

David Paterno presents building proposal

Board asked to halt project, consider cheaper renovation plan

By Dena Pauling
dpauling@centredaily.com



DT Nabil K. Mark
David Paterno presents a new plan for the high school facility to the State College School Board Monday evening.

STATE COLLEGE -- After keeping the details of his State College Area High School plan a secret for several weeks, David Paterno introduced his proposal, and those who have been working on it with him, to the State College Area school board Monday night.

The State College resident is asking the board essentially to halt its \$97.6 million project and go back to its initial plan to renovate the buildings as they are for an estimated \$62 million to \$67 million. His proposal also calls for the construction of an enclosed bridge over Westerly Parkway, where the high school buildings are located.

"What we need to do now is ask you to do something that is very hard," Paterno said to the board at the outset of his presentation. "We are asking you to pause, take a fresh look at something that I know you wanted to put behind you. And we have no authority to ask you to do that, but we are asking, on behalf of the community."

Board members, having just received several elements of Paterno's plan last night, declined to comment until they've had a chance to read the materials. They agreed to add it as a discussion item for their next meeting.

Under his plan, which he calls the "Sensible Solution," the square footage for instruction, the Career and Technical Center, physical education, food service, building administration and educational support is larger than what the board's plan calls for, which has been 90 percent designed by L. Robert Kimball & Associates.

The square footage for nearly all aspects of the high school building would be larger or comparable to the board's plan. The only area that would be about 2,500 square feet smaller is music and theater, though space for those arts programs would increase by about 8,357 square feet over the existing facility.

Paterno said his plan is the "better choice" because it is not as risky, is an estimated \$30 million cheaper and is supported by the community.

The latter point, however, has been a subject of debate. Those who have supported the board's plan have often pointed out that during the Act 34 process, when hundreds of community members presented their opinions about the high school, no one idea represented the majority of the comments. And opponents have said the majority of the comments were opposed to the project.

Paterno said that of the ideas that were presented during the Act 34 process, renovating the existing buildings was the most popular with about 390 favorable comments.

That is what prompted him, he said, to develop "Sensible Solution," which can be viewed at www.sensiblesolution.org.

At the conclusion of his presentation, several members of his team of volunteers stood to be recognized. They included his wife, Lori Paterno; Eric Topp; Jeff Smith; Brad Mitchell; Fred Fernsler, a local architect; and Scott Barbara.

It remains uncertain whether the board will scrap the plan it has been working on for almost two years. That plan, to renovate and expand the North Building to house grades nine to 12, was developed after multiple options were considered -- including the one Paterno is pitching.

Initially, the board had planned to renovate the North and South buildings for an estimated \$68 million. But it was rejected after district resident Paul Suhey, now co-chair of an opposition group, asked the board to consider construction of a new school at a new site.

Although the board ultimately decided that constructing an entirely new building was too expensive, it liked the one-building concept and settled on the plan it has now.

Dena Pauling can be reached at 231-4619.