Issue 14 will have been exhausted, meaning that work on them will depend on voter approval of more tax money. The Administration is hoping that a focus on elementary schools in the near term will help curtail the steep enrollment declines of recent years, much of which is the result of parents choosing to send their children to charter and voucher schools. A lesser rate of enrollment decline in the elementary schools would allow the OSFC to co-fund more high school space than it currently envisions. The current proposal assumes such an occurrence, so if enrollment does not stabilize, some of the high school plans may have to be cut back or eliminated.

The focus of the Master Plan proposal is on Segments 5 through 10. Construction on Segments 1 through 3 is either completed or started, and Segment 4 is in the design stage.

The Administration's 10-segment vision for the program co-funded by the OSFC: 69 new or renovated elementary schools (including one that will be combined with the School of the Arts high school), eight new high schools and four renovated high schools. Each of 10 academic neighborhoods would have at least one larger elementary school suitable for transformation into a junior high school if the District abandons the PreK-8 format currently followed.

Outside the co-funded program, 39 schools would be maintained for at least a few years. These include some schools that were not even included in the 2002 plan and a number that are being maintained only as swing space, that is, schools to accommodate students displaced by construction projects.

Also outside the co-funded plan, seven high schools would be maintained only. Among those are Collinwood and East, which would receive a total of \$10 million in improvements beyond routine maintenance, funded by local taxes.

The proposal is aimed at keeping maximum neighborhood coverage as long as possible not only by building smaller elementary schools but also by maintaining the schools that do not qualify for OSFC co-funding.

The Administration says that the maintain-only schools may be closed after several years if their enrollments do not increase. Closed schools may be demolished, sold, or donated for a community purpose.

The proposed maintain-only high schools are Collinwood, East, Carl Shuler, Garrett Morgan, Jane Addams, Martin Luther King, Jr., Ginn Academy (formerly Health Careers) and Whitney Young.

The Administration initially said the \$335 million in local tax money available from Issue 14, approved by voters in 2001, will have been spent by the end of Segment 7. The project team now says that the recent decision to install extra security features, including metal detectors, at all schools may mean that some Segment 7 work might have to be curtailed for lack of funds.

The Administration has calculated a need for \$217 million in additional local tax money to match the OSFC contribution for the co-funded portion of the program and for local-only, Locally Funded Initiative (LFI), work that is not supported by the OSFC. The Administration has offered conditional assurances that the \$217 million is sufficient to complete the work as proposed, including any demolitions that need to occur. Conditions that could cause the extra money to be insufficient include program rule changes by the OSFC, unforeseen spikes in construction-cost inflation, and a substantial increase in projected enrollment.

According to the project team, voter approval of the \$217 million would not increase the tax rate being collected from property owners at the time of the vote, but it would extend the collection period. Under one scenario offered by the Administration, taxes from Issue 14 would be collected through 2033, though at a declining rate after 2027, when the bulk of the bonds would be paid off. Assuming that voters approve an additional bond issue at the November 2008 general election, collections on the new issue would last from 2010 through 2037. Issue 14 bonds conceivably could be paid off sooner than 2033 if voters do not approve additional bonds.

(See Segment List on the CMSD Web site's BAC page for a complete list of maintain-only schools and the proposed Master Plan schedule.)

Details and analysis

Enrollment is the key

The OSFC, which pays 68 percent of the basic program cost, will co-fund space only for the estimated enrollment at the program's end, in 2015. It calculates the amount of school space that it will co-fund with a formula based on enrollment projections for the end of the program, in this case the year 2015. The latest OSFC-commissioned enrollment projection is for about 41,000 students. The preliminary current enrollment count is 52,351, around 20,000 less than when the program started. The main factors in the enrollment decline appear to be the city's population loss and students leaving the system for charter and parochial schools.

The estimated enrollment decline means that the OSFC will co-fund substantially fewer schools than the 111 in the original Master Plan. The precise number of schools that are eligible for co-funding depends on the size of the schools and the type of schools (high school or preK-8) that are chosen in the

Master Plan revision. For example, if elementary schools are designed to be at the minimum allowed size (350 students), more can be built.

Renovating or replacing space not eligible for OSFC co-funding may be done, but only through the LFI.

Some of the maintain-only schools are to be used as “swing sites” for students to attend while their schools are being renovated or replaced, meaning that they probably will not be needed after the program.

The OSFC will commission another enrollment projection in 2008 which, like the previous ones, will take into account past enrollment, dropout and withdrawal rates, city population, birth rates and other demographic factors as well as current enrollment. That means the Master Plan might have to be adjusted again.

The OSFC enrollment projections also include an assumption that the Cleveland District will continue a pattern of losing many students from the beginning of elementary school to the high school years. Because the District has lost so many students in the early elementary grades to charter schools in the last seven years or so, the OSFC has ratcheted down the high school co-funded enrollment even further, taking into account the historic pattern.

The co-funded high school allotment projected by the OSFC, a total of 9,623 students, is far less than the preliminary October 2007 count of about 16,400. CMSD officials are contesting the OSFC’s assumptions, but there is no guarantee that the rules will change.

District administrators say they are basing their budget plans for Segments 5 through 10 on the assumption of a much higher elementary-to-high-school retention rate. This means that if actual enrollment does not stabilize and the OSFC does not alter its assumptions, the District will have to scale back its high school plans. Some that are now proposed to be replaced or renovated might have to be only maintained, or, as is now proposed for East and Collinwood high schools, they might receive limited improvements funded by LFI money from bonds or other District money.

A question of balance

It is important that any Master Plan revision aim for geographic balance and maximum neighborhood coverage with those schools that are co-funded.

In deciding which schools to include in the co-funded program, the community can maximize coverage and balance and minimize LFI spending by matching chosen school locations with student population densities and limiting construction/renovation to the square footage that the OSFC will co-fund.

The state does not care where the co-funded square footage is built. It will co-fund renovation of a building that is too large for its neighborhood’s needs, but doing so saps co-funded space available for other parts of the city.

Likewise, the District may elect to renovate a too-large school and have the state co-fund only part of the space, meaning that the District must pay for the rest of the space with non-matched LFI money. That reduces the amount of

bond money available for matching the state's much-larger contribution elsewhere in the District.

For example, the Franklin D. Roosevelt elementary school in the Glenville academic neighborhood was renovated in Segment 2 for a co-funded enrollment of 1,115. It opened last August, and the preliminary head count there is 297. The enrollment there might rise by several hundred if two maintain-only schools in the academic neighborhood are eventually closed, but any remaining unused co-funded space and the money spent on it will have been wasted and not available for use in other parts of the city. The FDR project is expected to cost the School District \$5.3 million.

The community and the Administration need to consider the balance that they want between minimizing local costs and preserving neighborhood or architectural landmarks.

Options for schools

The current Administration has focused its plan on building new elementary schools that are closer to the OSFC's minimum size of 350 students rather than on renovating existing schools, which tend to be larger. The smaller size would permit co-funding of more schools and better geographical balance while minimizing transportation costs.

There are three main options for deciding what to do with the schools in Segments 5 through 10:

- Build and renovate only what the state will co-fund, and close the rest. This would maximize the impact of Issue 14 tax dollars and would reduce the District's later operational costs for labor, utilities and maintenance. However, it would possibly boost transportation costs and would have the greatest negative impact on the city's neighborhoods.

Closing schools prematurely could ironically result in more charter schools, because state law requires that if a district tries to sell viable school buildings, it must offer them first at appraised market value to the operators of "start-up community schools."

Closing a school without demolishing it carries extra security costs or runs the risk of vandalism. If the property can be disposed of otherwise, it can be used for community centers, parks, community gardens, or housing development.

- Do the state-matched work, and build/renovate some or all of rest with LFI money. Depending on the extent of LFI work, this option would increase the need for more tax money, and it could also cause unnecessary operational expenses. But it could also help preserve neighborhood identity and the integrity of the neighborhood school model.
- Do the state-matched work, and only maintain the excess schools. An advantage of this option is that it preserves schools to accommodate a possible later reversal of the downward enrollment trend. It also maximizes the use of Issue 14 money already spent in the Warm, Safe

and Dry effort of Segment 1 on all schools. A drawback would be that it would prolong a two-tier school facility system in which some children get the advantages of new or fully renovated schools while others attend classes in facilities that lack those comforts and technological and other improvements.

The CMSD Administration proposal chiefly combines elements of the latter two options. It calls for only maintaining 30 or so schools for at least a few years to preserve options and maintain maximum neighborhood coverage. However, the maintain-only schools would not fulfill the vision of a top-quality school environment for every child. If enrollment continues to decline as predicted, the District simply will not need all of these schools, and keeping them open will cause unnecessary operational expenses. On the other hand, if the OSFC enrollment projections are too low, the District will not have destroyed needed schools.

Demolitions of any maintain-only schools probably would not occur until Segment 10 (2012-2015).

Is high school space adequate?

Work on most comprehensive high schools – Glenville, John Marshall, Collinwood, East, East Tech, Lincoln-West, John F. Kennedy and South – would be in Segments 8 through 10. Two citywide high schools, Cleveland School of the Arts and Max Hayes vocational high school, would be built in Segment 5.

The high schools on the West Side as envisioned in the Administration's Master Plan proposal pose a potentially significant problem that is rooted in geography and OSFC enrollment assumptions. The only equitable solution may be to spend a significant amount of LFI money, not included in the present proposal, on high school space on the West Side.

The Administration has based its Master Plan proposal on high school-centered academic neighborhoods. These high schools are Collinwood, East, East Tech, Glenville, Adams, John F. Kennedy, South, Marshall and Lincoln-West. The proposal groups elementary schools around the nearest high school, though some elementary schools feed more than one neighborhood high school.

By several methods of mathematical analysis, either Marshall and Lincoln-West as planned will be significantly too small, or the other neighborhood high schools will be too large. In either case, the adjoining Marshall and Lincoln-West neighborhoods would not have the same relationship of co-funded elementary school space to available high school space as the District's other academic neighborhoods.

If the total co-funded elementary school enrollment for each academic neighborhood is divided by nine (nine grades from K through 8) and then the quotient is multiplied by four (for each high school grade), that would yield a number roughly equivalent to one high school space for each high school-age child in the neighborhood.

In the Administration's plan, every neighborhood high school except Collinwood, Marshall and Lincoln-West has a capacity within 190 of that target number. Collinwood would have excess capacity of about 900, but it is getting only \$5 million in tax money, which might be justifiable on geographic grounds. But Marshall falls 550 below the target, and Lincoln-West falls 1,440 below that number. If the deficits are reduced by 190 at each school, the combined shortfall for the adjacent neighborhoods is still 1,610.

The original Master Plan called for construction of a new "West Side Relief" High School for 1,600 students. The Administration bought land for the school on West 65th Street, between Marshall and Lincoln-West. The school had been planned for Segment 3, but the idea was dropped in 2006. The project team cited OSFC projections of declining enrollment as the reason.

Part of the reason behind that projection is the assumption of a continued high withdrawal/dropout rate for Cleveland high schools. And the co-funded high school enrollment that the OSFC does recognize is sapped by the proposed Master Plan's provision for 2,982 co-funded slots at four citywide-draw high schools – School of the Arts, John Hay, Max Hayes and SuccessTech. As citywide draws, however, they should ease the burden on all neighborhood schools.

The OSFC may be correct. Most of the neighborhood high schools in the plan may be too large for actual enrollment needs in 2015. But two of those schools are only getting \$5 million partial renovations, and two others are only co-funded at 750 students each, probably close to the minimum size for a comprehensive high school. That leaves few alternatives for the neighborhood schools that are left, none of them easy:

- Leave the current plan as it is and hope that Marshall's current enrollment of 2,155 (Shuler now holds 369 Marshall overflow students) dwindles enough to fit into the proposed new Marshall's 1,200 slots in the next seven years. Lincoln-West would be no more crowded than it currently is, but the risk would be that if withdrawal/dropout rates improve, the enrollment could rise well above capacity.
- Reduce co-funded enrollments at other planned high schools to give more to Marshall. If it was built large enough, some Lincoln-West neighborhood students could be funneled to Marshall. This may be a plausible alternative, but a member of the District's project team expressed reluctance to trim Glenville and East Tech, saying that students from Collinwood and East may want to attend the new schools.
- Build a West Side Relief High School with LFI money, which probably would add \$25 million to \$30 million to the District's program tab. That could thwart the Administration's intention to ask for additional bond issue authorization that would not increase current tax collection rates, although there may be enough in planned contingency funding to cover such an amount. An

advantage, depending on the timing of construction, would be that such a school could provide swing space for Lincoln-West students while their school is being renovated. The renovation of Rhodes High School while it is occupied has been difficult, according to the construction manager, and it is behind schedule.

- Build the new Marshall at a larger size than currently planned and pay for the extra capacity with unmatched LFI money. This would increase the District's overall program cost, but much less so than the previous alternative. Some of the rather large Lincoln-West neighborhood could be funneled to Marshall.

Landmark schools

Collinwood High School is a good example of the problem posed by neighborhood or officially designated landmark schools.

The enrollment there now is 1,047. The school has a listed capacity for 1,849 students. With projections of declining enrollment districtwide and limited financial resources, it would make no economic sense to totally renovate the building, which would either sap about 1,000 or so co-funded spaces from elsewhere in the city or cost many millions of LFI dollars, in addition to creating space for students who don't exist.

The alternative, demolishing the 80-year-old structure and building a new school of appropriate size (probably for 750 students), would face opposition from elements of the community committed to the landmark, and it would face possibly insurmountable bureaucratic hurdles in gaining permission from city planners. Hence the Administration proposes to spend only \$5 million in LFI money for a partial renovation of the school.

The Audubon K-8 is another example. The 83-year-old school with official landmark status has a listed capacity of 1,148 students and a current enrollment of 511. Again, it makes no economic sense to renovate such a large school. The District Administration wants to replace it with a new school for 450 children in the current Segment 4. However, the design work is on hold because some residents have been campaigning to have the school renovated, and city planners may prevent demolition.

Because of limited local funding, it is likely that some landmark schools will be neither renovated nor replaced, but only maintained until they can no longer be used.

The Administration's Master Plan proposal is contingent on gaining city approval to replace or alter a number of landmark schools: Audubon, Wilbur Wright, Watterson Lake, William Cullen Bryant, Joseph M. Gallagher, Tremont, and Luiz Munoz Marin. Residents in the areas of these and some Segment 9 schools should be aware that what is proposed might not occur.

City planners may prevent the proposed demolitions. If that happens, the District would be forced to either simply maintain these schools or to renovate them at larger co-funded capacities than currently planned. Consequently, the

Administration warns that some school projects proposed for Segment 9 may also not occur, because the co-funded capacity that would make them possible would have been used up in renovating the landmark schools.

Future uncertainties

Residents should also be aware that all of the school projects proposed for Segments 8, 9 and 10 are in a measure of jeopardy, chiefly because there is obviously no guarantee that voters will approve the additional tax money that would make them possible. The other reason is that enrollment could decline faster than currently projected. An updated forecast is to be released by the OSFC in 2008. If projected enrollment decline is more severe than currently estimated, then the OSFC will further reduce the amount of space that it will co-fund, which means the District will be able to build fewer new schools.

The elementary schools in Segments 8-10 are generally those that the Administration deems as least necessary or in least need of major repairs.

The possibility that enrollment decline may be more severe than currently projected is underscored by the Administration's recent five-year financial forecast for operations, which is not directly related to the school facilities program. That forecast, intentionally conservative, uses a projected enrollment of 37,710 for the year 2012. The OSFC's current projection for that year is 41,508.

The school project team said that if enrollment declines more than currently expected by the OSFC, schools in Segments 9 and 10 and perhaps in Segment 8 would be eliminated from the program or built smaller than now envisioned.

How much will it cost?

In the face of such uncertainties as well as a recent spate of budget overruns in Segment 3, planning for the future financial needs of the project is difficult. Estimates in 2002 that the total project would cost \$1.574 billion for 111 schools had a fatal flaw: They did not allow for construction cost inflation, even though the program was to last at least 13 years, so they underestimated the actual cost by at least several hundred million dollars. Those estimates also seriously underestimated LFI costs.

This time, a more experienced administration has made an effort to accurately estimate co-funded construction and LFI costs, and it has factored those estimates for inflation at the rate of 5 percent a year for Segments 7 through 10. It also did not allocate about \$29.4 million in expected revenue from interest and government technology subsidies.

In short, the Administration's calculation that it needs \$217 million in additional tax money to execute Segments 8 through 10 as proposed appears adequate. As mentioned above, a decision to build a West Side Relief High School with only LFI money would seriously affect the budget.

As stated in our previous report, the District has spent LFI money in the past on facilities that are not schools, including a professional development center at the former Bratenahl Elementary. The future request for capital improvements tax money should make clear the extent that the money might be used for non-school repairs and renovations.

Community engagement

The community needs opportunities to comprehend the plan, consider it, and comment on it. There is still time to begin what ought to be a dialogue that continues for the duration of the program.

In addition, the expected request for more tax money, which may well be on the November 2008 ballot, stands to receive a better reception from voters if the District makes a concerted effort to fully engage the community in the Master Plan revision process and thoroughly explain the need for more money.

As of mid-November, the current Master Plan proposal has been on the agenda at only two public forums. The Master Plan revision was also on the agenda of multi-topic forums that were to have been held at all schools on Oct. 10 and 11, but the tragic shooting at SuccessTech on Oct. 9 caused the forums to be canceled.

New forums or other community meetings, preferably dealing solely with the Master Plan so that the issue can be addressed thoroughly, ought to be scheduled as soon as possible. The Administration recently says it is planning more forums.

Residents need opportunities to ask questions and suggest possible alternatives.

The Administration has established a voicemail telephone hotline (216-574-8413) for residents to call with questions or comments about the Master Plan proposal. It has also set up a link on the CMSD's Web site at which written comments or questions of 100 words or less can be submitted. (Go to <http://www.cmsdnet.net> and click on "Talk to the CEO" at the top of the page.)

The hotline and email link are welcome, but they are not a substitute for the interactive give and take that can occur at a forum attended by a diverse group of residents and staffed by knowledgeable Administration officials.

The administration had hoped that after the previously scheduled forums the Board of Education might approve the revised Master Plan at its business meeting on Dec. 11, 2007. That would clear the way for OSFC consideration of the plan. The Administration hoped for approval by the OSFC in February 2008, so that the Administration and OSFC could work out a Project Agreement for Segment 5 by May 2008.

Now the project team says the school board probably will not be asked to vote on the plan until January or February.

As the Bond Accountability Commission reported in May and October, a possible solution might be for the District to commit to making December forums just the beginning of a process that will continue throughout the remainder of

the program. The master plan will have to be revised again, perhaps because of resurgent enrollment, perhaps because of further declines, and an ongoing engagement effort would serve that process well. In addition a process providing deeper and continuing community engagement will also help the Administration make its case for the additional money that it says will be needed.

Also as previously reported, the community engagement process could be fostered by a formal, ongoing effort by the District to keep the citizens informed about progress and/or delays in the work on each individual school, when the work is planned to start and finish, when the school is to reopen, etc. The Facilities Directory of the District's Web site, <http://www.cmsdnet.net/>, has not been updated since the summer of 2006 regarding this important endeavor.

An alternative is the Bond Accountability Commission's periodic Program Progress Updates, which are available on the School District's Web site at <http://www.cmsdnet.net/administration/BAC.htm>.

The OSFC says "a well-developed community engagement plan is a critical factor in obtaining community support for a project. ... School administrators, in collaboration with the Commission, are strongly encouraged to hold community-wide meetings to gather input from stakeholders. ... The more the community is involved, the better the chances are for support of the overall master plan and funding to support it.

The "Community Engagement Guide" (KnowledgeWorks Foundation, June 2005) distributed by the OSFC says, "Whereas some people refer to community engagement as a way to achieve "buy-in" from community members on plans that have already been developed or decisions that have already been made, KnowledgeWorks Foundation defines community engagement quite differently. ... The Foundation has adopted the term "authentic community engagement" to describe community engagement that creates ownership rather than "buy-in." Authentic community engagement is not about informing people, but educating community members so that they can make informed decisions."

The premise of the foundation's recommendations is that "people are much more likely to support what they have helped create."

For ideas on improved community engagement, see the KnowledgeWorks Web site at <http://kwfdn.org/>.

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