

Greenies irate over demolition proposal

By Jerry Jordan
News Editor

The Beaumont Independent School District spent more than \$34 million to turn the former Hebert High School into the current Ozen facility just over a decade ago, but hundreds of former South Park Greenies were recently outraged when a report from Parsons-3D/I, a Houston-based condition assessment and construction company, suggested that renovating South Park Middle School would be too costly.

The recommendation was to raze the current middle school that once served as South Park High School rather than remodel the building, which has stood the tests of time since the 1920s and has a pedigree that includes being the original site of what is known today as Lamar University.

The report, provided to the district on June 21, states, "the bottom line is that both CSF Engineers and Parsons-3D/I would recommend replacement of the South Park Middle School as opposed to a renovation."

One of the primary contributors of the report's conclusion was the age of the facility. But the report included no numbers for a comparison of how much it would cost to renovate the school versus demolishing it. More troubling for some was that the report is contradictory in that, despite the recommendation to bulldoze the building, it was found to be structurally sound.

"Enclosed in the final report along with supporting photos of CSF's findings for your review and consideration," states a letter to BISD Superintendent Carrol Thomas from Parsons-3D/I project manager Johnnie Jordan. "Their findings indicate that the basic structure of the main building appears to be sound and in generally good condition. However, if the district's intent is to retain the historical appearance and value of this building it would become difficult and more



Photo by Jerry Jordan

An engineering report recommends demolition despite the finding that the building is structurally sound.

costly to renovate. After careful review of the systems that would be necessary to replace, it is apparent that the costs to renovate would be significantly greater than the cost to build new."

Opposition to the report is strong and a group of South Park alumni have created a Web site and formed a petition drive to keep the school intact.

"We better start tearing down half the things in Washington DC," said Lou Bodden Buxton, a 1965 graduate of South Park High School. "You just don't throw away something because it is old. There is so much history in that school, you can't just throw it away. If you go back and find out about its history, you will see that South Park was there before Beaumont was. That was a community that was here before Beaumont, back when the area was known as Spindletop.

"Some of my classmates

and I questioned Dr. Teuscher on the numbers from 3D/I because they didn't seem right, and then they redid the numbers, and they came up with a new report. It was amazing. If these people are going to spend our money then the numbers need to be right, but they were wrong. Something funny is going on, that's all I can say about it."

When questioned about why there were no numbers to compare the cost of demolition and building new to the cost of renovating the school, 3D/I's Jordan said the company was not hired to come up with numbers for this project.

"That analysis was not geared around that," Jordan said. "We were asked to get a third party to look at whether renovation was more feasible than tearing it down. There were no requirements for numbers."

Jordan said that such a study would cost thousands of dollars and be too expensive

to perform.

"That would be something that would be very lengthy and too costly to undertake at this point," Jordan said. "I couldn't give you a dollar amount."

When asked why the company could come up with a number as to how much it would cost to replace a structure and not one as to how much it would cost to renovate a structure, Jordan said, "The processes are different."

"I can agree with the feelings and attitudes of the community, and I agree with some of them, but the requirements of this study were not to compare one to another," Jordan said. "It would be difficult, if not impossible, to come up with an exact number."

In 3D/I's assessment of replacement costs that it used to develop a \$450 million bond proposal that is currently being reviewed by a bond committee, the company estimated that it would cost \$30.7 million to tear down and rebuild South Park.

Using the numbers from 3D/I the 103,579 square-foot school would cost more than \$300 per square foot to rebuild.

Throughout the nation schools are being built at a half of that cost. Additionally, several local engineers questioned for this article said a close review of 3D/I's numbers would reveal further errors and inflated costs.

Representations that 3D/I made to school district officials in January had to be changed when it was determined that most of their findings were incorrect. Then in March, just before the Community Advisory Bond Committee was about to consider putting a bond proposal in front of voters, it was again found that 3D/I's numbers were incorrect.

Local contractor Tom Neild, of H.B. Neild & Sons Construction Co., helped to point out numerous inaccuracies that he found in 3D/I's numbers.

"When we went to West Brook, 3D/I had called for a roof to be replaced at the

ROTC Building with bond money. That roof had already been replaced with insurance money from Hurricane Rita," Neild said at the time. "They also said the district needed to spend \$31,000 to replace the sidewalks in J-Hall, that all of the windows in J-Hall needed to be replaced, that the wall finishes in J-Hall were beyond their useful life, that the electrical terminals in J-Hall were beyond their useful life and that the lighting and wiring in J-Hall needed to be replaced.

"First there are few, if any, windows at West Brook, much less in J-Hall. And J-Hall is a hallway inside the school. It doesn't have a sidewalk. The electrical outlets are fine. They just need to be cleaned. The lighting is OK, and the walls are lined with lockers, so how can the wall finishes be beyond their useful life? These are just some of the problems that we were able to point out with what 3D/I has presented."

Neild told The Examiner in March that his findings caused him to have serious concerns about the accuracy of the study and whether or not 3D/I actually went room-to-room as they promised in their contract with BISD.

He said he was shocked when he heard one of the employees from 3D/I tell him that they had climbed into every attic and every basement in BISD. Because most schools in BISD have flat roofs, there aren't too many attics and only one campus, that of Central High School, has what could be considered a basement.

"We need something to fix the problems in this district, and we will back that if it is fiscally responsible," Neild said. "We can't stop the board from putting this bond proposal up for a vote, but if they come out using this information that we have discovered, we are going to actively campaign against it. We need to do something realistic and responsible."

The company's numbers were even more suspect after

See IRATE on page 10 A

South Eastex Sports
Vehicle Sales & Finance

450 E. FRWY • VIDOR
www.southeastexsports.com
409-769-8530
WE STAND BEHIND WHAT WE SELL!

Fisher
www.fisherboats.com

MERCURY

PRO **TAHOE**

IN-HOUSE FINANCING ON ANY BOAT!
Live Local, Have a Job, Have Some Cash Down, Come by and See Us!

NEW '07 Tahoe
19' 4.3 LITER V6 MECRUISER CUSTOM GALVA-SHEILD TRAILER **\$22,995**

NEW '07 ProCraft
20.5' BASS, 225HP MERCURY OPTIMAX CUSTOM GALVA-SHEILD TRAILER **\$35,500**

NEW '07 Tahoe S Sport
19.5' 190HP 4.3 LITER V6 MECRUISER, CUSTOM GALVA-SHEILD TRAILER **\$21,995**

NEW '07 Mako 181
BAY SHARK 18', CENTER CONSOLE, 90HP MERCURY, GALVA-SHEILD TRAILER **\$16,995**

NEW '07 Fisher
18' PONTOON, 50HP MERCURY, GALVA-SHEILD TRAILER **\$15,995**

NEW '07 Procraft
16.5 PRO 165, 90HP MERCURY, GALVA-SHEILD TRAILER **\$16,995**

Hantavirus confirmed in area

By Shauna O'Brien
Staff Writer

After only four days of complaining of flu-like symptoms, 29-year-old Allen "Joey" Bruce of Beaumont died of hantavirus pulmonary syndrome (HPS).

Bruce, who is survived by his wife and two sons, died April 21 at Memorial Hermann Baptist Hospital. What had reportedly seemed similar to a common cold was actually a deadly virus, one that has not been detected in Jefferson County since 1996, according to the Beaumont Public Health Department.

The Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) states that hantavirus was first detected in the United States at the Four Corners of the Southwest — Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona and Utah — in May 1993. The first reported case in Texas was also in 1993.

Rodents such as rats and mice carry HPS, which has symptoms such as fever, chills, headache, stomach pain and vomiting. The National Center for Infectious Diseases states that the principal carrier is the deer mouse.

The transmission mode of the virus is primarily airborne. It is usually contained in the droppings, urine and saliva of rodents, according to the DSHS. The virus then takes to the air via dust particles and can be inhaled by humans. The virus cannot be transmitted through person-to-person contact.

Traditional antibiotics are

Hantavirus Prevention

Indoors

- Keep a clean home, especially kitchen (wash dishes, clean counters and floor, keep food covered in rodent-proof containers).
- Keep a tight-fitting lid on garbage, discard uneaten pet food at end of the day.
- Set and keep spring-loaded rodent traps. Set traps near baseboards because rodents tend to run along walls and in tight spaces rather than out in the open.
- Set EPA-approved rodenticide with bait with "covered bait stations." Follow instructions carefully.
- Seal all entry holes 1/4 inch wide or wider with lath screen or other patching materials, inside and out.

Outdoors

- Clear brush, grass and junk from around house foundations to eliminate a source of nesting materials.
- Use metal flashing around the base of wooden, earthen or adobe homes to provide a strong metal barrier. Install so that the flashing reaches 12 inches above the ground and six inches down into the ground
- Elevate hay, woodpiles and garbage cans to eliminate possible nesting sites. If possible, locate them 100 feet or more from house.
- Trap rodents outside. Poisons may be used, but be sure to keep them out of the reach of kids or pets.
- Encourage the presence of natural predators, such as non-poisonous snakes, owls and hawks.
- Getting rid of all rodents isn't feasible, but with effort you can keep the population low.

Source: www.cdc.gov

ineffective against viral infections, but taking certain measures can prevent contracting HPS. The health department warns that it is important to remember to "tightly close garbage cans, pet food containers and other food sources for rats and mice." It also helps to wear protective gloves and a dust-mask and to wash those items before removing and disposing of

them, making sure to always "double-bag and seal dead rats or mice, nests or droppings in plastic bags" before disposal.

The health department also suggests that people contact their local health care provider if hantavirus is suspected.

Shauna O'Brien can be reached at (409) 832-1400, ext. 248, or at shauna@theexaminer.com.

REGISTER NOW FOR:

Summer II

Classes start July 13

Fall 2007

Freshman Orientation

July 24, 5-7p.m. or August 9, 9-11a.m.

Classes start August 23

Go to www.lit.edu for a complete list of LIT course offerings. See the 'Class Schedule' under 'Helpful Downloads' on the home page.

For More Information call

Student Services at (409) 880-8321

Call Toll-Free • 1-800-950-6989



A Member of The Texas State University System
Lamar Institute of Technology is an equal opportunity/affirmative action education institution and employer.

Choose from 50 Career Plans

IRATE

from page 7 A

The Examiner bought the same computer program, RS Means, that was used to estimate the costs to replace buildings in BISD. Using the exact same criteria as 3D/I, the newspaper came up with costs that were different than 3D/I.

Buxton said she had reviewed all of the material that she could get her hands on from BISD and 3D/I about the plan to demolish South Park. She said she is also curi-

ous as to why the numbers from 3D/I keep changing.

"If you go to the grocery store, and you get a basket of groceries, and there is no price when you get to the register, and the checkout person says, 'Just pay this set amount and take your groceries home,' are you going to do that?" Buxton asked. "We don't run our homes that way. Why should we run our school district that way? Show me how you are going

to spend that money. That is the people's money, and the district needs to be on a budget. If it is going to cost 'X' to build a new school, and it is going to cost 'Y' to renovate, then we need to know those numbers. The district would rather destroy South Park than tell how much it would cost to fix it."

For an editorial addressing this topic, see page 29 A in this week's The Examiner.