

GRCC-Castle Closing

The following items briefly state main points of consideration regarding the closing of the GRCC and the Castle in Dallas City. Additional information relative to each reference is provided in the text that follows.

- Safety Concerns – Risk Management Consultant, Architect, and Building Committee recommend closure
- 21st Century Community Learning Center Grant – After School Program continuing to operate at the elementary school
- Roof Repairs – Extensive roof repair/replacement are necessary
- District Bonding Capacity – Questions regarding where to target the use of funds and borrowing power; at the GRCC and Castle or at the Elementary School
- Building Preservation – Questions regarding what to do with the facilities if they are not utilized or owned by the school district
- November 9, 2009-7:00 p.m.-Dallas City Elementary School – Special board meeting scheduled to provide information and obtain input from the public

At its regular meeting on Thursday, October 15, 2009, the Dallas Elementary School District board of education took action to close the Great River Community Center (GRCC). The 21 Century Grant Community Learning Center After-School Program operating at the GRCC was moved to the elementary school, effective immediately. The school's contingency plan that was developed for such a possibility was implemented, and while restructured to some extent the after-school program continues to function very well. Other clients of the GRCC have been informed of the decision, and are asked to relocate as soon as possible, but no later than December 1, 2009.

On October 5, 2009, the school district's risk management consultant, a service provided by our insurance carrier, conducted a survey of all district facilities, including the GRCC and the Castle. His findings in part indicate a serious liability risk due to the condition of the facilities, and a degree of danger (from falling rocks, brick, etc.) associated with being anywhere near the Castle. Our school district architect indicated similar findings, including danger from falling material in the main building chimney due to the deterioration and loss of mortar in the upper areas of the structure. Observations made by the school board building committee during a recent walk through of the GRCC facilities are similar to those of the risk management consultant and our district architect.

Action to close the center is due to safety hazards created mainly by a deterioration of the masonry edifice of the facility. Recent observations regarding the structural integrity in areas of the Castle, and also portions of the main building, were considered in the decision. Chimney systems in both buildings appear to present the most significant safety threat, with a potential for collapsing. Concerns for the safety of students, staff, parents and other patrons of the facilities led to making this difficult decision.

The future use of the GRCC is an item that the board has investigated and discussed for the past few years. A decision regarding use of the facility has at least in part been dependent upon obtaining the after-school program grant that would begin in school year 2009-2010, our current school year. The previous grant period ended at the end of June 2009. News of approval of the

current after-school grant did not come until June 2009, and the GRCC was once again made ready for the after-school program.

However, on August 17, 2009, first day of our Teacher Institute, heavy rains caused water to flow through previously undetected and substantial leaks in the roof above the stage and bleacher areas at the GRCC. While the leaks were repaired and maintained to the extent possible; further investigation into the condition of the gymnasium roof, and other portions of the facility, lead to additional information regarding structural problems that exist at the GRCC and the Castle.

While the castle and old high school have been, and continue to be important landmarks of the Dallas City school community, it is becoming increasingly difficult to justify expenditures for these aged and deteriorating facilities. One estimate to replace only the roof in the area above the gym floor, bleachers, stage and lobby/concession stand is in the range of approximately \$225,000. Additional estimates for repair and/or replacement of all deteriorating portions of the roof system, the vast majority of it, exceeds \$1,000,000.

At the end of fiscal year 2009 the district's available bonding capacity is approximately \$560,000; or about one-half of the entire bonding capacity of the district. Given this situation, roof repair of the GRCC and Castle facilities could only be completed on a partial basis, and for many years this would essentially eliminate the district's ability to borrow funds for any other purposes.

The General Assembly in Springfield continues to search for revenue sources to revive funding of the School Construction Grant Program (SCGP) that currently exists in Illinois, but has not been funded since 2003. Dallas Elementary School has an application filed with the SCGP for funding year 2005. When a funding source for this construction program is in place, Dallas Elementary should have a grant index of 75%; meaning the SCGP would fund 75% of the eligible expense for new school construction in the district and Dallas Elementary would be responsible for the remaining 25%.

This background information is also considered as part of the rationale for the decision to close the GRCC and fund only necessary expenses in an effort to position the district in a manner to take advantage of the SCGP when funding for the program becomes available. Such a strategy should enable the district to expand the elementary school and house all school programs and related activities, e.g. those currently housed in the GRCC, at one site.

Other means of addressing the situation at the GRCC and Castle have also been explored. We have communicated with the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency (IHPC). The Illinois Historic Preservation Agency operates over 60 historic sites and memorials, and also administers the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum. The library is the state's chief historical and genealogical research facility that is home to the state's world-renowned Abraham Lincoln collection. They administer all state and federal historic preservation and incentive programs in Illinois, including the National Register of Historic Places. IHPC staff is interested in visiting the Castle and assisting the school district in our efforts to find a steward for this important Dallas City landmark. Officers at the agency believe the Castle is a good candidate for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. They indicate that such listing would provide financial incentives for rehabilitation.

The decision to close the GRCC and Castle was not easy or taken lightly. It was a very difficult one that followed many months of investigation, consideration, and discussion. But, as mentioned previously, recent developments and information regarding safety risks around and in the facilities have led the notice of closure, at this time. Future utilization of the facilities is however, a discussion that is not closed.

November 2, 2009

No final decisions have been made regarding long term future utilization of the GRCC and the Castle. Therefore, as part of the decision making process, on **Monday, November 9, 2009 - 7:00 p.m., at Dallas City Elementary School**, the board of education has scheduled a special board meeting for the purpose of presenting information, and providing an opportunity for questions and comments from members of the school community.