



**Journal
für
Facility Management**
Wissenschaft trifft Praxis

Heft 12/2016

ISSN 2415-1858

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Heightened Change Awareness and Responsiveness Through Continuous Facility Master Planning

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Abstract:

Explanation of the Problem. Typical facility master plans are designed to follow a series of rigid steps aimed at achieving fixed goals and objectives, within a particular timespan and at an expected cost. Such time horizons are usually five, ten, and sometimes even fifteen or twenty years. Fixed plans tend to serve well when the future is foreseeable, and few unexpected events occur in the markets, population, and other change trends of the area. In our facilities management consulting work with school districts in the USA, changes often resist predictability. This has led to many school districts abandoning master plans altogether, or to engage them in fits and starts. Out of more than 150 school districts with which the authors have worked, fewer than 10 have had active master plans. In the others the plans had been invalidated after only a few years by changes in external circumstances.

Approach. In our consulting practice, we recommend that school districts adopt a continuous, perpetual facility master planning process, as opposed to a rigid plan. We developed this process ten years ago for a school district that had not had any type of facilities plan for nearly eight years.

Results. We present the essential elements of the continuous facility master planning process as we have structured it in our recommendations to school districts. This process can be used by owners of large building inventories of all types as a viable alternative to fixed plans.

Keywords: master planning, planning process, perpetual planning

Introduction

Dwight David Eisenhower was not only a prominent World War II and NATO general, but he also served as president of both Columbia University and the United States. Among his well-known quotations is the following: “Plans are nothing; planning is everything.” A variation of this quote explains perhaps the motivation for his sentiment: “In preparing for battle, I have always found that plans are useless, but planning is indispensable.”

We introduce this paper on facilities planning with the quote from President Eisenhower because we have learned over the years that, in war or in peace, Eisenhower had it right. There is a distinctive advantage to having a school district adopt a never-ending facility master planning protocol - a planning procedure or process - over the formulation of rigid five- or ten-year facility master plans. Among best practice proponents, our concept of a continuous planning protocol/procedure/process is not widely recognized. The five- or ten-year master plan remains recognized best practice among facility planners. In this paper, we explain:

- how we came upon the idea of a continuous planning process;
- why we beg to differ with those who consider rigid plans to be the best practice; and
- the components and ingredients of continuous planning.

The Five- or Ten-Year Facility Master Plan

The five- or ten-year facility master plan is, at this time, the best practice prototype in facilities planning. It shares the “plan” philosophy with other plans, such as:

- retirement plans;
- business plans;
- football/soccer match plans;
- travel plans;
- battle plans; and
- career plans.

In this sense, plans are rigidly designed step-by-step strategies aimed at reaching unchangeable goals and objectives. They may contain milestones on the way to reaching an ultimate goal. They may consist of several elements or components that are in themselves miniature plans within a larger plan. In all cases, plans are governed by schedules and other time factors, such as five- or ten-year time horizons, as well as intermediate goals or objectives to be reached by certain dates. Plans are thus firm prescriptions for successive

moves on the way to an intended purpose or outcome. Merriam Webster's Dictionary therefore defines "plan" in this fashion –

1. a method for achieving an end;
2. an often customary method of doing something: a procedure; and
3. a detailed formulation of a program of action.

The definition offered by the Council of Educational Facility Planners International (CEFPI) is presented in a key document titled "Master Planning School District Facility Needs". This document notes

Most educational entities confront any number of facility issues. Upgrading the physical infrastructure to meet current and future demands can be intimidating. The quantity and magnitude of capital issues in a changing environment can be overwhelming. How can all this complexity be made coherent to assure that decisions are sound and limited resources are wisely allocated?

The answer is the Facility Master Plan. The purpose of the Facility Master Plan (FMP) is simple: To provide a road map from the existing physical plant to a consensus future vision of educational environments that is fully aligned with the mission of the school district. The FMP is an investment that coordinates and aligns many diverse considerations into a strategic long term vision for facilities. It can be cursory or comprehensive, limited to an individual facility or targeted to specific grade levels. A comprehensive FMP includes every capital asset within a district. The more effort that is put into the FMP, the more credible the results will be. Among many advantages, a well-executed FMP can be a significant factor in establishing the credibility necessary to gain voter acceptance, state or federal funding, or grants (Prager, pp. 33-37, n.d.).

The CEFPI document continues to provide excellent insights into the needed components of a plan. We urge our readers to study it thoroughly and include it in their electronic libraries. Despite its value as a state-of-the-art knowledge piece, the paper seems to assume automatically that the plan is finite, i.e., it is done when "a consensus future vision of educational environments that is fully aligned with the mission of the school district" has been achieved and implemented. We argue instead that the consensus future vision shall always be a target, with aligned and kindred accomplishments and achievements along the way. We further argue that said target is subject to movement and change at varying rates as well as ranges of predictability.

A ten year facilities master plan for the Chicago Public Schools, the third-largest school district in the United States, provides some additional insights into the characteristics of “plans”. The ten-year Chicago plan does not provide for a continuous process.

Here is the plan’s overview:

CHICAGO, September 23, 2013– Chicago Public Schools (CPS) today released the final version of its 10-year Educational Facilities Master Plan (EFMP), the District’s blueprint for facilities investments over the next decade. The 10-year EFMP plan includes a number of objectives, including:

- Improving CPS facilities in order to provide safe, healthy and supportive learning environments such as sufficient space for the number of students in the building and access to advanced technology, play lots, modern computer and media labs, libraries, and ADA accessibility;
- Upgrading facilities district-wide so that classrooms are equipped to deliver core instructional programs and to support, as needed, specialized programs through dedicated spaces, specialized laboratories, unique equipment, and enhanced technology infrastructure;
- Directing resources toward upgrading the quality of education students receive by expanding access to high-quality programs such as Selective Enrollment Schools, International Baccalaureate (IB) Programs, Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) programs, Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs and Service Leadership (military) schools. The Chicago area has near 10% unemployment, but more than 100,000 unfilled jobs and roughly 77% of all jobs today require some kind of technical skill set. Access to a STEM education is one way to address the skills gap that undermines our economic competitiveness and threatens our future prosperity;
- Addressing the gap between students who qualify for selective enrollment schools and the amount of seats available. Last year, 18,000 students applied for 3,000 freshman selective enrollment seats across the City. There are approximately 2,500 students who qualify for selective enrollment high schools, but CPS does not have enough capacity in selective enrollment high schools to accommodate these students; and
- Alleviating overcrowding at our neighborhood schools that are being stretched to capacity with capital improvements that will allow for a better learning environment for our children to focus and excel in the classroom. Based on 10th day enrollment in

SY13-14, CPS' Space Utilization Standards indicate that we have 84 schools that are overcrowded ("CPS to Release", 2013).

We note wryly that a five-year plan for 2014 to 2018 was instead issued by the Chicago Public Schools one year later as a revision of the earlier ten-year plan. This "new" plan's website now states:

NOTE: This content is out of date and may no longer be relevant. It is preserved for legal reasons ("Capital Improvement Plan", 2013).

The newest Chicago Public Schools capital plan, which covers 2016 to 2020, is scaled back considerably, perhaps just in time for an economic recovery to make its pessimistic goals no longer a necessity.

We dare to rest our case. Yet, to some of our readers, the "finite-plan-versus-infinite-planning-process" argument may seem overblown and hollow. We contend that it is not. The reason we insist on advocating a continuous planning process, despite best practice contraindications, has its roots in our ten-plus years of facility management consulting. With some notable and relatively rare exceptions, the use of traditional facility master plans just does not seem to work out well.

The Case for a Continuous Facility Master Planning:

During our consulting work on facilities issues with over 150 school districts in the USA, fewer than 10 have had any semblance of an active facilities master plan on which current facilities management decisions were based. It was not immediately apparent why so many school districts had

- abandoned their plans outright;
- never begun any efforts at plan implementation; or
- were in some form of denial about their master plans – firmly convinced they had a viable plan, even though the plan had not been looked at for many years

In addition, numerous school districts had worked for years, sometimes decades, without formal, complete, and comprehensive facilities master plans. They were making decisions on impulse, based on how circumstances, opportunities, and issues presented themselves at any given time. Some state departments of education require the formal submission of some types of facilities planning reports. In districts with such statewide requirements, the completion of these standard forms often became a substitute for more encompassing planning efforts.

It was initially puzzling to us why so few school districts had functioning, operational facilities plans. We suspected that, perhaps, many school districts were embroiled in large numbers of day-to-day issues that served as nearly constant distractions from plan development and implementation. Likewise, we surmised that the smaller school districts may not be able to afford to keep full-time in-house planners, and saw no justification for spending money on consultants to develop and implement a facilities master plan. It was not until recently that we began to understand more clearly and deeply why a different reason for “plan abandonment” was actually the dominant one. This major cause of plan demise was the apparent inflexibility, the rigidity of prescriptive five- or ten-year plans. Such plans prescribe preconceived steps leading to a goal or objective. When external circumstances change and no longer permit actions to be carried out as planned, plans are often perceived to be no longer relevant, feasible, and practicable. At that point, school districts often abandon their five- or ten-year plans. At times, such plan abandonment occurs without a formal move or decision. Plans are simply no longer used without formal moves or decisions to do so. They collect dust on bookshelves or serve as decorative doorstops. This leads some school district officials to firmly believe that the district “has a plan” when, in reality, it has been inactive for quite some time.

Conversely, we have also found evidence that, under conditions of substantial economic and demographic stability and/or predictability, fixed plans do work well as facility management tools. Nearly twenty years ago, the five-year facility master plan for Gwinnett County Public Schools in suburban Atlanta functioned in a highly predictable rapid growth environment. The extraordinarily steep population growth in this sphere of influence of Atlanta made a five year plan of action completely viable. The plan was and continues to be financed by a so-called Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST), approved consistently by successive voter referenda. The most current five year plan for 2013 to 2017, contains the following introduction:

Since 1997, the Gwinnett education SPLOST (e-SPLOST) has provided students with thousands of classrooms and major technology improvements. Gwinnett voters extended the one-penny e-SPLOST in 2001 and 2006 by wide margins. In November of 2011, Gwinnett voters approved another extension which we refer to as SPLOST IV. Thanks to the original e-SPLOST and the three renewals GCPS has been able to manage the challenges of dramatic growth in student enrollment, rather than being

managed by it. (The school district's student enrollment continues to grow... in 2013, enrollment grew by 3,720 students over the 2012 enrollment)

In addition to facility improvements, technology advancements are a substantial part of this e-SPLOST program. SPLOST IV includes:

- Anticipated revenue of \$876 million (By law, Buford City Schools will get \$17.1 million based on its enrollment, leaving GCPS with \$858.9 million.)
- Projects include 5 new schools and 9 additions and renovations.
- Also included is air conditioning for all middle and high school gyms and all elementary activity buildings, along with all kitchens that currently do not have air conditioning.
- Significant technology upgrades include retrofits for all schools and infrastructure support and digital content.
- Other facility improvements address preventive maintenance postponed due to budget cuts (roofing, painting, carpeting, etc.) (“The Plan: Meeting”, 2014).

The highly predictable growth conditions in Gwinnett County have made rigid planning a viable option. But in our experience, such conditions are few and far between among school districts in the United States. Consequently, we argue in favor of a never-ending planning process because it has been our experience that the less-dynamic, prescriptive approaches dictated by rigid plans with a fixed expiration tend to fail whenever changes in external conditions require more flexible and creative responses.

How We Came Upon the “Planning Process” Idea:

It sounds trite – but necessity truly is the mother of invention. About ten years ago, in a school district in the southeastern United States, we encountered a stalemate. The loggerheads condition had its origins in a situation that exists completely in eleven of the fifty states, and to some extent in an additional eight. In these eleven states, all boards of education are constitutionally “fiscally dependent”. In the remaining eight states, some school boards are fiscally dependent, whereas others are fiscally independent. This means that fiscally dependent school districts receive their funding from another geographically-related taxing authority – typically a county, city, or other taxing district in which the school districts are located. Fiscally dependent school districts have no taxing authority themselves. They depend on local funding from other taxing authorities. Local funding is typically the lion's share of a

district's income. Eleven of the fifty United States have only fiscally dependent school districts, while another eight have a mixture of fiscally dependent and independent districts. The remainder have only fiscally independent school districts (Gold et al., 1995).

The fiscally dependent school district with which we worked was in a prolonged stalemate with its taxing authority, the local county government. For numerous years, perhaps as many as eight, the county commissioners funding the school district's operations had decided to not supply any money for ongoing day-to-day building maintenance. They funded the maintenance staff's salaries, but provided no advance support for any maintenance work, saying "when it breaks, we'll pay to fix it." They also provided no funding whatsoever for capital improvement programs, renovations, additions, or new construction of schools.

It was therefore the county government that hired us to conduct an across-the-board performance assessment of the school district. The school district did not have the funds for such a study. This study included administration, academic programs, finance, human resources, technology, transportation, facilities, and student nutrition. While we were in contract negotiations for this work, we were also asked if we had any ideas for breaking the logjam. According to county officials, the school district was simply unwilling or unable to provide the county with a reasonable facilities master plan. Until such a plan was forthcoming, funding for facilities would simply remain "quarantined". We added the development of a facilities master plan to our contractual scope of work.

Our project initiation meeting took place in the school board's meeting room. School board members sat behind their name plates at assigned seats, and county officials placed themselves near the far end of a long conference table that led away from the school board's rostrum. Our team was seated between the two parties, uncomfortable to serve as an obvious buffer to confrontational posturing. The atmosphere was distinctly chilly. Our contractual presence had not been requested by the school board, but the superintendent informed us of his instructions to staff to be cooperative. Years of mutual mistrust, wariness, suspicion, and doubt dominated the interactions. We did not consider ourselves fortunate to be placed in this position.

Despite the unfriendly undertones evident in the relationship between the county and the school board, we were able to hold frank and constructive interviews with individual county commission and school board members as well as the county administrator and the district superintendent. We found ourselves in open and honest interviews with school staff, and thus able to conduct a thorough performance assessment. The assessment's results showed that the district's overall performance exhibited few significant deficiencies, leading to some

recommendations for improvement as well as commendations for current practices and procedures. In the end, the chasm of the facilities master plan remained: how could we develop a facilities master plan that the county commission and the school board would accept in earnest as common ground?

Interviews with key decision-makers at the county and school district led us to some important findings and conclusions. These were as follows:

Findings:

- County commissioners had developed and maintained a stance of “sanctions” by not funding facilities maintenance and master planning unless the school district prepared and submitted what they specified to be an acceptable master plan. They instructed the county administrator to enforce this posture. The stand-off was in its eighth year.
- The school district responded by submitting only what the school board and the school administrators felt was the correct plan of action, regardless of county demands. They advocated for their “cause” in the local media.
- An escalating war of words in the press solidified the stalemate, creating increasing distrust among the parties. No actions aimed at resolving the issues seemed evident.
- Non-elected community leaders became increasingly frustrated, as evidenced by occasional letters to the editor and requests to speak before meetings of the county commission and the school board. However, neither the elected commissioners nor the elected school board members appeared concerned about risking re-election.
- The county officials’ attitude was, collectively, “all you need to do is ask, and we’ll fund your request.” The school district’s officials countered “we know best what our needs are: you should listen to us and not lord your control of the purse strings over us.”
- Neither side appeared to be willing to budge or blink.

Conclusions:

- The stalemate is unacceptable. It should not be allowed to be perpetuated or institutionalized. It must be undone and conditions for its reappearance should be removed or neutralized.

- Cooperation should be the natural working relationship between the county and the school district. The constant improvement of the school district's facilities should be the common goal of the taxing authority and its fiscally dependent county school district.
- Instead of having the school district prepare a facilities master plan in supplication to the county commission, the county and the school district should instead engage in a joint and ongoing planning process. This process should be mandatory for the county as well as the schools. It should result in a binding, annual budget agreement for funding facilities, including maintenance.

We succeeded in having the county commission as well as the school board accept the idea of a planning process as a concept and as a potential alternative to an unacceptable stalemate. Both parties agreed to have us proceed with the development of a facilities master planning protocol. Development and implementation of this planning process was not without upheavals, disagreements, and other contentiousness. These are all human expressions during conflict. However, the common goal was implementation and problem solving, and the facilities master planning protocol became the county's and the school district's standard procedure after a shake-down period of about four to five months. These are rational expressions of human endeavor. Perseverance worked. In the end, both parties to the stand-off appeared eager to find a path to mutually-acceptable, sustainable normalcy. Before we ever knew of President Eisenhower's famous quote, we had invented planning as an alternative to plans.

It may once more sound clichéd: our last meeting in the school board's conference room saw the county and school representatives sit randomly interspersed around the large conference table. We sat at the school board's usual rostrum to make our final presentation. We were no longer used to serve as a buffer between two once-estranged parties. Even the physical evidence of a rift had disappeared.

By now, nearly ten years later, the formerly combative county and school district have surely modified the process, enhanced it, and perhaps made it better. We have since this time recommended so-called continuous or perpetual facility master planning protocols to numerous other school districts. We have found that a school district does not need to be fiscally dependent to benefit from planning as opposed to having a plan. The following is an example of our most recent version of a recommended planning protocol. It is written in our standard "finding/recommendation" format.

FINDING: The district does not have a current facilities master plan.

As required by statute, the school district has engaged in the in-house development of a capital improvements plan. However, such an effort is typically only a portion of a true, enduring planning process. This lack of a full and steady commitment to planning leaves the district at risk and can lead to poor decision-making and, possibly, to misguided funding and management decisions. These uncertainties include, but are not limited to, a lack of the following:

- optimum decision-making about new construction, renovations, and additions of school buildings and related facilities;
- optimum long-term financing for new construction, renovations, and additions of school buildings and related facilities;
- optimum funding for preventive and reactive facilities maintenance; and
- properly reasoned building closure, re-use, sale, or demolition decisions.

RECOMMENDATION:

Design and implement a continuous five-year facilities master planning protocol that supports the school district and the community in working cooperatively, diligently, transparently, and realistically on planning and funding all aspects of facilities use and management.

A five-year facilities master plan should embody a continuous process that guides facilities planning, design, and construction for the district. As such, it must:

- transcend as much as possible changes brought about by replacements of elected and appointed office-holders;
- support ongoing, close cooperation between school officials, school board members, other public officials at the local and state levels, and the general public;
- require all process participants to recognize, and work within, best practice parameters of funding preventive maintenance activities for school facilities; and
- empower the director of maintenance to develop preventive maintenance protocols, capital improvement programs, and related documentation for submission and adoption and funding by the school board.

The five-year facilities master plan should be prepared for implementation and initiation effective with the start of 2015-16. As such, it would be called the five-year facilities master plan 2015-19. It should contain an immediate funding request, spread over the first five years, for items such as new construction, renovation, additions, other capital improvement projects, and preventive as well as reactive maintenance. The funding request should also contain a forecast of potential needs for the remaining ten-year period. Thus the plan has details for

years one through five and a broader forecast for years six through 10. The plan should be extended each year to cover a subsequent five-year period (for example, the following year, it becomes the five-year facilities master plan 2016-20). This type of plan updating should become routine to keep it useful as a guiding document. The statutorily required capital improvement plan should be wholly incorporated in, and fully coordinated with, this effort. The five-year facilities master plan should address the following:

- the strategy required to meet the need for facility maintenance and improvement and for the capital investments necessary to support existing and projected educational needs of the district;
- educational goals of the district to satisfy the needs of students, parents, educators, administrative staff, and the community;
- realistic plans to help the district provide for its short- and long-range facility needs; and
- realistic spending plans on maintenance amounting to a minimum of two percent of current replacement value (CRV) of all district facilities. (Note: this percentage will need to be greater until deferred maintenance deficiencies have been removed.)

The following essentials should be included in plan development and maintenance:

A. Goal-Setting Around Four Priorities

Planning is a goal-oriented activity. No plans can be made without one or more goals having been identified. In this case, planners must address four critical factors throughout the planning and design process:

- facilities quality;
- educational program needs;
- budget; and
- time.

Before the planning process begins, the school board and district administrators should acknowledge that all four priorities need to be addressed. Thereafter, they should decide which, if any, of these four priority areas is most important. For example, if the district is facing financial limits, then budget may cause it to follow a certain path to its end. Likewise, if time is a constraint, then district staff and elected officials must consider that quality and educational specifications may have to take a slight back seat – yet not to the extent of

neglect. It would be advisable, instead, that key personnel address all four of these factors when considering compromises on the needs of the educational program. It is important for all decision-makers to become increasingly aware that decisions to fund school facilities at a lower-than-best-practice level at the present time may obligate the school district to confront significantly larger, consequential costs in the future.

Goal setting for the five-year facilities master plan should include the following actions:

- recommend priorities and strategies concerning proposed projects and will meet the facility needs and educational goals of the district;
- conduct a thorough review, analysis, and evaluation of data that relate to facilities. This should include any needed updates of facilities condition and the contents of educational specifications. This process is needed to obtain a clearer understanding of the issues that require resolution;
- continue gathering data and prepare a project plan of action. This action plan should identify projects and their priorities, define the scope, budgets, and construction/renovation schedules. This will help to coordinate the financial and project phase issues;
- provide a process that includes and involves all stakeholders: community, schools, administrators, the school board, other elected and appointed local and state officials, and other pertinent agencies of government; and
- develop implementation guidelines for the five year facilities master plan and the project plan of action.

B. The Facilities Master Plan Team

The superintendent and the school board should jointly establish a facilities master plan team. This team must function cooperatively for the master planning process to succeed. This means that there cannot be any debate over the proper funding level for facilities management, but that there can be vigorous examination, discussion, and debate concerning funding priorities and choices. Thus there are two overriding precepts the team must use as its governing principles:

- annual spending on preventive maintenance tasks must be between two to four percent of the current replacement value (CRV) of the district's building inventory; and

- the amount of deferred maintenance should never be allowed to rise above five percent of the district's CRV.

The team's core membership should consist of the superintendent, the assistant superintendent for auxiliary services, and the director of maintenance. The superintendent or the assistant superintendent should keep the school board abreast of all developments concerning facilities planning. As necessary, the team should also include an external advisory/resource board consisting of facilities and real estate experts, demographers, educators, and other stakeholders in the community. The team should guide the district's facilities planning, design and construction effort, and focus especially on educational philosophy, financing, and school facility needs. District and external professional staff should be selected to support the team's work efforts as needed.

Initially, team meetings should be conducted not less frequently than every two weeks. This will speed the process and focus the membership on those issues that are being researched, developed, or contemplated. As the entire process becomes more routine, the meetings may occur monthly and occasionally more or less frequently as needed.

It may be valuable to include members from other local and state government agencies on the team. Other school districts have found that by collaborating with non-educational agencies during the planning process, it is often possible to develop school facilities that provide for other needs and activities in the community, thus increasing prospective revenue from facilities use and a broader value of the facilities to the community. If it appears warranted, three or more subcommittees of the team may be established, such as:

- The Educational Process Committee;
- The Facilities and Real Estate; and
- The School District Facilities Finance Committee.

This may be valuable in some cases, but in smaller school districts, such a committee structure may lead to an over-complication of the planning efforts.

C. Community Meetings

Authentic community engagement instills a sense of genuine ownership within a community, which is a key factor in sustaining school improvement efforts. Community input is essential in any five-year facilities master planning process. The district's planning team should

conduct a series of “open forum” meetings around the county, encouraging community participation. Initially, there should be at least three rounds of meetings in strategic locations that maximize the potential for community involvement. The National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities website contains an extensive resource list on community participation in school planning.

During the first round of meetings, the planning process should be explained, goals and objectives presented, and community input solicited on the basic educational needs of the community. Included in this appraisal should be discussions eliciting information about all types of special education needs (remedial, disability-assisted, advanced placement, etc.) of students, and whether these needs are currently being met.

During the second round of meetings, the community should be apprised of the data collection efforts to date, the current status of the district’s school facilities, and the demographic data affecting the master plan.

The third round of meetings should present the five-year facilities master plan, including the facilities condition assessment, the project plan, the implementation plan, and the financing plan. Any recommendations to construct new facilities, close existing facilities, or consolidate two or more facilities should be explained in detail at this meeting. The plan’s response to meeting the educational needs of the community discussed during the first meeting should be presented. Sufficient time should be allotted to ensure full community awareness of the impact of all plan recommendations. Because there may be considerable community discussion regarding the proposed project plan and financing plan, follow-on meetings may be held to address these concerns.

D. Professional Consultant

Once the team has been established, it should hire, as soon as possible, a professional firm of planners, architects, and engineers to help prepare the initial five-year facilities master plan. The professional firm should develop a profile of the implications of the district’s educational goals for its facilities. The firm should propose actions that will help achieve these goals.

The firm should compare current and projected enrollment with the capacity of the existing facilities. Data that may be included are demographics, floor plans of school buildings, enrollment data from the previous school year, and average daily membership projections for the coming five years.

The firm should assess the physical condition of the schools along with any additional district-owned school-related buildings and facilities. Data should be collected building by building with as much detail as possible. If the district already has an excellent database showing projected capital improvement projects and costs, much of this information merely needs to be updated. Whatever data are compiled during the assessment should be used to analyze each facility's ability to meet the educational goals of the district as well. The suitability of the buildings and other facilities for future educational programs is as important as their physical condition. The firm should also review historic budgets, projections of major construction costs, and costs of renovations. For the average school district of five to ten thousand students, the initial services of a planning consultant should cost about 100,000 to 200,000 USD, with about half the initial amount required for updates in five year increments.

E. Planning Process Protocol

The foregoing description of facilities master planning is contained within a perpetual process: instead of having the district prepare a finite plan which ends after five or ten years with plan goals reached, partially accomplished, or not attained, the process is instead ongoing. We recommend that the district prepare a detailed plan with a five-year time horizon and a broader plan from year six to year 10. As the most current year of the plan is being implemented, a new 10th year should be added, thus maintaining the five- and ten-year time horizon. All plan years should be reexamined, and adjustments made as necessary based on changes in the local economy, demography, and other important external change factors. In the case of school districts located in areas with environments that are especially subject to often unpredictable and major changes, we recommend limiting the focus to a five-year planning horizon only.

Such a protocol allows the school district to avoid two major pitfalls:

- An unintended and detrimental interruption in planning due to a failure to achieve some or perhaps all goals of a rigid, fixed plan; and
- The stoic or stubborn adherence to implementing plan goals made immaterial due to unanticipated changes in the economy, demography, or technology impacting the district.

Conclusion:

The creation of finite plans (five, 10, 15, 20 years or longer) remains the widely-held best practice standard for facilities master plan implementation. By advocating continuous planning as a process, we have decided to challenge this best practice trend. It has taken us years to find an independent best practice source for our approach.

A reference to the planning process as a best practice may be found in work accomplished by the Coalition for Adequate School Housing (C.A.S.H.), an organization founded to promote, develop, and support state and local funding for K-12 construction that has a membership of more than 1,500 school districts, county offices and private sector businesses. One C.A.S.H. publication, *An Overview of the Facilities Master Plan Process*, states:

A Facilities Master Plan is an ongoing process that results in the creation of an evolving document. Both the process and document are designed to ensure that a school and community based plan is created through a consensus of participants in the Facilities Master Plan process. The purpose of the plan is to develop and communicate an efficient process to change the district's school facilities to better accommodate and support its current and future educational programs on a regularly updated basis. It will serve as a guide for assessing the need for facility improvements and capital investments... This Facilities Master Plan will determine the scope of repairs, modernization, upgrades, and/or new construction needed to serve the current and future school facilities needs of the community. It will also assess the variety of federal, state, and local funding sources and financing options available to the District and will import a prudent view of the scope of projects that may be accomplished reasonably with available funds ("An Overview of", n.d.).

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