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District 95 prepares to invest in school buildings

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The Paris-Union School District 95 Finance and Facilities Committee met Monday, Aug. 4, to discuss bringing a Limited Notice to Proceed (LNTF) to a vote during the upcoming board meeting—an important step in a multi-phase plan to address long-term infrastructure needs across the district.

“What we’re looking to do is bring the notice to proceed to a vote at next Monday’s board meeting, rather than doing information one month and action the next,” Superintendent Mary Morgan Ryan said. “We’ve been talking about this for a while. I feel like everybody’s pretty well informed. Plus, we took a beat when we got some new board members, and kind of restarted and got everybody on board, and that has slowed us down. If we are looking to do something next summer, we can’t wait too much longer.”

The proposed vote during the Monday, Aug. 11 board meeting will authorize spending \$500,000 to move forward with early project steps under the LNTF. Specifically, the approval would allow contractors with Opterra Energy Services to begin the design phase of the first part of an expansive project across multiple district facilities ahead of full contract execution.

“That (approval) is to the design work on the first part,” Morgan Ryan explained. “We have that money in our Capital Projects Fund balance so we can pay that. We will have that basically replenished this year with the one percent sales tax because we bring in a little more than that every year with sales tax money.”

“It’s the perfect use of sales tax, that is what it is meant for. That is what (the tax) is voted in by the voters for, for school facility work,” she added.

Morgan Ryan also noted that the funds have been “accumulating over time.”

“We haven’t really used it because we have been thinking something like this would happen,” she explained.

If the LNTP is approved, the district will begin the design process, creating an “all-encompassing” plan. The plan will return to the board to be evaluated, at which time the board will decide “which bits and pieces of the project to move forward with,” according to Morgan Ryan.

In a lengthy presentation by representatives from Opterra, several major facilities improvements were noted, including critical systems throughout the district, like:

- Fire Protection Systems
- Electrical Upgrades
- H/LS Improvements
- Building Automation Systems

Key challenges were identified inside district buildings, most notably inside Mayo Middle School, those challenges included:

- Existing fire protection systems are not addressable for emergency responses
- Mechanical systems are well beyond their expected useful life
- Current building automation systems are obsolete and inefficient
- Ventilation rates do not meet current code requirements

“We’re not going to recommend doing everything on the list,” Sharon Uslan, a project representative from Opterra noted. “There are certain systems we can extend the useful life of, similar to the roof that still has five years of life remaining.”

She also emphasized that agreeing to the LNTP does not commit the board to the entire project scope.

“One of the things that is good about this process is that even if you approve the limited notice to proceed, you don’t have to approve everything in the bundle; you can cherry-pick through those items,” she said. “I think there is only a one percent chance that you do everything on the list ... we’re not going to come back to you and recommend that you do everything. I think there are certain systems that you have that have more useful life in them.”

A tentative schedule was also showcased by the contracting representatives. It included the following, potential dates:

- Aug. 11, 2025: Initial Board Approval
- October 2025: 50 percent Design Review
- December 2025: 90 percent Design Review and GMP Discussion
- January 2026: GMP Approval
- February 2026: Implementation Agreement Finalization
- Summer 2026: Project Completion

“This is a little aggressive, but I think we can do it,” Uslan said, noting the need to act soon to avoid cost inflation.

Following the presentation, board members provided feedback and requests to the superintendent for additional information. Among the requests were questions about the district's maximum bond capacity rate, what rate the district would qualify for, the district's current debt limit and specifics surrounding the Guaranteed Maximum Price (GMP) if the district were to go forward with Opterra.

Morgan Ryan took the feedback and shared that she would have additional information available by the Aug. 11 meeting.



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