

Deciding priorities: List of Easthampton schools' needs will head to mayor's office

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EASTHAMPTON - The School Committee will discuss which school priorities, including White Brook pool repairs and replacing a School Department pick-up, should be sent to the mayor's office for the city's capital plan at tonight's School Committee meeting, held at 7 p.m. at White Brook Middle School.

"In November and December the city will publish a plan that says here's a list of everything everyone wants and then we'll project what we'll be able to fund," Mayor Michael A. Tautznik said. "I don't know the specifics of the (School Committee) proposal, but I do think it's appropriate for the School Committee and School Department to maintain the building facilities properly."

The city has \$442,994 in free cash - considerably lower than last year's more than \$1 million free cash - available to pay for capital projects, which always exceed what the city has to spend, Tautznik said.

"Everybody needs something," Tautznik said. "If you want a new car and a diamond necklace you'd have to decide what you need more. It's probably a new car, but a diamond necklace would be really nice."

Any decision on capital spending is a "ways off," he noted.

The White Brook pool will cost \$583,680 to reopen.

Besides the \$210,675 on reserve for the project, another \$373,005 is estimated to be needed, according to the 2009-2011 public schools capital list.

"The big issue all along has been the pool and my concern has been what appears to be a black hole of money here to get that pool back up and running," said Tom Brown, chairman of the School Committee.

"While I'm not opposed to getting the pool fixed, there is a finite amount of money that we have to spend on it and there are some repercussions to spending your entire capital assets on one item. If we have broken our bank on spending for the pool and something goes bump like the phone system or something that's on it's last leg, then now what?"

Tautznik said he thinks the superintendent will list what the school should have, given the fact that there are huge projects sitting in the city's capital plan, at tonight's meeting.

Superintendent Deborah Carter could not be reached for comment Thursday.

Other items to be discussed tonight from the capital list:

* Replacing a pick-up truck, which is estimated to cost \$30,000. The truck, a used Ford F-350 two-wheel drive model, will be used daily for maintenance operations and is estimated to last 15 years, according to the list. Another item to be discussed is three elementary school carts with laptops, estimated to cost \$70,000.

* The phones at White Brook went down last month, and repair cost \$18,500 - \$14,000 of which came from balances of earlier capital project funds. The remainder came from local maintenance and technology funds. Carter will report on the status of White Brook's phones.

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