

West Lafayette Community School Corporation RDP Projects Update

Summer 2020

In 2014, a group of West Lafayette Community School Corporation (WLCSC) stakeholders began meeting to discuss WLCSC facilities. Those stakeholders included teachers, support staff, administrators, parents, community members, school board members, and architects. The 47-member facilities committee was facilitated by Dr. Ed. Eiler, retired superintendent from the Lafayette School Corporation.

After nearly two years of meeting, the facilities committee recommended the following:

- 1) Replace Happy Hollow with a new intermediate school at the Burtsfield site;
- 2) Renovate Cumberland Elementary School;
- 3) Update the West Lafayette Jr/Sr High School with a new STEM academic wing; a new aquatics center and repurpose the old pool into classrooms; renovate the performing arts area with a performing arts center; and remodel the cafeteria into a state-of-the-art café;
- 4) Repurpose Happy Hollow for possibly a Kindergarten/Early-childhood center if bonding capacity is available; and
- 5) Reallocate retiring debt so the above projects do not impact the Debt Service Tax Rate.

The administration and members of the facilities committee held multiple community forums to gain community input. Based upon the input received from these meetings, the final plans were presented to the facilities committee for final approval. With unanimous approval by the committee, the administration presented the RDP Projects to the School Board for consideration, which they passed in 2016 with a 7-0 vote in favor of starting the RDP Projects.

West Lafayette Intermediate School

On October 10, 2018, West Lafayette Intermediate School (WLIS) opened. WLIS houses grades 4 – 6. The construction cost came in at just under \$29 million. The facility opened nine-weeks earlier than planned and came in under budget. Students, teachers, staff members, parents and community members are now enjoying a state-of-the-art educational facility. This was the first new school built in WLCSC since 1961.



Cumberland Elementary School Renovation

On July 31, 2019, Cumberland Elementary School was rededicated and named the West Lafayette Elementary School (WLES) which serves grades K-3. The entire school was remodeled with the inclusion of a remodeled gymnasium, a new cafeteria with an operating kitchen, remodeled classrooms, a new media center, and updated safety features including a fire protection system, alarm systems and fire retardant materials. The remodeling costs came in at around \$15 million and the school opened on time as planned. Now our students, teachers, staff, administrators, parents and community have access to a safer facility, state-of-the-art instructional resources including a new media center, updated service areas including receiving a hot lunch prepared right at the school, and a more inviting facility.



West Lafayette Jr/Sr High School

On November 25, 2019, the dedication ceremonies for the Richard A. Wachs Jr. Aquatic Center and the RDP Café were held. The construction costs for both projects came in at approximately \$12 million. Now our students, teachers, staff, administrators, parents and community have access to a state-of-the-art aquatic center, new classrooms and a large group instructional area with the repurposing of the old pool, and a modern café that provides our students and staff with a greater variety of healthy food options and better service.



Construction is continuing on the James R. Guy Academic Wing (JRGAW) and on the Bob Kelly Performing Arts Center (BKPAC). The anticipated completion date for both projects is expected to be June 2021. The anticipated cost of the JRGAW is approximately \$13 million and the BKPAC is approximately \$8 million. Also, the cost of the stair tower and a remodeling of second floor classrooms is projected to come in at just over \$900,000.

Old Happy Hollow Elementary School

Currently, the City of West Lafayette is leasing Happy Hollow. This has provided additional revenue to the school district to assist with construction bond payments. When the lease is ended, the school district must continue working towards fixing the charter school law which allows charter schools to lease unused public school buildings for a \$1 and work towards finding additional funding opportunities to eventually help put into place an Early-childhood/Kindergarten Center. According to some preliminary architectural plans, the estimated costs to convert Happy Hollow is approximately \$15 million. For the short-term, with the finalized costs of those projects already completed plus the JRGAW and the BKPAC, WLCSC has reached its bonding capacity. If any additional construction projects are added, this will impact the school district's debt service tax rate. At this time, the administration and School Board are considering other financial options in order to keep the school district's debt tax rate from increasing.

Summary

Since 2014, the WLCSC School Board, administration and facilities committee have been working on improving all school facilities. The learning environment is very important to the success of our students and to the work of our teachers, support staff and administration. Therefore, using recommendations garnered by the WLCSC facilities committee, and with input received from many community forums, the School Board and administration have followed the proposed plan as approved in 2016. Throughout this process, the cost of construction increased significantly. The school district's debt service tax rate in 2016 was \$0.5375 per \$100 of assessed valuation. In 2021, the projected school district's debt service tax rate is expected to come in at \$0.5375 per \$100 of assessed valuation.

The money to pay the school district's debt service tax rate comes from local property taxes. Other than the revenue received from the leasing of Happy Hollow and the money raised by the West Lafayette Schools Education Foundation for the building projects, no other school district funds are being used to pay the school district's construction costs.

Some have asked if the operating referendum is being used to assist with the construction projects. The answer is no. In 2017, the school district asked the community to consider renewing the operating referendum that was first passed in 2010. With a record setting vote of just over 94%, WLCSC's community voted in favor of renewing the operating referendum for another 7 years. This referendum is being used to cover the budget cuts made by the state over the past 11 years so WLCSC can maintain and enhance its award-winning arts, music, and co-/extra-curricular programs, while also adding teaching staff and providing raises to our teachers and support staff.

If you need any more information about the RDP projects, the school district's debt service process, or the operating referendum, please call the WLCSC central office at 765-269-4002.