

Schools try to cut, not hurt, FHS project

By Casey Hane
staff writer

School officials are whittling away at a multimillion dollar Farmington High construction project, after the first round of bidding showed it would be more than \$800,000 over budget.

They are confident they can make the project aesthetically pleasing despite the changes, done hurriedly during the past two weeks to keep the project on schedule.

Some Farmington High parents say they are not sure the changed plan will be pleasing and are concerned at the discrepancy in cost estimates.

"It was very disappointing to feel that (the project) seemed to be crumbling," said deputy superintendent Michael Flanagan. "We're getting back on track. I'm feeling a lot more confident now."

Modifying the media center and doubling its size, major facade improvements and changes to the front parking area are all part of the project, originally estimated to cost \$2.7 million.

THE DISCREPANCIES between budgeted amounts and costs were discovered when bids were opened March 21. Even with revisions, the project will likely cost the district more than planned. Superintendent Graham Lewis said about \$200,000 of the overage was expected because of upgrades needed in lighting and electrical systems.

A representative handful of Farmington High parents and teachers appeared at the April 4 school board meeting to voice concern about paring the project. At least one was angry at the situation, and told the board so, to the applause of others present.

"When you approved the \$2.7 million, everything was there. What happened?" asked Farmington High parent activist Tina Jensen. "You're almost talking another million dollars. I don't like the idea of the shortcuts. It's not the thing we were told, or as the public. It's been so watered down."

To Jensen's question about why cost estimates were so low, a representative from the Grand Rapids architect, Greiner, Inc., said, "This goes on in most construction projects."

AT THE April 4 board meeting, administrators got some direction from the board:

- An enclosed hallway west of the media center, scheduled to go as one of the revisions, will be figured back in. Trustees were concerned with students having to go out of the building during class exchange, and with security to the media center, which a hallway would provide.
- Revisions to the lobby area — which was to be changed to not include as many improvements — will also be figured back in. Trustee Jack Inch called a revamped

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lobby "a necessity."

• The district will continue talking with Farmington city officials, who are concerned with a proposed driveway in front of the school to be used by buses. Employees of Farmington High say they are concerned with the current setup, and say "It's just a matter of time" before a student gets hurt.

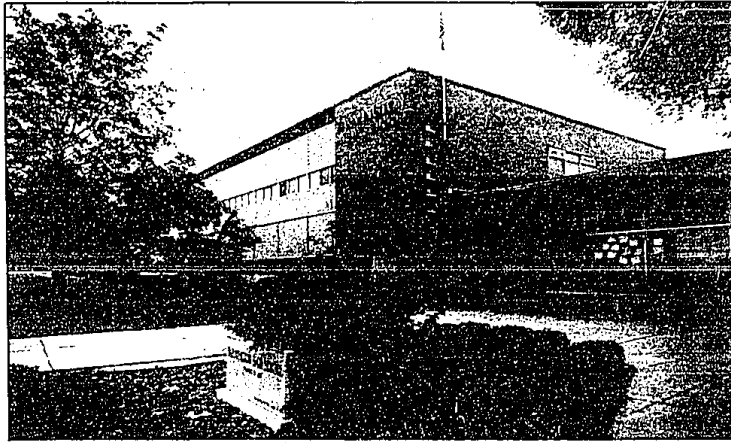
TRUSTEES HAVE tentatively scheduled a special meeting for 7:30 p.m. April 11 to hear firm costs and award any bids necessary to keep the project moving. Project manager Bill McCarthy said they were working to revise the plans with low bidders, but may have to rebid three or four items.

Those working on the project stress they will not make any revisions affecting programs in the school. "We are reducing the costs without reducing the quality of the program," said Judy Miller of Greiner. "I don't think there's anything we took out that wasn't cosmetic."

When the school board approved the \$2.7 million last October, at least one trustee called the cost "reasonable" and said the project would be nice but not luxurious. "We're not going to get anything that's going to look like elegance," trustee James Abernethy said last fall. Abernethy heads the board's building and site committee.

GREINER was selected as the architect for this project, and for the new west-side elementary school, after the school board's building and site committee toured the state and did extensive reviews of several architectural firms. Money for the Farmington High project is being taken from the district's capital fund.

Farmington High is the oldest building in the Farmington school district. Built in 1953, it has many of the original furnishings and building parts. The upgraded media center will serve as the telecommunications hub between schools in the district; it eventually will link the district and community, according to the conceptual plan.



RANDY BORST/staff photographer

Farmington High, built in 1953, will undergo a major renovation project.

Bonds sold, debt tax dips

By Casey Hane
staff writer

Farmington Public Schools will roll back its debt millage two-tenths of a mill this year, deputy superintendent Michael Flanagan said Tuesday.

The announcement came following a multimillion dollar bond sale that brought the district the lowest bond interest rate of any district in the state so far this year. School board president Jack Cotton called the sale "an excellent report on the status of the district."

A total \$4.3 million in bonds were sold April 4 to low bidder National Bank of Detroit, which quoted an 7.072 percent interest rate over 15 years. Six financial companies bid on the package, which will be used to build a new elementary school on 11 Mile Road, east of Halsted.

Percentages in the bids ranged up to 7.290, and represented an interest spread of

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\$146,000. The issue will cost the district \$4.77 million.

Flanagan said he expected the bond sale to close in about three weeks.

SALE OF the bonds was approved by voters Jan. 31, following a bond election defeat

for a larger amount last fall. School officials had promised voters a favorable sale, promising they would pay no more in debt millage than the 1.2 mills currently on the books.

"Flanagan said the bond sale was 'beyond our expectations' and the district's healthy financial position was a plus in getting the district a AA rating from both national rating services.

"There's no question our fund equity position balanced the negative . . . of losing the first election," he said. "It made a big stride in easing their minds."

"The lesson I taught me, is we should continue the good, strong financial position we have."

Bond proposals were opened late afternoon of April 4, and taken to the school board at a special meeting that evening. Trustees voted 6-0 to award the bonds to NBD. Helen Prutow was absent.

Science training for teachers sparks heated school debate

By Casey Hane
staff writer

Farmington school trustees are debating a revised elementary science curriculum that calls for extensive training of classroom teachers. Some believe science should be taught by specialists, not by regular classroom teachers.

"I do not agree that an elementary teacher skilled in language arts is capable of being in-service to deliver elementary math and science," trustee James Abernethy said at a recent school board meeting.

"There are other approaches to allow people who eat and breathe (math and science) to go after it."

"We need a science teacher and a science room that has the necessary equipment set up," trustee Janice Rolnick said. "I think it's a fallacy and I think it's irrational to believe all teachers can teach all things."

REGARDLESS OF view, the district is focusing intently on science as educators try to beef up programs and sagging science test scores being felt across the state.

"The jury is out and it is not clear," said Judith White, assistant superintendent for curriculum and staff development. "We will move cautiously, we're testing some things out."

"I don't think there is a clear answer out there. If there was, we'd be doing it."

The discussion came during an April 4 meeting, as trustees approved curriculum revisions and textbook purchases totaling \$150,000 for a number of education areas.

Despite feelings to the contrary, trustees voted to approve the curriculum and buy the textbooks on the promise that administrators would closely monitor the program and its effectiveness.

WHITE SAID that although the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) tests are one tool, the district would seek other means for analyzing the district's elementary science program. The revised curriculum will make the program "coordinated and articulated," she said.

Trustee Helen Ditzhary supports the idea of thorough staff training.

"They (the teachers) are qualified to teach all subjects. I have a feeling they can learn these things given the right kind of training and support," Ditzhary said.

SEVERAL YEARS ago, the school board set a goal to place science rooms at each elementary school, something Rolnick hopes will still occur.

But until a new elementary school is built and the elementary overcrowding problems eased, the district doesn't have the room to open science rooms, Superintendent Graham Lewis said.

"This alternative may be a better way to go," he said. "We don't have the facilities or room available to move into that kind of a program, even if we wanted to."

Kathy McAdams, science coordinator for the Farmington district, said she believed thorough planning and scheduling of teacher science training might "allay some of the concerns."

Workshops are planned for throughout the year that will be "tailored to teachers' needs," she said.

Hills couple face tax charges

A Farmington Hills husband and wife were arrested at their places of employment Friday as the result of a 10-count federal grand jury indictment returned April 4, according to U.S. Attorney Roy Hayes.

Michael Charles Tarrant and Marlene Elizabeth Tarrant each face five counts of failing to file federal income tax returns for the years 1982-86.

The indictment charges that Michael Tarrant, who had a gross income of \$116,612 for 1982-86, and Marlene Tarrant, with a gross in-

come for the same period of \$100,485, failed to file tax returns and failed to pay taxes due and owing, according to a U.S. attorney's office spokeswoman.

"An indictment is only a charge and is not evidence of guilt. The defendants are entitled to a fair trial where it will be the government's responsibility to prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt," Hayes said.

U.S. District Court Magistrate Marcia Cooke Thursday postponed the Tarrants' arraignment until Thursday, April 12. She advised the

couple that it was "in their best interest to retain an attorney."

The Tarrants were released on \$20,000 unsecured personal bond. They could not be reached for comment Friday afternoon.

If convicted, each defendant faces a maximum sentence of five years' imprisonment and a \$125,000 fine.

The case was investigated by special agents of the Criminal Investigation Division of the Internal Revenue Service. The case is assigned to assistant U.S. Attorney Eric Siraus.

\$1,000 pending a preliminary exam in 47th District Court.

Police say that a man gave the 13-year-old girl a plastic bag containing a pornographic video cassette at 4 p.m. Monday, April 9, after calling her over to the gatehouse. The girl was accompanied by a 12-year-old girlfriend.

The girl, suspicious of the man's intentions, gave the video to the apartment manager, who called police after determining it was pornographic, said Farmington Hills detective Sandle Rochford.

Guard is arraigned on obscenity charges

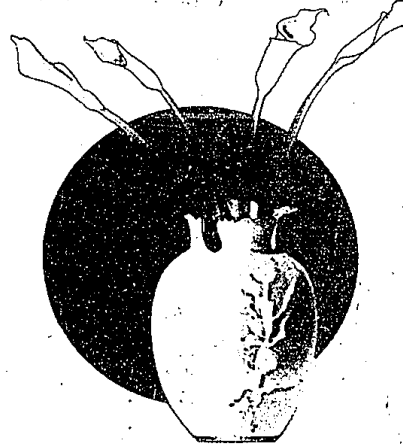
A gatehouse guard at Hunters Ridge Apartments is charged with furnishing obscene materials to a 13-

year-old girl who lives in the Farmington Hills apartment complex, near 14 Mile and Orchard Lake Road.

Arraigned Thursday before District Judge Michael Hand of Farmington, Dale Douglas Denton, 40, of Walled Lake, pleaded not guilty to furnishing obscene materials to a minor.

Conviction of the high misdemeanor carries a penalty of up to two years in prison and a \$10,000 fine.

Hand set cash/surety bond at



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