

Bond Oversight Committee - Status Report 07/29/2014

HISD's two building programs are busier than ever, but in very different stages.

The 2007 bond program is busy winding down so all original work can be completed by the end of the year. At the same time, the 2012 bond program is ramping up, with construction starting on all 17 schools in the first phase by the end of the year.

"It's been a real challenge, but it's been a really exciting challenge," said HISD's Officer of Construction & Facility Services Robert Sands.

Sands provided an update on July 29 about the progress of both programs at the quarterly meeting of the district's Bond Oversight Committee.

The nine-member panel heard from district staff on all aspects of the programs, with a focus on the second-quarter months of April, May and June.

Committee members asked questions on a variety of topics, from finances to schedules. In particular, as the 2007 building program comes to a close, some wondered about the possibility of leftover money. The total budget for the 2007 Facilities Capital Program is \$1,176,130,676, of which \$1,060,400,472 is committed (including encumbrances of \$52,982,873 and actual expenditures of \$1,007,417,599) leaving \$115,730,204 or 10 percent available to complete the projects.

The 2007 program provided funding for 23 new schools as well as more than 180 renovation and repair projects. As of June 30, \$115 million was available to complete remaining work within the program. How much money, if any, remains at the end won't be known until all the projects are financially closed out, according to Chief Operations Officer Leo Bobadilla.

With the 2012 bond program moving ahead so quickly, at least one committee member expressed concern that the project schedule program may be too ambitious, considering inevitable and unforeseen delays in permitting and construction.

To date, district officials said they have been working with the City of Houston to ensure permit reviews go as smoothly as possible. The district is also working to ensure adequate funding for the impending construction, with plans to sell another tranche of bonds in September. Another sale could take place in the fourth quarter or in early 2015, according to Controller Sherrie Robinson.

Even as construction documents are reviewed and finalized, the district is moving ahead on planning and design for all the remaining 23 schools in the program. Over the past quarter, that work has included holding design charrettes for some of the district's largest high schools – Bellaire, Lamar, Davis and Yates. Those schools, in the second phase of the program, are slated to begin construction in mid to late 2015.

In conjunction, the district has been hosting community meetings to ensure the plans and designs meet the needs of students and neighborhoods. The district also held a safety and security symposium to ensure that the new schools follow national best practices.

“None of these schools are cookie-cutter,” said Dan Bankhead, the district’s general manager for Facilities Design. In an effort to maximize community participation in the program, the district worked with interns over the past summer from high schools and the University of Houston.

As the district looks to rebuild or renovate 40 schools across the city, the goal is to ensure the new buildings can serve generations of students to come. One priority is creating sustainable facilities with eco-friendly design features that serve as learning tools. All of the schools in Group 1 and Group 2 are seeking LEED certification from the United State Green Building Council. One school is seeking the highest certification, Platinum, and Bankhead said he’d be encouraging all of the projects to challenge themselves.

With the summer months typically the busiest time for construction and renovation projects, work is moving ahead to prepare the Milby site. All the furniture has been moved out of the school, and teams are working on transitioning the students and staff to the former Jones High School campus and Attucks Middle School. Both of those locations will be temporary homes for Milby students until their new school is ready.

All the school leadership teams are working together to minimize any potential problems with student schedules and discipline issues. Committee members discussed the difficulties of moving academic and athletic programs. “There’s more to this than construction, isn’t there?” said D.V. “Sonny” Flores.

Chief Operating Officer Leo Bobadilla acknowledged the challenges. “Every project is going to have to go through a period of pain to get to a better place,” he said.

Bobadilla also discussed the construction delivery method of Construction Manager at Risk to help manage unforeseen circumstances. By bringing in the contractor early, Bobadilla said it helps ensure the projects meet the budget requirements. “Once we get to construction, there shouldn’t be a lot of surprises for the team,” he said.

Meanwhile, the district’s Office of Business Assistance continues to show success with its program for Minority and Women-owned Business Enterprises (M/WBEs). Participation by M/WBEs has reached nearly 35 percent in the 2007 bond program, far exceeding the district’s goal of 20 percent. M/WBE participation in the 2012 program is more than 50 percent for design and program management firms selected to date.

In addition, the bond communications team has been working diligently to inform communities and schools to keep them updated about upcoming meetings. In addition, the team completed six new videos in the months of April, May and June. Community meetings were held at the following schools during the second quarter, including Sterling High School, Milby High School, Parker Elementary School, High School for Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice, Condit Elementary School, Dowling Middle

School, Eastwood Academy, Mandarin Chinese Language Immersion Magnet School, North Houston Early College High School and South Early College High School.

Looking ahead, Sands told the panel that the district is working with the schools in Group 3 and Group 4 to finalize the selection of architects to begin planning and design on those projects. To encourage architects to submit qualifications, the district hosted a meet and greet in June that attracted hundreds of participants.

HISD officials have spent the past few weeks interviewing potential firms. "My team is excited about that," Sands said.