

EPISD bond plan projects \$230 million

El Paso Times

Oct. 26, 2006

By Gustavo Reveles Acosta

The 2007 El Paso Independent School District bond project could be worth \$230 million and include major projects, such as a new Northeast high school and the creation of ninth-grade centers to relieve overcrowding at Franklin and Coronado high schools.

Trustees on Wednesday were given the preliminary bond project list compiled by a committee of administrators, parents and other stakeholders. The list, which will be reviewed by the board and finalized by the end of the year, includes:

- New elementary schools in the Upper Valley, Franklin Hills, Fort Bliss, far Northeast and East-Central areas.
- The reconstruction of Alamo Elementary in Segundo Barrio.
- A new West Side middle school.
- A new far Northeast high school near Painted Dunes Golf Course.

The bond committee “has made a recommendation and we as a board need to sit down and make some hard decisions,” Trustee Charles Roark said. “We need to talk to (the district’s bond consultant) and see if this is something we can bring to the public.”

EPISD Superintendent Lorenzo Garcia said he would try to schedule a meeting in November to give the board a chance to comment on the presented project list.

The committee and the administration compiled the list based on student enrollment patterns that – because of the influx of military families into El Paso – is expected to add 10,100 students to the district by 2012.

EPISD’s current enrollment is about 63,000 students.

According to the district, the growth will mean EPISD will need 547 new teachers in six years.

“That means we need 547 places (classrooms) for them to teach,” said Bill Wachtel, a district analyst.

The district figures that once all 2003 bond projects are completed, and given the influx of students expected, six of the 10 high schools in the district will be overcrowded.

District officials also said nine of the 16 middle schools and 20 of the 58 elementary schools will be at capacity. The figures also indicate that most of the district’s growth is expected in the Northeast and West Side.

The bond committee said its original wish list included \$330 million in projects, which was then pared down to \$230 million.

“What drove our decision was what would better serve the students of the district,” bond committee chairman Ramy Martinez said. “There are different needs this time around (than in 2003). This bond is different.”

Although the proposed list does include \$15.4 million in refurbishments throughout the district, most of the money would go towards new construction.

The project list includes classroom additions to Chapin and Burges high schools; Charles, Canyon Hills and Richardson middle schools’ and Nixon, Polk and Bond elementary schools. Also on the list are new multipurpose classroom buildings at 17 elementary schools.

One of the biggest changes the bond would bring is the creation of ninth-grade centers at Franklin and Coronado. The concept would not only ease overcrowding at both West Side schools but also come in line with the concept of smaller campuses Garcia is advocating.

The two new centers – one of which would move into the current Hornedo Middle School campus – would operate independently from the traditional high schools.

To accommodate the displaced Hornedo, the district would build a new West Side middle school – a cheaper project than building a complete new high school. The Coronado-area ninth-grade center would most likely be near the current campus.

“The question is: Do we build a ninth-grade center or do we build a third high school on the West Side?” Garcia said. “I think, academically, this is the question we need to answer. Ninth-grade centers make sense.”

There was no discussion of how a \$230 million bond program would affect district taxpayers. Homeowners in EPISD are still paying for the \$207 million bond program approved by voters in 2003.