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By GISEELLE ARREDONDO

• Leader & Times

USD No. 480 Board President Delvin Kinser presented an update of the district's school expansion plans at Tuesday night's city commission meeting.

Kinser said that the Vision Team Committee, since the summer, had 10 meetings brainstorming ideas, looking at what the community needs, overcrowding issues and educational issues.

They came up with various scenarios of building projects. through the months of October, November and December with many community meetings at McDonald's and the coffee shop as well as other locations to try and implement ideas from the community as well, he said.



He noted the Vision Team made a decision on a plan at its meeting Monday night.

“As of Monday, a decision was made on a plan to recommend to the USD 480 school board,” Kinser said. “The original plan that the Vision Team came up with was a plan that would rework our elementary schools. Right now, we have seven elementary schools. The plan would

be to go to five elementary schools and they would be K through 5 facilities, instead of K through 3 facilities. The way that would work is, we would repurpose Cottonwood and Sunflower into elementary schools, and then we would take MacArthur and MacArthur would be torn down and a new facility built next to MacArthur. Where MacArthur sits now would be the parking lot for the new facility. And then we would be looking at building two brand new elementary schools, possibly in the northeast and one in the southeast.”

He said that the idea of putting those elementary schools in those four quadrants of the city is due to the community saying that they want neighborhood schools.

“Also, by going to K through five, we eliminate a transition,” Kinser continued. “Right now, as you know, our students transition from third grade to fourth grade, then from sixth to seventh and then eight to ninth. We would take one of those out, so we would have K to five, six to eighth, nine to 12.”

The plan that the Vision Committee has submitted to USD 480 also addresses the middle schools.

“Obviously, our middle schools right now could not handle sixth through eight. They barely handle seventh to eight,” he said.

The recommendation is to build two new middle schools on different locations, which will be determined by the USD 480 board, he said.

Kinser added that there was a question about merging the two middle schools into one.

“Overwhelmingly, the community was telling us, ‘No, we like the fact we have two middle schools for a couple of reasons. It still keeps the neighborhood feel at the middle school level because they are in different areas of town and also because of opportunities for extracurricular activities for kids sixth to eighth grade.’ If you go to one middle school, not as many people can be on the football team,” he explained.

The Vision Committee said the most cost effective way, considering what architects and builders said, that if the middle schools are redesigned and redeveloped, it will be about the same amount of dollars to get it to where it needs to be, Kinser said.

And regarding the high school, he said, “the public doesn’t want a new high school.

“They felt like the high school we have, it’s 30 years old, it’s very stressed with the amount of folks that are running in and out every day. They told us they wouldn’t support that.

“The Vision Committee has recommended to take the old West Middle School and tear down what needs to be torn down and revamp that building and make it a part of the high school campus. That would alleviate the population pressure in the high school with the classrooms and the facilities that would be at the renovated West,” he said.

Kinser said in the initial polling with a phone survey of 365 registered voters and the question of \$14.95 a month on a \$100,000 home. Of those that were surveyed, 48 percent said that they would either support or strongly support that. Forty-four percent said they would oppose or strongly oppose. The next question was for a bond issue similar but scaled back to where it would be less than \$10 a month increase in property taxes if one had a \$100,000 home.

When that question was asked, 61 percent said they would support or strongly support that plan. Thirty-one percent said they would oppose or strongly oppose.

“So we saw a great increase in willingness when the money came down to less than \$10 a month on a \$100,000 home.”

Kinser added “Vision Committee saw that, knowing one of the things that the Vision Committee said at the beginning, they wanted to develop a plan that is going to move forward and work and be what we need for the education of our kids but we also want to do something that the community will support and we can afford.”

“When we, as a Vision Committee, saw those results, it’s not everything we are asking for but it’s about 85 percent, and we can live with that,” he said.

The plan is five elementary schools, two new middle schools and some renovation at West to make it part of the high school, Kinser said.

“The estimated cost was \$128 million, so down a few million dollars from \$148,” he said. “20 million.”

“Obviously, it will be up to USD 480 to be the ones campaigning and convincing our folks that this is something that we need to do,” he said.

That will be stressed along with what the state is going to do with assistance he said.

Next Monday, he noted, at the regular meeting, the board will vote on whether or not to put the plan front of the citizens.

“It’s an exciting time,” Kinser said and smiled.

He added that Gov. Sam Brownback made an announcement that he’s going to push for full funding for all day kindergarten this year.

“If we can get full funding for all day kindergarten, that’s going to help us tremendously with this plan.”

Commissioner Joe Denoyer said a moment later, “I want to thank you guys. When you first

came, you were met with some resistance – the Vision Team, the community meetings, the phone surveys and then you took those results and then you tweaked your plan to meet what the community wants. I want to thank all those involved for listening to the community in doing what we need. And I honestly believe that we need to upgrade our schools.”

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