

# FORT MILL SCHOOLS

*Office of the Superintendent*

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## NEWS RELEASE

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**TO:** Fort Mill Times, The Herald, Charlotte Observer, WRHI, CN2

**FROM:** Dr. Chuck Epps, Superintendent

**DATE:** 01/19/2011

**RE: Board Approved Land and Facility Acquisitions**

Annually, the Fort Mill School District updates its Long-Range Facility Plan which outlines capital land and building needs for the upcoming ten years. This plan supports the District's long-term commitment to excellence in providing every student, teacher, and staff member with outstanding educational and operational facilities. Strong community support has enabled the District to invest wisely in its school campuses, classrooms, and operations.

Fort Mill School District continues to be the fastest growing in South Carolina, while at the same time the smallest geographically. The School District budget is comprised of two distinct sources of money - operations and capital. By state law, these sources cannot be commingled and must be used for their respective purposes. Therefore, capital needs of our School District are funded from revenue sources that may only be used for land and buildings and not operational costs such as salaries. Additionally, with the growth in our student population of more than 350% in the past ten years, the need for central support services has also increased and we have outgrown our current locations. Our motto, "Children First," not only encompasses our classrooms, but also extends to providing the highest level of daily direct and indirect support from our district-wide services to our schools.

During the January 18, 2011 Board of Trustees Business Meeting held at Fort Mill Elementary School, the Board approved a proposal by Dr. Chuck Epps, Superintendent, which recommended the acquisition of three properties: land slated for future Middle School #5; property for a new bus and maintenance facility; and two constructed buildings and property to serve as the District's new central office headquarters. These acquisitions will cost the District approximately \$12 million, which is \$3.2 million below the projected cost as budgeted in the 10 year facility plan. Additionally, this capital cost will be offset by proceeds from the future sale of two existing district-owned buildings located on E. Elliott Street, the district office and a maintenance facility.

“We feel these moves will strategically benefit our students and staff for many years and provide overwhelming tax savings to our property owners and businesses,” Dr. Epps noted. “Additionally, with the capital dollars already available, these purchases will not increase the debt service millage currently levied against property owners, thus making this action tax neutral.”

At the meeting, the Board of Trustees expressed their desire to offer property owners a tax benefit from the \$3.2 million construction savings by reducing debt service millage for taxes in 2011 and future years. The administration will review this opportunity and report back to the Board by May 1<sup>st</sup>.

### ***Middle School #5***

The land for Middle School #5 is located on Pleasant Road, adjacent to Pleasant Knoll Elementary. According to student growth projections, the district-wide middle school enrollment will reach capacity in the 2019/2020 school year. Acquiring this property enables the District to plan for an elementary/middle school campus, similar to that of Fort Mill, Gold Hill and Springfield Elementary and Middle Schools, within the time table advised by the 10-year plan. These joint campuses provide many benefits such as construction dollar savings in needed access entrances and road improvements as well as shared parking lots. A generous donation coupled with current market conditions warrant this to be a timely purchase.

### ***Property for a New Bus Transportation and Maintenance Facility***

The land acquired for the new transportation and maintenance facility will be fully donated and is centrally located off Springfield Parkway, close to Highway 77 in a planned office park, Gold Hill Commons, on Deerfield Drive. Currently, the Transportation and Maintenance Departments are housed in two separate locations. The merging of transportation and operations into one facility will offer the District a multitude of efficiency gains, including a common refueling area, central mechanics, district-wide storage, shop operations and office space.

The current Transportation Department is housed in a mobile unit located on a parking lot towards the back of Fort Mill High School campus. The District’s fleet, parked at the same location, includes a total of 76 buses (51 state-owned and 25 district-owned). This location has been an ongoing safety concern since the bus fleet is co-located with student parking. The State of South Carolina requires all state-owned buses to be secured behind a fence at a minimum distance between each bus. Due to space limitations, fencing has not been possible and all buses are parked at the state minimum distance, which is a limitation to expanding the District’s bus fleet. The new facility planned for Deerfield Drive is planned for 150 buses, the proper security, and a secure training area for bus drivers, which is another area lacking in the current space. Its new central location will allow the District to optimize bus routes and commute time for students.

*New District Office Headquarters*

Two constructed office buildings, adjacent to one another with ample employee and visitor parking, will become the new central office headquarters for the Fort Mill School District. The buildings are located in the same office park area, Gold Hill Commons on Deerfield Drive, of the newly acquired property for the Bus Transportation/Maintenance Facility.

In 1978, school operations were moved from Banks Street and 120 E. Elliott Street became the new office headquarters for the Fort Mill School District. At that time, the District served less than 2,500 students, all in schools located within a two miles radius. Offices for all administrative departments were housed in one location, with the headquarters being centrally located to schools and student families.

Thirty-three years later, the Fort Mill District Office serves 10,300 students with its administrative staff housed in three separate locations. Schools have increased in number and have pushed outwards from the center of town, making the current School District Office less central and therefore less convenient for students, their families, district employees, and visitors. Renovations and additions at the current location occurred in 1980 and 2003, but there is no longer adequate space for public and school meetings, or for expansion.

The new office headquarters, coupled with the transportation/maintenance facility, offers the community of Fort Mill a centralized campus location which is better poised to handle continued and planned student growth. With the new site offering double the space of the current facility, employees housed in multiple locations will be brought back together, thus strengthening our communication and efficiency with our schools and community.

The Board of Trustees, administration, and staff of Fort Mill School District appreciate the opportunity to serve the students and families of our township and will continue our commitment to excellence in education.