Considerations for Central High School Existing Site Remodel-Expansion Alternative

Purpose
In July of 2013, the News-Gazette reported that the Champaign School District was looking for a centrally located piece of land for a new Central High School. Unit 4 has since announced the purchase a site north of Interstate 74, commonly referred to as the Interstate or Olympian Drive site and intend to build a new high school at this location. The following is an alternative option involving the remodeling and expansion of the current Central High School at its present location, on University Avenue west of downtown, in lieu of building a new Central High School at the Interstate site. The alternative also provides a cost model for comparison.

The alternative outlined in this report has the potential to reduce costs allowing those additional funds to be directed to other needed capital improvements and priorities within the district.

Site
Unit 4 initially requested proposals for sites between 30 and 40 acres. Centennial’s current campus is 22 acres, while Central’s current site is 5 acres. The Interstate site is 80 acres with 65 acres proposed to be used for the new Central High school and the remaining 15 acres being reserved for an additional future school building and for storm water retention.

Background
In September of 2014, Unit 4 provided a conceptual plan and cost for the renovation and addition to the current Central High School prepared by BLDD Architects. That plan was based upon a similar sized building and similar programmatic requirements as was proposed for the Interstate site. This plan also accommodated programmatic recreation requirements. The conceptual plan indicated 202,000 square feet of remodeling and an 85,000 square foot addition. The plan also proposed the acquisition of adjacent properties to have a fully developed campus including future building expansion on a 32.4 acre campus (see site area extents drawing below). A new building on the existing site, adjacent to the current building, may require a slightly larger addition to meet the program requirements. For the purpose of this comparison, the same overall size building as proposed at the Interstate site was assumed.

Unit 4 estimated the remodeling and addition to the existing Central High School to be slightly over $100 million dollars.
Alternative Central-Remodel/Addition

The alternative initial land acquisition in this proposal is limited to Park Street itself, the block north of Park Street, as well as, the former McKinley YMCA site, the Christian Science Church and one single family residence to the west of the former YMCA property (see site drawing below). The acquisition of these properties will accommodate the academic program, a practice/band field and additional parking.

Establish a long term funding source for future land acquisition near to the Central campus based upon the long term priorities of a Unit 4 capital improvement master plan. Such a strategy has been successfully adopted in Urbana where the school district sets aside funds annually for land purchases near Urbana High School. This can be referenced in the News-Gazette article dated March 28, 2014 entitled “District buying 15th lot on UHS block”.

The site drawing on the following page indicates further site acquisition on the north and south sides of Church St. that could take place over time, expanding the campus to 17.6 acres.
Funding for additional land acquisition will be discussed later as part of this alternative.

The proposed new high school is programmed to have a natatorium with a competitive pool component. This alternative suggests that the pool be located off-site at another location within the community by partnering with the Champaign Park District, and/or Parkland College sharing in the cost and usage of the facility.

**Future Land Acquisition Funding**

This alternative is assuming initial monies can be saved by limiting land acquisition and the money saved can be used for other capital priorities. But, in the future monies will be needed to acquire land as needed based on Unit 4 priorities such as recreation fields.

In studies for Unit 4 completed in 2012, and in the current *Cost Benefit Analysis of the New Champaign Central High School* dated August 2014, it is shown that the District’s transportation operating costs (not including family transportation) will increase at the interstate site approximately $550,000 per year as compared costs at the existing Central location. Over a thirty year period, based upon normal inflation, these operating costs will exceed $26 million. Those operation costs could be saved and directed to a future land acquisition program. The CBA Report also indicates many other costs that could be reduced through this alternative proposal.
**Costs**
The alternative option in this proposal to remodel and expand the existing Central High School facility projects a cost of $54 million as compared to $100 million as indicated in the cost model presented by Unit 4. This would yield $46 million dollars in savings that could be redirected to other capital improvement priorities.

Centennial building facilities are aging which requires reinvestment in infrastructure and upgrading of capacity and programming. Without such improvements Centennial will be in the current situation that now faces and aging Central High School.

The referendum proposed $55 million dollars in improvements at Centennial High School. If it is possible to reevaluate and reduce the scope of the Centennial project by 10% there would be an accumulative savings of $51.5 million dollars that could be directed to other capital priorities. With a potential savings of $51.5 million dollars, a portion of those funds could be dedicated to building a natatorium, assuming Unit 4 would provide half of the money required, partnering with another community organization to complete this facility. This would also provide monies for the reinvestment of Dr. Howard School and other capital priorities.

**Recreational Green Space**
The initial phase of this project does add a band/practice field in addition to parking. It does not specifically address the requirements for adjacency relative to other athletic fields including a competition stadium in the initial phase. Some of the options to consider:

- Maintain the status quo as to existing recreational amenities.
- Develop land acquisition plan to include recreational amenities as earlier defined in alternative.
- Develop a separate competition stadium and athletic facilities for joint use by Central, Centennial, and maybe a possible third high school in the future.

**Parking**
Centennial has 550 and Central 126 existing off-street surface parking spaces. The Interstate proposal shows 1250 parking spaces.

The alternative proposal Central site has added approximately 100 parking spaces with the acquisition of the church property west of the former McKinley YMCA. Additional parking can be added based upon the proposed land acquisition program using transportation operating savings.

**Pros**
- School capacities and academic programs have been met.
- There is a continuance and useful life for the existing Central facility.
- It is not the one time hard costs that are most relevant, but rather the ongoing operation costs such as transportation costs which are infinite to a site or facility. There will be a $550,000 comparative savings in transportation operating cost by not relocating Central to the Interstate site.
• Champaign – Urbana is the fifth most compact metropolitan area in the country, according to a study recently released by Smart Growth America, a Washington DC group that advocates for policies countering urban sprawl. Central renovated and expanded is a good example of this stewardship.
• Monies are available for other capital priorities in the Unit #4 District such as Dr. Howard School.
• There is no foreseeable revenue source to repurpose Central if Central High School is relocated to a different site leaving a mostly vacant building.
• Centennial will be upgraded with a minimal reduction of scope.

**Cons**
• Some of the recreation amenities will shift relative to Unit 4’s master planning priorities.