

Public forum on new gym answers questions

By Karen Krien

karen.k@nwkansan.com

There were many questions asked at the public forum on Thursday. The forum dealt with the building of a new gymnasium on the south side of the high school.

Questions boiled down to basically five divisions: Why is there a need for a new gym; how will it benefit the community; costs of the facility and other funding; reasons for the design and construction; and improvements which have been made.

Why the need for a new gym?
Mr. Schiltz said that when girls' athletics came in the 1970s, the school gyms were no longer adequate for practices. The small gym at the grade school is used for not only practices but also games. It is so small that there is not enough room for the athletes to make a 3-pointer.

Even more concerning is the fact that athletes are bigger and stronger and games are played at a fierce pace. Most athletes are used to practicing on regulation-sized gyms so when they are put into a smaller gym, it throws them.

Dr. Mary Beth Miller, physician and board member, pointed out that the small gym is an accident waiting to happen.

Kim Zwegygart, St. Francis resident, echoed Dr. Miller's feelings. We cannot, she said, afford even one lost life.

"Are we going to wait until that accident takes a life or disables a kid for life," she said. "How are we going to face those parents and say, 'gosh, we should have built a new gym?'"

Practice time is an issue. With the new 94-foot collegian-size gym, when the bleachers are pushed back, the floor will allow two volleyball and/or basketball courts. Kent Kechter, teacher and coach, said he had taught in the St. Francis school for 36 years and

has coached in the gyms. The first night of junior high basketball was the night of the forum and, because both gyms were being used, there was no place to hold the practice. During the season, the junior high kids will probably have only five days of actual

practice in the high school gym. Jeff Beims, teacher and boys' high school basketball coach, said he and Larry Flemming, girls' high school basketball coach, worked out a schedule for practice. He figures that he has 25 boys out for basketball this year and when they

practice on the grade school court, it is impossible to go full speed, thus, they are getting about two-thirds of the needed practice time.

Kody Krien, formerly of Bird City and one of the panel members at the forum, said, when he and Cory Busse, also now of St.

Francis, were in high school, their coaches had always cautioned them about the dangers of playing in the Sainty grade school gym because it was so small.

"If we want the kids to be able to compete, we need another gym," he said.

Community benefits from a new gym

The plans for the proposed new gym are to have a 94-foot gym floor with bleachers that will seat up to 1,200 people. There will be a commons room which can be held for public meetings and community events, even voting and blood drives can be held there. An inside walking track will be situated around the gym; there will be adequate rest room facilities, a concession stand and an officials dressing room.

Scott Carmichael, principal, talked about the public being able to use the walking track. People can walk in the school but it isn't ideal walking conditions.

With the new track, access control cards can be issued to those wanting to walk. The cards will be programmed to walkers so they can enter the building at certain times.

When the Ray and Vergie Rogers money was donated to the school, it was used to put in new comfortable seats and air conditioning in the auditorium. The Don Kramer money was used to put in new stage curtains. Fans have also been installed.

"Since the work was done, we have functions taking place in the

auditorium two to three times a month," Mr. Carmichael said.

"We want people to use the school. We want our kids to come back and live and bring their kids to the school," he said. "This isn't our building — It's the community's building."

One of the questions asked at the public forum on Thursday evening was, "How much is going to cost to reserve the commons room?" The school is charging \$5 an hour but not to exceed \$10 a day, was the answer.

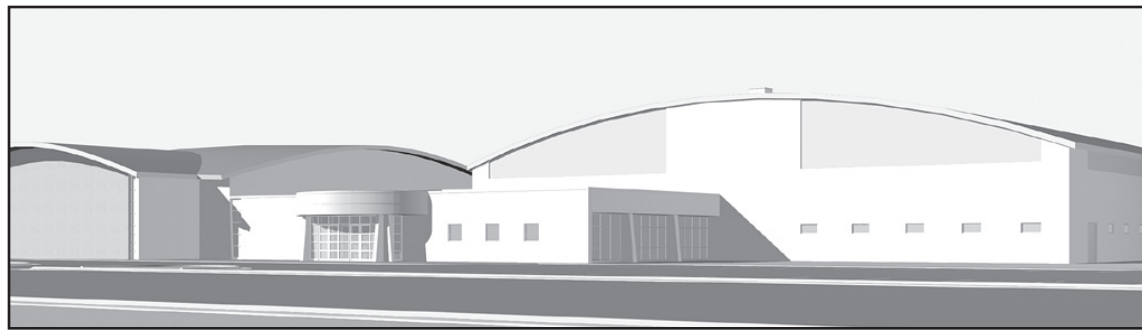
The commons room is about two-thirds the size of the junior-senior high school cafeteria. There will be a folding partition so one area can be blocked off when not needed.

The new concession area will be located where it can easily be accessed for indoor events as well as track and football since the door to the east can be opened.

Mr. Carmichael pointed out that when sporting events are held at the school, and, with a new gym, there will be more held in St. Francis, there will be more people coming to town, buying gas, food and other items.

Kelly Frewen, one of the forum panel, said he has seen the community progress. When the hospital and clinic building and remodeling were done, there was controversy. It has taken 9 years to get to this point of getting a new gym, we need to go forward again, he said.

Tom Keller, St. Francis, president of the Community Builders asked the question, "If someone donates \$2.5 million to build the gym, will you name it after him?" This brought a rouse of laughter and an answer of, "that will have to be a board decision," from Rob Schiltz, superintendent.



View of the proposed gym

Improvements in the schools

As in any public forum, on Thursday, there were people for and those against the building of the new gym.

There were those who were concerned that there had not been improvements made at the grade school and in the industrial arts department.

Rob Schiltz, superintendent, said he had taught industrial arts for 18 years. He said that the equipment in that department is very good and well maintained. Several years ago, two lathes had been deemed dangerous and they

had been sold. Older machines are better than the newer machines, he said, but added that he wasn't aware of any equipment needs in the wood shop.

Anytime, he said, there is a request for equipment or supplies, they are almost always granted.

He was asked about remodeling plans for the elementary bathrooms. Mr. Schiltz said that the elementary bathrooms were clean, they worked well and they had curtains at the stalls.

Over the last 10 years, new double-paned windows have been

installed in the grade school (And, there is no duct tape, Mr. Schiltz said.), 30 new computers were purchased for the computer lab, there is a science lab, new ceiling tiles and new lighting in the third grade classroom and cafeteria.

The elementary school was built in 1919.

"I think we do try to maintain our schools," Mr. Schiltz said. "Right now one boiler in the elementary school is out but we do have money in the capital outlay fund and we're going to fix it!"

What are the costs of a new gym?

Jeff Olofson, teacher and coach, and Rob Schiltz, superintendent, talked about the costs involved with building a new gymnasium at the high school.

The cost of the proposed gym is \$2.5 million. The money will be raised through property taxes which will pay off bonds.

The question, "why can we afford a gym but we can't afford to give teachers raises?" Rob Schiltz, superintendent, answered, that teachers are paid out of the general fund, not the capital outlay fund which is used for building improvements, equipment and building projects such as the gym.

"What will be the costs of maintain a new gym?" Mr. Schiltz said he had taken the utility costs of the high school for one year, then divided the costs by the square feet. That figure was taken by the gym's square feet. The figure he had come up with was \$25,000 for the year.

He pointed out that the high school is an older building with window air conditioners in each of the rooms so this figure may be high. He also said that gas prices could go higher.

If the gym project is passed, he said they will be looking at ways to make the building more energy efficient, using skylights so little or no electricity is used to light the gym during the day. In an area between the new gym and the wrestling/weight room, there are plans to put in an underground water storage which collects the water and snow coming off the roofs of

the two buildings.

The matter of teacher's salaries brought up the question, "Are St. Francis teacher's salaries lagging behind?"

Mr. Schiltz said he had the salaries of the Region 9, and 26 schools in northwest Kansas and St. Francis ranked third with 23 schools behind.

Kim Zwegygart, St. Francis, referred to the building of the Colby High School. She said the board had become nervous about the costs, had cut corners and, in the end, had ended up spending the same amount of money but had less to show for it.

As the president of Cheyenne County Development Corporation, she said people who do not look toward the future will be in the past.

"We have the choice to lay down and die," she said. "I am not ready for St. Francis to be what it used to be — not thinking forward but being status quo."

Perry Keller, St. Francis and one of the forum panel, said if the gym were here today, everyone would be glad.

"The problem is money — but, most would pay less than \$1 a day," he said. "Most of us spend more on a pop or candy bar."

Kenneth Roberson, St. Francis and one of the forum panel, quoted Will Rogers when he said, "I can't remember a time when taxes were too high and money was not short."

On the positive side, Cara Hunt, student at St. Francis, asked when

classes will be able to use the new gym?

Glen Strait, architect, said, if the bond issue passes, it will take anywhere from 4 to 6 months to finish up the plans — classes would probably not use the new gym until 2010-2011 school year.

Tom Keller, St. Francis and president of the Community Builders, asked what were the projected costs of building materials and the availability of contractors?

Everyone is aware that construction costs have gone up considerable, Mr. Strait said. However, the economic down trend may send costs the other direction. In the last three months, he saw the bids in projects come in lower than expected.

Chris Bracelin, St. Francis, asked about the interest rates. Mr. Schiltz said officials with Piper-Jaffery, the bond company, had said that a 4.7 rate will be realistic and it will be locked in.

Bob Bixler asked how much money had already been spent getting this far into the project. Mr. Schiltz said the financial planner (PiperJaffery) doesn't get paid if the bond doesn't pass; \$2,300 had been paid to Mr. Strait and, if the bond passes, he will get a certain percent; and \$300+ had been put into postage for the fliers.

The question was asked if the board had looked into any other way of financing the project besides property tax? Mr. Schiltz said the law states that schools cannot raise money any other way than property tax.

A cup of coffee a day

The St. Francis Board of Education is asking people in the district to vote "yes" to raise a \$2.5 million bond to build a new gym. People are wondering how much it is going to raise their taxes. The following gives a general idea of what taxpayers will be seeing added to the taxes.

The pay-back period will be 15 years and the mill levy raised will be 6.25 mills.

The majority of the people will be paying less than \$1 a day. Broken down even further, the cost of a cup of coffee, candy bar or soda.

Residential property	
Costs include	
Annual property tax	
\$50,000 home	\$35.94
\$75,000 home	\$53.91
\$100,000 home	\$71.88
\$150,000 home	\$107.81
Monthly property tax	
\$50,000 home	\$2.99
\$75,000 home	\$4.49
\$100,000 home	\$5.99
\$150,000 home	\$8.98
Daily property tax	
\$50,000 home	\$.10
\$75,000 home	\$.15
\$100,000 home	\$.20
\$150,000 home	\$.30
Commercial property	
Annual property tax	
\$50,000 property	\$78.13
\$75,000 property	\$117.19
\$100,000 property	\$156.25
\$150,000 property	\$234.38
\$200,000 property	\$312.50

Monthly property tax	
\$50,000 property	\$6.51
\$75,000 property	\$9.77
\$100,000 property	\$13.02
\$150,000 property	\$19.53
\$200,000 property	\$26.04
Daily property tax	
\$50,000 property	\$.21
\$75,000 property	\$.32
\$100,000 property	\$.43
\$150,000 property	\$.64
\$200,000 property	\$.86
Agriculture property	
Annual property tax	
Dry crop land (median use value=\$90/acre)	
160 acres	\$27.00
640 acres	\$108.00
Irrigated land (median use value=\$150/acre)	
160 acres	\$ 45.00
640 acres	\$180.00
Grass land (median use value=\$16/acre)	
160 acres	\$ 4.80
640 acres	\$ 19.20
Annual cost per acre	
Dry crop land	\$.17
Irrigated land	\$.28
Grass land	\$.03
Monthly property tax	
Dry crop land	
160 acres	\$ 2.25
640 acres	\$ 9.00
Irrigated land	
160 acres	\$ 3.75
640 acres	\$15.00
Grass land	
160 acres	\$.40
640 acres	\$ 1.60

RIDERS

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St. Jude collection
Each year, Sharon Olofson, coordinator for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, has a container to collect money for sick kids who cannot make the ride. She reported on Monday that \$528 had been donated. But, before she sends it in, she said Allison Grice is planning a money-making project at the Craft Show on Nov. 1.

Next year
Each year, the trail ride through parts of Cheyenne County is scheduled for the second Sunday in October. Mr. Cooper and others will be looking for another scenic place to hold the 18th ride. Watch for more information closer to the date.

Reason for the design

On the outside, the proposed new St. Francis high school gym will look much like the old gym.

John Lampe, St. Francis, asked why the gym is so high — wouldn't it be better, he said, to dig it down like Goodland's Max Jones Field House?

Glen Strait, architect, said there is a handicap usability issue with a plan such as Goodland's. Two years ago, the field house was added on to and an elevator and

lift were installed. The St. Francis plan is more cost effective, he said.

Another question asked was "wouldn't be easier to make it in a semi circle?" Again, Mr. Strait answered the question and said it would be more expensive.

Mr. Strait said a pre-structured frame with masonry would tie in the new building with the other buildings and would be the most cost efficient.

FORUM

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wanted one. They looked ahead to the future.

"I and my wife plan to be here; we have two children living here and we plan to watch our granddaughter grow up and go to school here," he said.

Following the forum, tours were available to everyone who wanted to see the junior-senior high school and grade school.

The forum was held to help people with questions to be able to make an educated vote. Everyone is urged to cast their vote on Nov. 4. It is a little more than a week before the election. Those who are unsure about why the gym should be built, how much it will cost, what it will do for the community or need more information, should contact someone who knows the facts.



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