

Leyba plans to avoid Prop BB money probe

With the district plagued by accusations of misuse of Proposition BB money, the Bonita Vista Site Modernization Committee is trying to avoid the same problems. They are deciding how to spend approximately \$11 million in district and state funds to repair, upgrade, and modernize Bonita. Construction may take place anytime from 2004-2009, depending on available funds. One of the Site Committee's goals is to conduct all planning properly and with no improprieties. Principal Ramón Leyba said he wants to "make sure that every teacher affected by the modernization is involved in the decision-making process."

The district has been taking increasing criticism about how it has spent nearly \$40 million of the \$187 million in bond money approved by voters in Nov. 2000. Proposition BB was a ballot initiative which promised to "...relieve crowding, repair local schools and improve safety conditions for students in the SUHSD."

The district used the bond money to build two gyms, one at Sweetwater High costing \$10.8 million, and a second at Mar Vista High costing \$10.9 million. This resulted in complaints of misuse of money and a Grand Jury investigation.

Citizens such as Carl Moon, a teacher at Sweetwater High School, made complaints against the district. "They argued that we needed to replace our existing gym because it was falling apart," he said, "but so are our classrooms." Another teacher at Sweetwater High said that classroom temperatures can reach 100 degrees near summertime at the year-round site due to the lack of air conditioning in most of the classrooms. "Kids can't learn under those conditions," he said.

After an extensive investigation following complaints from citizens, the Grand Jury reported in June that none of the district's actions were illegal, but they did criticize them for lack of communication with parents and the community.

BV's Site Committee meetings set priorities earlier this month, putting classrooms and students at Bonita first. The Site Committee plans to upgrade and renovate all science lab rooms, including implementing a standard room design and possibly adding a 10th lab room.

The plans also include upgrading the general infrastructure of the school, such as water, sewer, gas, and power lines. According to the district's Facilities Improvement Plan created in 2000, the current electrical system at Bonita is aged and insufficient to meet current demands of the school. Heating and ventilation systems will also be upgraded, as well as wiring for computers, fire alarms, and the P.A. system. All restrooms within the 500, 400, and 300 buildings will be fully renovated.

Future construction during Phases II and III may include expansion of the library and a new book storage area. There are also plans to construct a new two-story classroom building in place of the current 900 building, containing 22 new classrooms: 1 science lab, 18 classrooms, 3 dance rooms, student restrooms, and a staff workstation. Although the new building would provide much-needed classrooms to meet the demands of this overcrowded school, some object to replacing the usable classrooms in the 900

See Prop BB on p. 12

You could be a felon  3

College: California Style  6-7

Quentin's New Flick  9

October 24, 2003
News 1.12
Opinion 3.3
Features 4.5
CFB 6.7
Entertainment 8.9
Sports 10
On Campus 11

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building, which are in good condition. "It's crazy," said librarian Mary Anderson.

ASB Adviser Jill Gonzales added that it is likely that the new building will not be built because it is in one of the later phases. Since it is not one of the Site Committee's top priorities, money could run out before that phase.

The Site Committee plans to have public meetings to get parent and community input into the building plans that must be submitted to the state by March to qualify for state matching funds. The Site Committee will present their plans and priorities and also answer questions. They are working very hard to avoid the problems that existed at other schools.

At a previous Site Committee meeting, Al Ohlendorf called the planning process at Mar Vista and Sweetwater High a "mistake." Their plans to address the concerns of

parents and community members take heed of the Grand Jury's recommendations.

Alma Graham, a Sweetwater High committee member, was quoted in the Union Tribune as saying that she was "happy" with the gym, but concerned

"We must turn away 100-300 students a year from science classes due to lack of space."

-- SUH teacher

about when the science labs would be built. "We didn't know they were going to run out of money," she said.

Answering allegations in the Grand Jury report that the district underestimated costs of construction, Supt. Brand said that there was a possibility that there would be less-than-expected funding, but the district still expects to complete all planned projects within the remaining 13 years. Some teachers, however, disagree. Moon said that the district only has enough funds to renovate science buildings.

He also said that there are no immediate plans to deal with issues of

overcrowding in science classrooms. "We must turn away 100-300 students a year from science classes due to lack of space," a Sweetwater High science teacher said. Larry Goshorn, a district building project group team leader, agreed that the current plans are to renovate and not expand the science buildings, but could not comment on overcrowding. "We will upgrade the lab rooms to accommodate a wider curriculum," he said. Goshorn continued to say that the district will eventually buy up neighboring homes to expand the campus.

In a survey conducted by the Crusader, teachers at Sweetwater High School were asked about the building of the gym. Of the 23 respondents, all of them said that they did not support building of the gym, 21 said that they believed the opinions of the teachers were ignored, and nearly all said that they believed the classrooms should have been modernized first.

Supt. Brands disputes the accuracy of the polling sample. Sweetwater High School Principal Ralph Mora said that "everyone" was in support of the gym.