

Alternative bus access sought to Island transportation center

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The Grand Island Board of Education has directed a consultant to examine the possibility of an alternative location for a new bus access road to the transportation center behind Sidway School on Baseline Road.

The board is studying three design concepts developed by Wendel Duchscherer Engineers & Architects for changes to the current site at Sidway, which includes a 65-year-old building that needs extensive repairs.

All three designs include a new road north of the school, adjacent to St. Martin-in-the-Fields Episcopal Church, that would lead to the transportation center and parking.

The state Education Department wants bus and pedestrian vehicle access separated for safety. Currently there is one road into the property to the south of the school and across Baseline from the rear of a retail plaza.

At a meeting late last month, several Baseline Road residents objected to the new bus road, which would be across from several residences. They said it would increase congestion and the time it takes to leave their driveways.

Monday, the board asked Wendel and Cannon Design, which studied five possible sites for a transportation center, to explore locating the bus road to the south of the school on vacant land between the U.S. Post Office and a drugstore.

More information is expected at the board's next meeting July 23.

In a related matter, Tom Rachow, supervisor of buildings and grounds, gave an overview of how the district's 12 maintenance mechanics work.

Only one currently works at the transportation center. The others work out of the old Nike Base on Staley Road.

He said those buildings will need some maintenance in the future and noted that the boiler dates to the 1940s.

Rachow also said there could be savings in travel time by relocating his department to the Sidway site, which is nearer all five schools. He also said the old Nike Base lacks adequate storage for equipment, some of which has to be left outside year-round.

"A lot of equipment is jammed in. There's not much room for interior storage," he said.

The three design concepts are:

- * Demolish the existing 65-year-old transportation center and build a new 16,000-square-foot structure.

- * Build a new 16,000-square-foot structure but use 8,000 square feet of the existing building for maintenance operations of Buildings and Grounds, and 4,000 square feet for district storage needs.

- * Build a new 12,000-square-foot structure for transportation maintenance and use 8,000 square feet of the old building for Buildings and Grounds maintenance, and 4,000 square feet for transportation operations.

Superintendent Robert Christmann also said several teachers have volunteered to participate in meetings over the summer with Cannon Design - architect on the \$51 million capital project - on classroom configurations and other issues related to that project. The district expects to let bids in January for extensive renovations to the schools, a new technology wing at the high school and a state-of-the-art athletic field behind the high-school and middle-school on Ransom Road.