

Media rallies to save beloved school

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Times Daily Columnist

For the third time in ten years the Media community is engaged in a fight to save its elementary school. Three years ago we thought this problem was behind us. Wrong!!

The Rose Tree Media School Board, faced with what it was told were enormous renovation costs considered two options. These options were either the total renovation of the Media School with demolition of the newest wing, or closing Media School and building a new elementary school on the grounds of Springton Lake Middle School.

The architect hired by the school board originally estimated that the cost of renovating Media School would be about \$16 million. This estimate was subsequently lowered to \$10,056,000 and was based on an estimate of 103,000 square feet. The estimate for a new building at Springton Lake is \$8,900,000. The architect has recommended that the district build a new school and close the Media School.

Media residents, borough officials and residents of surrounding areas have organized to oppose this recommendation. Committees have been formed and many issues have been raised that were not previously considered by the Rose Tree Media School Board.

At the March school board meeting the architects figures were challenged and the following points were made:

- The square footage was off by more than 13,000 square feet reducing the estimated cost by more than \$1 million.
- The recommendation to move the cafeteria was unnecessary and would be an added expense.
- The cost of the bond issue was inflated for the

renovation option.

• All the costs involved in busing the 340 walking students were not considered.

These savings alone make the expense of renovating less than the cost of building at a new site. As a result, the school board agreed that a detailed, accurate study is needed. The construction management firm, Heery Corporation, has been charged with hiring a firm familiar with the type of renovations needed to give the board a proper estimate. This report should be available in early August.

There are additional financial issues to consider. If the Media School is closed, it will most likely be empty at an annual cost to taxpayers in excess of \$100,000. It is zoned for recreation, education and community use and it is unlikely in these recessionary times that anyone will invest the money needed to renovate the building. It most certainly will not be converted to office use.

Moreover, many problems have surfaced concerning Springton Lake as a site for a new school. The board is also reviewing the feasibility of this option. If the Springton Lake site is not viable, land would have to be purchased, driving up the new school cost.

There are however, issues besides costs that are vitally important to the Media community. Borough residents have been steadfast supporters of community elementary schools, fighting side by side with Edgmont and Middletown residents ten years ago, trying to save the Hannah Carr and Roosevelt Schools, as well as Media School. Only Media survived the battle. Three years ago when the district was faced with a shortage of elementary space, Media residents supported the revamping of Indian Lane School.

By now, up to three generations of Media families have been educated at Media School. There is a strong sense of pride and tradition in this legacy. Media

School today astutely reflects the cultural and economic diversity so often sought through court mandates. Children of all backgrounds not only interact in the school setting but, because of the school's location in the town, they see each other shopping, at the playground and in church.

Many parents with elementary age children chose to live within walking distance of Media School because of the benefits they believe walking to school provides. There are over 200 children who walk to Media School. The daily walk to school extends a child's sense of belonging to a community beyond their street or block. Even so, it's not just the "walkers" that benefit from Media School's location in the Delaware County seat. All Media School children benefit from the close proximity of the Court House, Delaware County Institute of Science and the fire house — all within walking distance for field trips.

Finally, there is a question of values. Small-town life is not for everyone, but for some of us, it is as important as the air we breath. Community, diversity, preservation, sociability, counting on neighbors, controlling one's life; these are the values a small town offers. And these are the values we wish to pass on to our children, in large part by having them spend the first, formative part of their education at an historic, walk-to community school.

The residents of Media are energetic and creative, with a heightened taste for social and community events. Media School has been an important part of our town since 1913 and its presence is a significant factor in binding our community together. Media residents stand ready to put all their energy and creativity to use working with the Rose Tree Media School Board to save the Media School.

Robert A. McMahon is the mayor of Media.