

Fate of former high school to be decided in February

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When the Webster County Board of Education next meets, it will hear the recommendation of school district attorney Amelia Zachary regarding two undisclosed bids received for the sale of the former Providence Independent School District High School and its adjoining property, which includes the gymnasium more commonly known as the "Doghouse," an office building, and a maintenance building.

That decision, proposed by Webster County Board of Education Chairman James Nance during the board's meeting Thursday night, Jan. 14, at the Webster County Board of Education conference room in Dixon, was informally agreed to by board members during a discussion of the issue.

Prior to agreeing to seek bids and an appraisal on the property, the school board has debated whether to sell the surrounding property, and the city of Providence has expressed interest in the Doghouse facility as well.

Just before the start of Monday's meeting, Webster County School District Superintendent James Kemp introduced Michael Reagan, a guest at the meeting, as one of the people who had submitted a bid on the school property.

In other business, the board approved the recommendation to officially close the Slaughters Elementary renovation project following a decision earlier this month to pay a settlement to M&W Construction. The remaining funds from the project, approximately \$215,700 according to information provided by school district officials, was then approved for transfer into the building fund for the Webster County High School renovation and new construction. Members also authorized Kemp to seek bids for furniture for the new WCHS Media Center currently under construction as part of the ongoing renovation, and approved a series of action items by "consent," as part of a single motion, including field trip requests for FFA and FCCLA, out-of-district reciprocal contracts, and various monthly reports.

During his report to the board earlier in the meeting, Kemp presented a draft of the 2010-2011 budget for board consideration. Kemp said the biggest difference about this year's proposed budget as compared to previous years is the fact that the state hasn't announced tentative per-pupil funding (SEEK) amounts yet. He also told the board to expect further reductions in state-level funding for the next school year.

"There won't be one new penny coming from the state," Kemp said, before quickly noting that the district will be responsible for the complete cost of a 1.5 percent employee pay raise. "That's an extra \$90,000 that has to be shifted from one location to another."

Nance told Kemp he didn't want him to wait until the state announces funding decisions for education to finish the school district budget.

"We need to do our budget on what we know is in our pocket, not what we hope is in our pocket," Nance said.

Nance then asked if Kemp had talked with state lawmakers representing Webster County, to which Kemp said he had discussed the situation with them.

Kemp also presented a copy of a document he prepared regarding how the district is using stimulus money it has received. According to Kemp, the district has hired a total of 30 full-time and part-time employees it "otherwise would not have had," and also expanded the district's tutoring program, Trojan Academy, at least temporarily to help better prepare students for state testing in the spring.

The board also reviewed a list of personnel changes, including the employment of Joshua Basham, Bobbi Bassler, Jeffrey Haire, John Milam, and Teresa Turner as substitute teachers; and Melanie Kelsey, Sebree Elementary Title I Instructional Assistant; the resignation of Jeremy Collins, lead teacher at the Webster County Alternative Learning Center; and Leslie Kuykendall, ARRA instructional assistant one, Clay Elementary; and the termination of Shanda Townsend, a bus driver and maintenance secretary.

The board then went into closed session to conduct student hearings after hearing a brief report from Catholine Townsend, director of food services for the school district, regarding recent changes in the way some of the meals are handled. Townsend said Sebree Elementary saw an increase of 54 percent in the number of students eating breakfast after a policy was enacted allowing them to take the meals to their morning classroom.