

Gilmer-Lewis intercounty school project is on track

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By John Clise - Staff Writer , The Inter-Mountain

Members of the Lewis County Board of Education met with representatives of Williamson-Shriver Architects on June 27 to discuss the progress being made on the Gilmer-Lewis intercounty school project, which will be the first of its kind in the state.

The school site sets on 20 acres of property located in both Lewis and Gilmer counties. It will house an approximately 40,000-square foot school that will serve students in kindergarten through sixth grade from the eastern end of Gilmer County and the western end of Lewis County in the Linn area. The \$10 million school will replace Troy Elementary School in Gilmer County and Alum Bridge Elementary in Lewis County.

Ted Shriver told board members they were setting the stage for the rest of the state regarding future intercounty schools.

"What you are doing with Gilmer County is setting a new pace for the state," Shriver said.

Shriver said there has been a lot of good input coming in from the school committee, which has representation from both counties and includes educators, residents, parents and students.

The design of the school is ongoing, as input is taken and improvements are made to the school's template. Some changes include moving the playground area from the side to the back of the school for better student safety. It also has included moving access areas to give bus drivers and parents a better view when they exit the school campus.

Classrooms also are under development with questions being asked about the layout and the design.

Shriver said the architects are not creating a "cookie cutter" school; they are creating a facility that gives students, teachers and the community what they need.

"The School Board Authority does not dictate what goes into the school as long as you don't go over cost or over space requirements," Shriver said. "The layout is up to the committee."

Greg Martin, the project manager, said the proposed design will keep the lower grade levels, K-1, in one wing and grades 2-6 in a separate wing.

He said efforts are being made to explore what can be done to improve the point of view of drivers leaving the campus.

Some issues being discussed are what would be the best use of a media center or library as computer terminals and access will be located in the classroom. A library could be used more as a lounge for students to explore books rather than implementing a traditional library.

"The plan is still developing," Shriver said. "We still have more meetings to discuss the project."

"I think you are going to design a good school for Gilmer and Lewis County," Lewis County Board of Education member Cline Craig said. "We can't lose sight of the fact this is a school for both Gilmer and Lewis counties. This is going to give the students in those outlying areas a new school they wouldn't have had before."

Both Shriver and Martin stressed the importance of knowing what students, educators and the community want for the school. According to current building plans, the school will include 6,645 square feet for pre-school, handicapped and special needs students; 10,200 square feet for elementary classrooms; 7,341 square feet for core educational support areas; 1,300 square feet for music and art; 1,350 square feet for a media area; 3,340 square feet for physical education; and 5,857 square feet for core/building support areas.

The single-story school is being financed by the state School Building Authority and is expected to be a template for other intercounty school projects in the state.