

## **MUSD ponders facilities future**

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By CONNIE KORBEL Of The Beacon -

As the news that all but one portable classroom are beyond repair settled in this summer, the Mendocino middle and grammar school campus moved programs around to adjust to even fewer classrooms.

School began this week and although not a dynamic turn-around, Sally Swan, MUSD business manager, reported that district enrollment declined less than they had projected for the year.

The board of trustees held a special facilities-focused meeting last Thursday evening. About 30 people listened to three presentations with the board. No actions were taken at this wholly informational meeting.

Tom Birdsell opened the meeting with a power-point presentation highlighting the district's demographics, compiled from county assessor and voter registration records and U.S. census data for the town of Mendocino.

Birdsell learned that the median home ownership is 15 years. Forty-three percent of the school district's residents have first mortgages versus the 67 percent California average, and 78 percent are educated beyond high school (57 percent is the California average).

There are 4,300 registered voters in MUSD, 31 percent are between 18 and 49 years of age, and the average registered voter's age is 57.

Birdsell's research indicates that, within the district's 220 square miles, property values have soared since 2000. The district's assessed value has grown to \$1 billion for 5,000 parcels.

According to an April 2004 letter from the county assistant audit-controller, the district had a bond capacity of just under \$11 million two years ago. Adjusted for today's values, the bond capacity is now at \$25 million.

Known for his wit, Birdsell says, "In summary, according to my census sources, we're wiser, smarter and better looking than any other community."

Architect Mark Quattrocchi provided a computer-assisted presentation of what the proposed integrated K-8 campus looks like in its near-completed design state, less the landscaping.

To get to where they are now, Quattrocchi reminded everyone the project started with an investigation into the extent of dry rot in the grammar school building. He told them, "I was in [Mendocino] high school when they built this. I was not the architect."

Quattrocchi explained that when evaluating the crawl space beneath the modular wings that flank the core of the building (the multi-purpose room area) in late summer, they discovered standing water. He said, "That's fabulous, if you're a termite."

He reports the combined school structure of the redesigned K-8 campus is smaller than the current two separate schools and provides a flexible use of space. The master plan has been designed to allow building the campus incrementally, if needed.

The final presentation was from John Hartenstein, chief bond counsel, who has advised the district since 1999. He has worked with schools of all sizes. Locally, he's also experienced with Point Arena, Sonoma County schools and currently with Ukiah, which is preparing for a November bond election.

Hartenstein discussed the important roles and services provided by the financial advisor and legal counsel. He said a financial advisor provides a wide range of services from assessing district resources, identifying alternatives, and managing the state process, to designing a bond plan that matches needs with resources.

He advised that, even if the district is unsure whether or when it will go for a bond measure, it needs to get a financial advisor in place as soon as possible. He said it's important to begin the process early.

"Now is not too early for a June [2006] election," he said.

The next meeting of the K-8 design committee is on Tuesday, Sept. 27 at 3:45 p.m. in the middle school library.