

Alex Area Stewards have defined thirteen key destiny drivers that will work to strengthen economic vitality for the region. Over thirteen weeks you will read about each destiny driver and its importance to the region. If you find a destiny driver that ignites your passion for the future, call the Alex Area Stewards at (320)763-4545 or visit the website at www.alexareastewards.com and become part of shaping the destiny of our region.

Destiny Driver – Build a new high school with a regional auditorium for Alexandria area students and communities by 2014.

A long-range, two-phase plan based on community input and feedback

The District 206 Board of Education spent several years listening, securing community input, and developing a long-range facility improvement plan that would provide our community's children with up-to-date, safe, healthy and nurturing learning environments.

This two-phase plan focused on higher-priority needs in Phase I of the plan – critical facility and space needs for many of our elementary students, as well as current and future space needs for our early learners (birth to age 5). The Phase I building referendum, a \$24.5 million bond measure approved by voters on September 25, 2007, provided funding for the construction of a new K-6 elementary school [Woodland] to replace Washington Elementary, a new Early Education Center (connected to the new elementary school), and health-and-safety improvements at Garfield Elementary. In addition, the district purchased land for a future high school.

By securing land in Phase I, District 206 voters showed support for taking the first step toward building a new high school. Phase II of the district's long-range facility improvement plan proposes a referendum for a new high school in 3-5 years. This two-phase plan allows the district to proactively prepare for Phase II in order to spread the cost of the plan over a longer period of time to keep costs and tax impacts as reasonable as possible. It also provides sufficient time to engage the community in the planning and design process.

Jefferson High School (JHS) facility and space needs

According to John Ryberg, School Facilities Specialist, with the Minnesota Department of Education, Jefferson High School, which was built in 1957, has significant needs in terms of site, classroom space, as well as health and safety concerns. They include:

- A small 45-acre, land-locked site that is below state guidelines
- Safety and security concerns
- Insufficient classroom space, including temporary classrooms that were built in the 1970s and undersized band, choir, and orchestra rooms.
- Many site, mechanical and programmatic limitations:
 - Limited parking
 - Poor electrical wiring
 - Insufficient hot water heat
 - Inadequate univent system
 - No auditorium
 - Drainage and wetlands problems
- Limited outdoor physical education and co-curricular activities space
- Overcrowded core space (kitchen, cafeteria, commons, hallways)

In March 2008, in response to the needs and concerns at JHS, the School Board closed on property for a future high school site. The 167-acre parcel of land is located at the intersection of 50th Avenue and Pioneer Road and is two miles from Woodland Elementary and is easily accessible from Discovery Middle School.

An opportunity to shape our future

The destiny driver to build a new high school for Alexandria area students and communities by 2014 not only aligns with Phase II of the district's long-range facilities plan but reflects the priorities of area residents. In a recent community perception survey, 78.9% of respondents ranked education first as very important to their quality of life. For the past 128 years, District 206 has created and sustained a highly regarded school system within a thriving community. A new high school would provide the opportunity to extend this long-standing tradition of educational excellence into the future. In addition, an auditorium would be a natural asset in developing, promoting, and showcasing the region's thriving art and cultural gifts. Community involvement is encouraged in creating a new high school design that would house grades 9-12 and incorporate features that prepare graduates for skills needed in the 21st century.

Published by Echo Press – 8/14/09

Author: Alex Area Stewards