

Public voted down \$61-million bond issue Tuesday, but school board president Dan Diepenbrock, administrators insist high school expansion critical

By LARRY PHILLIPS • Daily Leader

Voters turned down a bond issue Tuesday that would've expanded and improved schools and facilities in the USD No. 480 district. Board of education president Dan Diepenbrock, administration members and the DLR Group, the architects of the bond issue, met Wednesday to discuss the outcome of the election.

"With the help of the Blue Ribbon Committee, we put together a proposal and submitted it to the voters. Now we need to find out what part of the proposal caused it to be rejected," Diepenbrock said. "In the debate leading up to the election, we obviously heard many different reasons for opposing it, but we are going to now go to the voters, get their input on why the proposal failed and come up with a project that is acceptable."

As Diepenbrock expressed Wednesday morning, bond proponents are most concerned – for the moment – with space at Liberal High School.

"We are overcrowded at the high school today, so we need to get to work to resolve that situation," he said. "With respect to the other proposed improvements, we just need to prioritize

each project and find out what the community will accept and what it won't.

"The Blue Ribbon Committee and the Yes Committee worked incredibly hard to put together this proposal and in informing the public about what the bond issue would finance. Hours and hours were spent putting together literature and making presentations throughout the community," he added.

With the defeat of the issue at the polls, some were worried the work put in by the Blue Ribbon Committee would fall by the wayside.

"Since we learned the results, I've spoken with several members of the Blue Ribbon Committee and, I'm happy to report, their enthusiasm is still very high. They are ready to roll up their sleeves and get back to work on this," Diepenbrock said.

Diepenbrock and the various pro-bond committees believed they put out solid information, but perhaps, people were unable – or didn't want to – absorb all of it.

"My biggest disappointment with the process so far are twofold.

First, during the campaign comments were made to the effect, 'We don't know what we are voting on.' Or, 'In previous bond issues we knew exactly what the money was going to be spent on,'" Diepenbrock said. "Anyone making such statements just chose to be uninformed.

Detailed information on this project was presented to the community in many different ways, including almost 40 presentations made at various meetings throughout the community. The USD 480 Web site had an abundance of information available, including the exact dollar amounts and architectural drawings of the proposed improvements.

"Second, I'm really disappointed with comments to the effect that the project needs to be cut

back to allow only for the bare essentials,”

he continued. “Is that the kind of community we want to live in? One that invests only in what we need just to get by?”

“I think it will be very difficult to persuade young families to move to Liberal and invest in this town and start a life here if they learn that the community’s attitude is to only invest in and live with the bare essentials, including with respect to the schools where their children will spend most of their waking hours,” Diepenbrock said.

The bond issue was defeated in a 60-percent against and 40-percent yes vote, with 2,781 votes cast.