

Items total \$5.7 million; include concrete repair, gym floor work, new projects at Redskin Field

By RACHEL COLEMAN • Leader & Times A five-year capital improvement plan submitted to the USD 480 school board at Monday's meeting sparked debate but finally won approval. The plan, mapped out by director of auxiliary services Robert Burkey, listed \$5.7 million worth of repairs, maintenance and improvements to district properties. Each item included the year requested, the year of projected completion, and an estimated cost.

Board member Tammy Sutherland-Abbott questioned the need for the plan to be listed as an action item on the agenda.

"I don't know that we've ever had this as an action item before," she said. "So ... does that mean that by voting on this, we're saying that everything on [this list] is approved? Because there's hundreds of thousands of dollars on there."

"It's not approving the projects. It's approving that we have a plan," said Burkey. "It's a way for my department to look ahead. It's not a plan to act on the list, it's a plan to be ready when funding is available. I'm supposed to bring a five-year plan before the board."

Board member Nick Hatcher praised the schedule as "forward thinking." Even so, Sutherland-Abbott wanted to know why the schedule was presented as an action item, rather than an information item.

Hatcher and board member Dan Diepenbrock argued that board adoption of the plan would serve, simply, as a guidepost for future boards. As newly-elected board members take office, Hatcher said, "they don't always know what's going on, what's been planned, what we've decided." Diepenbrock also said that district committees have no authority to move forward with "to-do" lists; by adopting the schedule, he said, Burkey's department has a sense of what the board is likely to approve.

"I see it as a giving permission for them to make a schedule, so that when [the district] receives money, before it is spent, the projects are lined out," said board member Cheryl Louderback.

"It's a way for the board to look ahead, toward the future," Hatcher put in.

"Then why didn't the board do that, oh, 20 years ago?" Sutherland-Abbott said.

"Well, that might be why we're in the shape we're in today," said Hatcher.

Burkey's departmental plan includes routine items like concrete repair in driveways, and gymnasium floor recoats, along with larger-scale projects — remodeling of bathrooms in some elementary school areas and replacement of water faucets and fountains. One high-dollar project listed involved dealing with asbestos at Lincoln Elementary School. The priciest items involved outdoor work at the South Middle School track and the north parking lot of Liberal High School, estimated at \$600,000 and \$800,000 respectively.

The last page of Burkey's plan included a set of projects at Redskin Field totalling \$800,000: extension of the north dressing rooms and press box remodel, at \$250,000 each, and remodeling and construction of new home-side concessions and restroom areas at \$300,000.

As discussion continued, Sutherland-Abbott continued to question the need for a board vote on the plan. Board chair Delvin Kinser asked her if there was something specific in Burkey's list that concerned her.

"There's a lot of dollar amounts there," she said. "It's always been handled differently. To me, an action item means we're authorizing the project."

In the end, the board voted to adopt Burkey's plan 5-2, with Sutherland-Abbott and Steve Helm against the measure.

USD 480 posts info on web site

By RACHEL COLEMAN • Leader & Times As with all directors' reports, director of auxiliary services Robert Burkey's five-year plan can be viewed by the public on the Internet. To access the information, visit usd480.net, click on the tab labeled "School Board," then select "School Board Agenda" from the pull-down list. By clicking on the small calendar boxes highlighted in yellow at the right side of the page, site visitors can view the entire agenda from each meeting. Links are enabled, so that by clicking on Item 10, "Capital Improvement Plan," the chart and schedule prepared by Burkey can be viewed online or downloaded as a pdf file.