Drew Lovett

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Specialty Beat: Business
Shippensburg School Board in midst of Capital Campaign

 The Shippensburg Area School District School Board along with the Shippensburg Foundation approved a capital campaign last summer aimed at improving the Shippensburg Area Senior High School.

 The Flagship Proud fund is a proposal made in part with the Shippensburg Arts & Athletics committee, the board and the foundation. The fund is a multi-dimensional plan with three separate renovations and upgrades to the SASHS.

Part 1: would require construction to improve the front of the high school with the construction of a new patio, Part 2 includes renovations to the seats, lights and sound system in the auditorium and the third part includes the construction of a multipurpose turf stadium next to the school.

 The board held various contentious work sessions throughout the spring and summer of 2018 where community members, students, teachers, alumni and coaches could openly voice their thoughts or concerns regarding the fund.

In one meeting Tyler Fairchild, Shippensburg Parks and Recreation Authority director, outlined a plan to make improvements to Veterans Stadium hoping to renew their contract with SASHS that was not received by the board.

David Lovett, Shippensburg School Board President feels the district’s plan to own and construct their own stadium would not only cut costs but the district would be able to control when and who uses the facility.

Lovett believes Veteran’s Stadium is obsolete, it is no longer safe to play on and that the players are at a disadvantage when they’re away competing on turf fields.

“Don’t forget it’s also a Title IX violation,” Lovett said. “Boys and girls have the right to have equal facilities and opportunities and if we stay in Veteran’s Stadium the district is a sitting duck for a lawsuit.” Lovett said.

Spicka, vice president of the board, agreed that it is time for the district to move forward in upgrading its facilities. She’s excited to finally have the funds to invest in improvements that will enhance students’ experiences.

“The seats are worn out [in the auditorium], the wallpaper is peeling, it feels like the room has been abandoned. The microphones cut out in the declining sound system,” Spicka said.

She also believes strongly in building a turf stadium all players can use insisting that constructing a multipurpose stadium is in compliance with Title IX.

“Telling girls that they have to play on inferior fields sends a message to girls that the district and community do not value them as much as they do male athletes,” Spicka said.

According to Lovett, the construction stadium was originally supposed to begin in late winter but was delayed because of a drainage study being conducted in the borough.

He now believes it will be completed by fall 2020 school year.

Lovett explained that extra-curricular and co-curricular activities are sometimes the main motivators for students and that an improvement would enhance morale and potentially boost test scores.

“These activities are just as important as academics and positively correlate with it. Studies show that they teach social skills, teamwork and school pride.” Lovett said.

Spicka believes the outcome of the 2019 board election could impact the construction of the multipurpose stadium with several candidates running to stop funding the project.

“There should be no issues implementing the projects,” she said. “I met with students who felt like they were in a “poor” district, other teams come to play on our field [Veterans Stadium] and cite it as sloped—we are finally in a financial position to make quality investments for students and teachers.”

Lovett feels the stadium can be useful for players and is also a money-making venture for the community.

“It’s a multisport field, we could use it for PIAA playoff games, fundraisers, community events and graduation,” Lovett said.

He explained that the district pays Luhrs Performing Arts Center at Shippensburg University $3,000 to hold graduation each year. Lovett emphasized that these costs and booster clubs paying to play on the turf fields at SU could be avoided and invested elsewhere.

“[These improvements] create a sense of school unity,” Lovett said. “It saves money, the community learns how to complete capital campaigns, it’s an opportunity for local businesses people to advertise and students and teachers get to create new traditions at SASHS.” Lovett said.

Lovett noted that Steve Dolbin, an art professor at Shippensburg University, had children who attended SASD, is active in the arts & athletics committee and will be donating an original sculpture when the new stadium is completed.

Misty Knight, a human communications professor at the university, is the head of the Arts & Athletics committee and has children who attend SASD. According to Lovett, her committee will pay for any additions to the auditorium renovation.

“I’m interested in enhancing the facilities and offering a safe environment for students, teachers and administrators to learn and grow together,” Lovett said.