

From the Superintendent

Three years ago over 100 community residents helped define a Long Range Plan for Romulus Central School which would insure its future as a small scale institution of learning meeting its community's needs. Last year more than 30 people spent 15 months planning a celebration of how well this small school has met that mission throughout its 60-year history. This year, the Board of Education proffers a plan which will help RCS continue to meet the needs of our community at the dawn of the 21st Century through a proposed capital project.

Inside this edition of the Bulletin you will find information about this proposed project which seeks to improve three key areas of the building used daily by students and frequently by the public at large - the gymnasium, the auditorium, and the library. The Board is proposing that we take advantage of an unprecedented 10% incentive to complete a capital project, upping the State's share of financing improvements to our school to 87.4% ! With this unique opportunity we can approach the enviable 95% state aid offered to merged Districts, and bring some 1.3 million dollars of State money to Romulus to accomplish goals we have already set for ourselves.

Why do we need to spend more money on our building? The reasons are several and are outlined inside this edition of the Bulletin in related articles. Please see the description of the work proposed for details. Basically we should undertake this project for three reasons: the work is needed; the work is part of the plan developed by the community through the Long Range Planning process Facilities Committee; and the work is offered to us this year with an additional 10% incentive from the State to do a capital project, allowing us to have almost all of the funds we need locally already on hand. The most the tax rate would increase would be six cents per thousand (one-third of one percent) due to the borrowing involved, and if all goes right with timing, we may be able to do the full scope of the work for no tax impact. This is an opportunity too good not to offer to the public at this time.

Please use this Bulletin to help acquaint yourself with this proposal, and please talk to members of the Board of Education to learn more about the project and its need. Please make plans to attend our public information session on November 10, and please come to the polls November 16 to cast your vote. Through this effort we hope to meet the goals of the Long Range Plan and have RCS well positioned to begin its next 60 years.

Chris Manasari

Why a Capital Project?

The proposed capital project is the first offered since 1994, when several of these same items were included in a 1.1 million dollar proposal which failed to gain public support. At that time we included a front driveway for buses, computerization of classrooms, and office renovations along with the gymnasium floor replacement and auditorium lighting involved in this proposal. Since 1994 we have been able to make some improvements to the building through an energy performance contract, although this proposed work has not been part of that effort. We have abandoned the front drive and now suggest a main entrance at the Gymnasium Lobby. We have completed the necessary installation of an office safe ourselves, and have computerized our classrooms through BOCES aid at 65%. The work that remains however, is either beyond our means to complete ourselves, or will cost us much more if done at a local level without State aid.

What is the Need?

In the gym the floor is popping up and we have begun to screw the loose boards down one by one. The public lavatories are small and inaccessible to the handicapped. The weight room currently used for instruction is dangerously undersized, and our occupational and physical therapists working with handicapped students do so out of a bookcloset and in the hallway. When the community uses the gym on weekends, the teacher workstations are currently exposed to high traffic for telephone and shower access. An addition to this area for special education could also be used to serve the public during non-school hours. Such an addition will also allow us to draw State aid on the reconstruction of the contiguous parking lot.

The south parking lot and driveway have needed repair for over a decade. By adding a walkway to the north side of this parking area, we can offer our students a safe bus loading area away from traffic at the driveway portion of the lot. The reconstruction necessary is extensive because of the deteriorated condition of the lot currently, and because of the heavy traffic from buses. This reconstruction will be aided at 87.4% along with the rest of the project as site-work related to the gymnasium addition.

The auditorium curtains, carpet and seating have gone untouched since its construction 30 years ago. The lighting and wiring are antiquated. It needs a facelift. We installed high performance house lighting as part of the EPC, but stage lighting and sound are still incomplete. As many parents know too well, the current sound system picks up radio interference during performances, and the lighting, while improved, is still in need of work as it is now partially controlled by both the old rheostats and the new digital panel. Seats are noisy and need reupholstery. The carpet is worn, torn and stained. This facility is used regularly for large groups, musical programs and stage productions by the elementary and secondary students as well as by the community.

A Distance Learning Lab is proposed to bring Romulus into the 21st century with the possibility of small enrollment special classes and whole school events. The technology is in use in neighboring Districts and our students deserve not to be left behind. We have applied for grants

for this portion of the project and have already received a \$25,000 member item from Senator Nozzolio to support this effort. The proposal calls for outfitting the Media Center Lecture Room with this added capacity, while still preserving the room's current multiple purpose nature. We propose joining several of the schools in our BOCES area in the RAITN project available from Monroe I BOCES as a cross contract, and allowing our students and public access to an expanding network of Distance Learning courses.

Why Now?

During the first few years of the Pataki administration, regulations were put in place to slow down the outflow of State dollars to schools, including building aid. Rules were changed which required a ten-year amortization of bonds for all projects, and approvals were delayed during these changes. The legislature last year, however, provided an ADDITIONAL 10% incentive for capital projects approved by voters after July 1, 1998. This additional State aid will allow us to draw up to 87.4% of the costs of this proposal from Albany, making the local share only less than one in eight dollars spent. We have most of that money on hand right now in a Capital Reserve account, and we have an additional \$25,000 member item from Senator Nozzolio specifically to support the Distance Learning portion of the project. We also have applied for a grant to help cover a portion of the cost of the lab, which we will know more about in October.

This unique combination of circumstances allows us to project a maximum tax impact of six cents per thousand for the borrowing required to turn our \$140,000 local share into the required State aided payments on a ten year loan. Should the grant be approved, and/or should the timing work out such that we can hold money and earn interest on it before we pay for work completed, we may be able to offer this project at no tax impact. The worst case calls for less than a one-third of one percent increase in tax rates, and the best case allows us to do the work for what we have in the bank.

The Board of Education has deliberated this proposal for six months, and has honed the list of items to be addressed to those it feels best meet the needs of the children and the community at large. They feel the proposal is worthy and offer the public a chance to approve it by vote in November.

Capital Project Planned for November Vote

At its meeting of September 8, the Board of Education approved a special vote for November 16, 1998 from 2-9 p.m. seeking approval of a 1.5 million dollar capital project for improvements to the school. The project would involve three main areas of the building which have high public and student use: the gymnasium, auditorium and library facilities. If approved by District voters, the state would provide 87.4% of the costs, with local dollars accounting for the remainder. The District has a capital reserve account with over \$118,000 available, plus a special \$25,000 member item from Senator Nozzolio for Distance Learning, and would seek to raise the rest in tax, amounting to an estimated maximum of \$0.06 per thousand of assessed value addition to the current average rate of \$15.62 (a one-third of one percent increase).

In the gymnasium work would include: replacement of the 33 -year old gym floor which has lost its bond to the subfloor and is coming loose by the plank, renovation of public lavatories to provide handicapped accessibility, renovation of coaches offices to provide secure community use, the expansion of the foyer to provide a new main entrance to the building for students, and the addition of a multiple-use special education classroom with community use in mind for exercise and health related activities before and after school hours. Construction in this area of the building will also allow us to draw 87.4% state aid on the reconstruction of the south parking lot and driveway - work which has been called for for more than ten years.

In the auditorium, seats would be reupholstered and repaired, the old rheostatic stage lighting controls would be removed and additional electronically controlled stage lighting installed, a new sound system would be added, and new curtains and carpeting would complete the facelift of this frequently used area. The back room near the north entrance would become stage storage and a light control booth, providing security for scenery, costumes and equipment for student and community productions.

In the library area the media center lecture room would have one more purpose added to its multi-use capacity, that of a distance learning lab. Using ISDN technology available this year in our geographic region, RCS can be linked to the Rochester Area Interactive Television Network (RAITN), allowing us the capability of offering and receiving Distance Learning courses with R.I.T., SUNY Brockport, MCC, and neighboring schools such as Canandaigua, Victor, Red Jacket and Bloomfield. Distance Learning provides Districts with the capacity to offer such courses as Japanese, Advanced Math, Sign Language and AP courses, using the power of technology to link small enrollment classes from several sites at once to provide economies of scale. This facility could also be used by the community for training and for adult education opportunities for evening classes from local colleges. The RAITN network currently involves some thirty Rochester area schools, the Rochester Museum and Science Center, and WXXI, and offers our students the opportunity to pursue coursework or even virtual fieldtrips to the Houston Space Center, the Smithsonian Museum or a host of other sites. The facility would be used by students of all age levels in the school program, plus adults in the community, and a special link would be installed so that the auditorium could also be connected for special programs and teleconferences. Additional information on RAITN is available at their website at www.monroe.edu.

The District is working with Ashley- McGraw Architects of Syracuse and BPD Municipal Finance of Victor in planning the details of the project and its funding. Representatives of both of these firms will be available for a special public meeting about the project scheduled for Tuesday November 10 at 7 p.m. in the auditorium. The scope of project work was developed by a community committee as an outgrowth of our Long Range Plan in 1995, and has been reviewed with the District Shared Decision Making Committee at several points in its development. We hope to use a special 10% state aid incentive new this year for building projects approved after July 1, 1998 to bring an additional \$150,000 of State money to our District by completing this major project and preparing ourselves for the world of the 21st Century. The Board of Education encourages all community members to learn more about this proposal and to cast their votes in November.

STAR Program Information

200 senior citizen homeowners in Romulus know its for real! They saved an average of \$750 on their school taxes this year thanks to the new STAR program, because the first \$50,000 of their home's value was exempted from school tax. Some of them ended up paying no school tax at all! The good news for all of us is that beginning in 1999 the STAR program affects all homeowners regardless of age or income. By applying to your town assessor, any school taxpayer may receive a \$10,000 exemption on their primary residence beginning with next year's school tax bills. That exemption is scheduled to increase to \$20,000 in 2000 and to \$30,000 in 2001. This will mean an average savings of over \$150 for all homeowners who apply next year. Watch for information about applying for STAR for 1999 from your town assessors.

Fayette Tax Rate

While expenditures were up a reasonable 3.19% in this year's school budget, the tax levy for the school District went up 8.86% this year, largely as a result of State Aid that went everywhere but Romulus. The average tax rate in the school district went up a corresponding 8.78%. In Fayette, however, the impact was not so clear cut. Because of a change in the equalization rate, a figure issued by the New York State Office of Real Property Tax Services meant to reflect the degree to which assessments accurately reflect what homes sell for in any given area in any given year, Fayette school taxes went up closer to 12.24%.

The State's sampling of properties in the Town of Fayette for 1997 produced an equalization rate of 104.72. The same sampling a year later produced a rate of 99.86. This decrease of 4% caused a corresponding increase in the tax rate. This means that the correction which an equalization rate seeks to provide was less necessary and that the tax rate for the Town should be closer to the average for the rest of the School District. Whereas last year Fayette residents paid a rate of \$13.88 per thousand when the average for RCS was \$14.36, this year Fayette residents are paying \$15.58 while the average rate for the school District is \$15.62. Questions about equalization rates may be best answered by your assessor or the Office of Real Property Tax Services in Waterloo or Albany.

The school itself cannot control assessments, equalization rates, or the State Aid it receives, and continues to do its best to keep its actual expenditure increases within reason. Since 1990, total budget expenditures in Romulus are up 3.18% per annum. The tax rate increases in Fayette this year, and in all of our Towns the past three years, are NOT a function of spending increases. They are instead part of a revenue problem requiring our community to adjust to school tax rates which are more reflective of the State and the Finger Lakes Regional averages. Last year's average tax rate per thousand of true value was \$16.96 throughout our BOCES area - Romulus' current year average rate is \$15.62. Romulus is pleased that it continues to tax at a rate lower than average, and spend at a lower than average rate per pupil, while its students perform at rates much higher than average on the School Report Card.

Tax Collection Continues

Residents may wonder why it is advantageous for the school and for them to use the return envelope included with tax bills and mail their payment to Syracuse. This is a fair question and deserves a fair answer.

Romulus is in its second year of using a "lock-box" tax collection service offered by Chase Manhattan Bank. Several Rochester area Towns and Schools use this service, as well as our neighbor South Seneca. The advantage for the District is purely financial. By depositing money directly into an interest bearing money market account at the bank itself the same day the envelope is opened, we gain one to two days of additional interest income on our deposits rather than collecting the cash in person at the school. Taxpayers are credited with having paid their bills on the date of the postmark on the envelope, and the money is readily available to the school by means of an electronic banking system, so that we move it to maximize interest as soon as possible. The efficiency of the lock-box operation is such that we have been able to contain our costs for tax collection at their 1993 levels, while improving our ability to put the money to immediate use in interest earnings. This is similar to what large corporations do with mortgage or car payments that may travel to places far away for processing.

The advantage to the taxpayer includes the convenience of mailing the payment, as well as the savings the District passes on by way of interest revenue. Every dollar we make of interest is a dollar we don't have to raise in next year's taxes. Tax Collection continues in October with a 2% penalty imposed on payments postmarked after October 2nd.

Romulus Central School
Capital Project '98
Talking Points

What: 3 Areas

Gym (\$856,500)	Auditorium (\$153,500)	Library (\$104,000)
Replace Gym Floor	Reupholster Seating	Add Distance Learning Lab for RAITN
Add Barriers to Coaches' Offices	New Carpet	
Add Entryway/Foyer	New Curtains	
Add Special Education Room- OT/PT	Replace Rheostat Light Controls	
Reconstruct Parking Lot (\$214.5K)	Add two banks Stage Lighting	
Add Sidewalk on North side/Entry	New Sound System	
Resurface Tennis Courts	Reuse tax room as storage/control	(Other)
Add baskets + Lights (Coin operated)		(\$48,000)
		Masonry Repair
Subtotal of work above = $\frac{\$1,162,500 + \$338,000}{\$1,500,000}$ Total		Contingencies + Fees

Why:

Gym Floor is popping up from subfloor	Added Special Ed Room open to public
Weight Room is dangerously undersized	Auditorium requires upkeep
Parking lot has been bad for years	Finish job of replacing light controls
Security requires a main entrance	Sound System needs replacing
Tennis courts need upkeep	Curtains can no longer be fire-proofed
Gym Teachers' Office are not secure	Distance Learning Lab in Long Range Plan
Insufficient Storage Space Currently	RAITN technology now available to us
Public Lavatories are insufficient/ not accessible	Masonry needs repointing on 1938 structure

Take advantage of 10% Incentive Aid to complete projects approved after July 1, 1998

At What Cost?

Total Project: 1.5 Million Dollars
87.4 % State Aided
We have on hand: \$118,000 Capital Reserve
 \$25,000 Member Item
 ????? Back Federal Aid

Maximum Tax Impact = \$0.06 per thousand (one third of one percent)

Vote Information

Public Meeting November 10, 1998
Public Vote November 16, 1998
Must have Voter Approval to Proceed

MAY be able to do at NO new cost: add back Federal Aid, and/or borrow and arbitrage