

**LT looking at athletic field house**Brooke Williams / Published: March 4, 2020

The Lackawanna Trail School Board heard preliminary plans on Monday for a possible new athletic field house at Lions Pride Stadium.

At Monday’s board meeting, Superintendent Matthew Rakauskas said the district has worked hard to accommodate student athletes, but it’s a “constant give and take,” especially when wrestlers and football players have overlapping seasons, similar training needs and have to share facilities.

“It’s clumsy, it’s time consuming, it’s dangerous, and our student athletes are really not getting the best bang for their buck,” he said.

Since December, he said a committee with representation from the school board, administration and athletics department has been meeting to discuss the potential of this project, although the idea has been bounced for about 10 years.

Head football coach Steve Jervis said he was surprised that Lackawanna Trail did not have a varsity locker room for football players when he first started working for the school district.

Jervis explained that the current weight room facility is too small, with students having to perform lifts down the hallway and interrupt practices and games by carrying weights and bars through the gym.

This overcrowding not only causes safety concerns for students, but leaves quality equipment in storage that cannot fit in the weight room, he said, adding that moving the weight room equipment two times per year poses personal injury risks.

Valley View School District also donated used football lockers, which Jervis said was a $15,000-20,000 value.

Rakauskas, Jervis and other coaches in attendance stressed that the field house would not only benefit football players, as other teams and physical education classes could use the weight room as well.

“I think we could kill three birds with one stone: a new varsity locker room, a new concession stand and a new weight training facility for all our athletes at Lackawanna Trail,” Jervis said.

Business manager Keith Glynn said the district has set aside a significant portion of the fund balance for capital projects such as the field house.

“Right now, we have $2 million assigned for future capital projects, and this project should come in below half of that, maybe lower if we have donations,” Glynn said.

Rakauskas has also been looking into grant funding options that could offset expenses.

“We’re in a position where we think that this fall or early winter, we can begin a field house building project that would serve all these needs,” he said.

Board member Brian Petula acknowledged the need for a field house, but said he wants to make sure the district isn’t putting it before improvements on the education side that could impact a larger number of students.

“I want to make sure that we are crystal clear about where do we put our next dollar where it has the most leverage and impacts every student in the district,” he said.

Rakauskas said the goal would be to complete this project without sacrificing any educational needs.

Next week, the board will approve the 2018-19 single audit from Murphy, Dougherty & Co. as submitted.

Glynn said the auditor provided a “clean audit opinion” for Lackawanna Trail.

“The district has been very fiscally sound over the past three years,” he said. “We’ve been able to accumulate a fund balance of around $4,654,000, which is in part why we’re starting discussions about capital improvements.”

The district has an outstanding bond from around five years ago and has an opportunity to recall it in September, which will be reviewed in the upcoming months with the board and public.

Glynn said interest rates are favorable and the district could save approximately $274,000 over the remaining 15 years of the bond.

Additionally, Rakauskas said rather than updating the district’s policies all at once to put them in line with Pennsylvania School Boards Association templates, the board will look at one group at a time, with first readings of all policy numbers in the 200s on the agenda next week.

Next week, the board also intends to vote on the following:

\*Approve an E-Rate wireless access point upgrade to ePlus for better internet access in the high school at a pre-E-Rate cost of $33,939.50, pending E-Rate and general operating budget funding approval. (The district only pays 40 percent of this cost).

\*Approve an internet service provider proposal from Frontier, Comcast or Granite, eligible for an E-Rate discount.

\*Approve a senior class field trip to Six Flags planned tentatively for May 15-16.

\*Approve Mary Kate Rodenbach as a full-time secretary to begin March 23.

\*Approve an applicant for a new maintenance II position at the high school. (Applications still accepted).

\*Approve the Ski Club request for a two-day trip to Vermont in January 2021, with the exact location and dates to be decided, at a cost of up to four substitute teachers to the district.

\*Approve Judy Ambrose’s unpaid leave request for three and a half days April 6-9.

\*Acknowledge the resignations of Keith Glynn, junior high basketball coach, and Sarah Richards, basketball cheerleading coach, both effective immediately.

\*Approve Steve Beckish as a volunteer golf coach for the 2020-21 school year.

\*Approve Charlie

Cobb and Luke Ryon as volunteer assistant baseball coaches for the 2019-20 season.

\*Approve Vince Kalinoski Jr. as a volunteer football coach for the 2019-20 and 2020-21 school years.

The LTSB is scheduled to meet again on Monday, Feb. 9 at 7:30 p.m.