

EPISD trustees back bond items

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By Gustavo Reveles Acosta

Despite concerns raised by some members during a workshop Tuesday night, the El Paso Independent School District Board of Trustees informally agreed to support the administration's project list for the coming bond election.

The project list would cost \$230 million and include the construction of five new elementary schools, a middle school and a high school.

"It's easy to sit here and say that I wouldn't have put this project on the list or that I would put that other one in," Trustee David Dodge said. "But I believe in the work (the administration and a bond subcommittee) have done, and I support this project list."

The list of projects is nearly identical to the preliminary project list presented to the board two weeks ago. One change is the inclusion of a classroom wing at Coronado High School to house a ninth-grade center. Some maintenance projects were cut to accommodate the Coronado wing.

Although the board has vowed to support the projects, the move will not become official until a formal vote on a project list later this month or early in December.

Election day will be May 12.

During the workshop at the Hilton Inn Hotel, trustees were given a chance to discuss the project list.

Trustee Lorraine O'Donnell asked the administration whether the district had made any promises during the campaign for the 2003 bond, and if so, whether those promises were being kept.

Hector Martinez, EPISD's associate superintendent for operations, said that because of the expected influx of military families into the district, the administration had to "start from scratch" in listing its needs.

But he also added that some of the projects on the agreed-upon list – mostly the 20 multipurpose classrooms for elementary schools – are part of the promises made to voters in 2003.

"It has been indeed a difficult process to assemble this data because of the bond (committee) and the administration both feel that the needs of the district are large, yet must be balanced by priorities and public support," Superintendent Lorenzo Garcia said.

The bond committee identified \$330 million in immediate needs that could be filled by this bond election but decided to present a project list worth \$230 million. A \$330 million bond election “is something the community would not be willing or able to support,” Martinez said.

The official figures of how much the \$230 million bond election will cost voters are not yet available, but the district’s bond financial advisor gave the board a first look into taxpayer input. According to Hector Zavaleta of First Southwest, a \$230 million bond debt would add a maximum of 7.5 cents to the current tax rate. That means that the average \$100,000 home in the district would see its annual school tax bill increase by \$65.