

FACILITIES TASK FORCE PLANNING PROCESS

In January, 2005, Superintendent Watkins notified board members, district employees and community members through the St. Cloud Times, staff e-mail and the District 742 web site of his intent to convene a facilities task force. The purpose of the task force was to study current facilities and their capacity to meet educational needs for students, as well as district operational needs. Membership for the Facilities Task Force was selected from interested applicants.

The task force convened on February 16, 2005 under the co-facilitation of Superintendent Bruce Watkins and volunteer David Leapaldt, GLT Architect Principal. Meetings focused on the development of a long-range (8-20 years) plan that would provide guidance in both short (0-3 years) and mid-term (4-7 years) periods as well. From the beginning, the committee accepted the premises that (1) enrollment would be difficult to predict and (2) enrollment in the state of Minnesota determines school funding. In order to plan around the enrollment variable, the task force elected to prepare three different scenarios dealing with steady enrollment, declining enrollment, and growing enrollment.

The committee met twice a month for 5 ½ months to review data and engage in small and large group discussions in order to complete the plan. Guiding principles were developed and adopted by committee members with accompanying "strategic filters" to guide the group in their decision-making. Immediate facility issues were also discussed and followed with recommendations (e.g., sale of District Administration Office and Community Education Center, moving DAO staff to Apollo, purchase of St. Joseph property).

Members representing various community organizations shared data from the following sources:

- St. Cloud Comprehensive Plan
- Waite Park Comprehensive Plan
- St. Augusta Comprehensive Plan
- St. Joseph Comprehensive Plan
- Clearview Land Use projections
- Area Planning Organization Comprehensive Plan
- District demographics (enrollment, capacities)
- District maintenance schedules
- Open enrollment data
- ROI Central Minnesota, St. Cloud Times publication, April 2005*

As the task force continued its work, it became apparent that there were four distinct "subdistricts" within the District 742 geographical boundaries. The land use projections described in the various cities' comprehensive plans indicated growth in certain areas of the district, but other areas were landlocked or not growing for a variety of other reasons. It became apparent that it was impossible to predict either growth or decline for the district as a whole. Detailed examination of each of those four geographical areas resulted in a flexible, dynamic plan that projects district facility needs in the short term (0-3 years), in the mid-term (4-7 years), and long term (8-20 years). Planning for the long term can now include thoughtful short term decisions in the areas of land purchases, building additions and facility maintenance that will maximize both long-term district efficiency and tax payer dollars.

The Facilities Plan presented in this document contains twelve maps that examine each of the four "subregions" (southeast of St. Cloud, south St. Cloud, St. Joseph, and northside) in light of short term, mid-term, and long term growth projections. The task force was unanimous in its agreement that the plan presented here provides the flexibility and guidance necessary to assist District 742 in planning for both its immediate and long-range future.