

## A WELL THOUGHT-OUT PLAN FOR FACILITY PROJECTS

### **Defining a Vision; the Role of an Architect and a Construction Management Firm; Maximizing New York State Building Aid Reimbursement**

#### A. Introductory Discussion:

The Southern Cayuga School District like most school districts in New York State desires to receive the maximum state building aid allowable to help pay for the facilities necessary to support the locally defined educational plan.

***Defining the educational program is the first priority by the school board, district leadership, and faculty. The educational plan accommodates statewide curriculum/assessment standards, and the vision and aspirations the Southern Cayuga School District community has for all the children of the district, present and future. Planning for a facility project is first a curriculum visioning/improvement endeavor before it is a 'brick and mortar' designing/construction endeavor.***

Commissioner's Regulations 155.1 requires a school district to plan for the future of its facilities by: assessing enrollment projections, evaluating the district's grade organization, reviewing the use of existing buildings, evaluating the need for replacing obsolete and/or aging facilities, and determining the needs for additional facilities.

A key ingredient to determine what facilities are needed to implement the educational plan is an enrollment projection. The defining of facilities necessary to implement the plan is with a future vision of the K-6 enrollment to be served five years from now, the 7-8 enrollment to be served eight years from now, and the 9-12 enrollment to be served ten years from now. The district vision for pre-kindergarten education is an *additional* documentation for facilities necessary to implement program.

Once the educational program plan is defined and future enrollment estimates are calculated, an architect can help a school board answer:

- How do the present facilities help or hinder the educational plan?
- Can the current facilities be renovated to meet the space needs of the educational plan?
- Can the current facilities be renovated with the addition of new space to meet the needs of the educational plan?
- Should a current building be abandoned and a new building constructed to meet the space needs of the educational plan?

*"Custom tools and research to aid a school district in defining a vision and decision options for serving students in the future."*

Form follows function. The educational program plan/expectations to serve the estimated future student population must first be defined. Then, and only then can design specialists help define facility options to achieve the educational plan. It is also at this time that the various facility options are analyzed to calculate the maximum State of New York building aid represented by each respective option to achieve the defined educational program specifications.

## B. Goals

### 1. DEVELOP AFFORDABLE OPTIONS TO MEET THE EDUCATIONAL SPECIFICATIONS

A simultaneous overlay in reviewing facility options that can meet the needs of the educational plan is economics. What can the school district afford? What facility options are within the means of the school district? After planned input from the community, the school board/administrative team can judge and estimate what the local taxpayer can afford to implement the educational plan and the necessary facilities. Estimates of capital fund collections based on various facility options are provided by the architect and construction management consultants so estimates on school district taxes can be calculated.

### 2. CHOOSE DESIGN OPTIONS THAT QUALIFY FOR MAXIMUM BUILDING AID FROM THE STATE OF NEW YORK

Commissioner's Regulations have been developed to help secure equity and fairness in determining the maximum amount the State will pay to support facilities in all school districts, rich and poor. Districts that are wealthy may spend much more than what the State will aid 'up to'. For Southern Cayuga and most school districts, the reality of economics is that they must try and satisfy the facility needs of their educational plans at no more than the maximum allowable expense the State will aid 'up to'. This worthy goal is not always attainable. The real work of an architect/engineer is the skill to design a form that will satisfy the function of the district's educational plan *within* the maximum cost allowance that the State will aid 'up to' unless the school board decides to spend above the aidable ceiling. Therefore, it is important to support the work of the architect and the program decision-making of the district by having available on-going estimates of maximum aid ceiling calculations of design schematics. In this way, the major work necessary to submit a project for State Education Department review is not wasted. Southern Cayuga and the architect design team will know the estimated qualifying aid ceiling of a plan before submittal to the State Education Department.

### 3. UNDERSTAND THE ‘MAXIMUM AID CEILING ALLOWANCE’

Any dollars spent over the assigned maximum cost allowance as defined by the State Education Department are all ‘100 penny dollars’ directly from local tax dollars with no State support. Careful planning is necessary to keep as close to the maximum aid ceiling as possible. Sometimes the maximum aid ceiling may not be sufficient for major work in very old, sub-standard buildings. Or, a district may wish to provide more space than the estimated enrollments can justify as per the SED school facility program guidelines. In these cases, the school will need to decide what it can afford over the state aidable ceiling for the facility project.

#### C. Strategic Approach

- 1. Assure that all design features can be directly related to the educational vision, instructional goals, and mission of the Southern Cayuga Central School District. Communicate this vision with clarity to the community. For example, every item of a proposed project should have a direct and clear answer to the question “What will this do for kids?” short term and or long term.**
2. Follow Commissioner’s guidelines that are used to determine maximum cost allowance for building aid for each building.
3. Keep a district-wide perspective. The total of the rated capacities of **all** the buildings in the Southern Cayuga must relate and be congruous with the total projected K-6 and 7-12 student enrollments to be served in programs offered by the school district. The district cannot receive aid on space that supercedes the enrollment estimated to be served in the future. Flexibility in design can be a major asset for the district in delivering the program as the future unfolds for the next generation over the next 8 to 13 years from now.
4. Follow carefully what makes up a maximum aid ceiling assignment. Maximum aid ceilings are building specific and cannot be allocated for other buildings. Maximum aid ceilings include two parts: one is for construction or reconstruction and the other is for related incidental expenses. Both aid ceiling maximums cannot be interchanged.
5. Put in place accurate record keeping for each project. This is to ensure that Southern Cayuga can file accurate final cost reports to the State Education Department such that there are no deducts in aid for unapproved items or for work that was not in the original scope of the project and not substantiated by an approved change order.

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