

NEW HIGH SCHOOL BY 2022

River Islands will write \$100 million check to build Lathrop's 2nd high school

By: Jason Campbell

By 2022 Lathrop could have its second high school.

And it could end up being built without a dime of state money.

On Thursday night, representatives from the River Islands Technology Academy Board of Trustees met with representatives from the Banta Elementary School District to discuss the construction of a new high school in the master planned community that will eventually serve up to 1,800 students.

With River Islands agreeing to front \$100 million to construct the still unnamed high school – on a 55-acre lot at the corner of River Islands Parkway and Paradise Road – the discussion on Thursday focused on whether the school would be a public or charter high school, and what elements of a comprehensive high school would have to be left off during the design phase to make the \$100 million price tag work for a school of that size.

But it won't be as simple as just constructing the high school.

River Islands currently has a mitigation agreement in place with Tracy High School that covers the cost of students attending West High School. While Tracy Unified does have a mitigation measure in place that says that River Islands needs to construct a high school in the community when they reach 1,760 homes, they have not expressed interest in playing a part in shaping that school or running it.

Banta Elementary School District, however, has expressed interest, and is currently in the process of negotiating with Tracy to form the Banta Unified School District and changing its designation from a K-8 provider to a district capable of accepting K-12 students.

As long as the two boards agree to the tenets of the unification agreement, the matter can be easily solved without sending the matter to the voters for their final approval. But even if that were to be the case, it would be the voters within the newly drawn lines of the Banta Unified School District – which are essentially the same lines that exist now – that would have the final say in whether the unification was approved.

According River Islands Project Director Susan Dell'Osso – who also serves as the President of the RiTechA Board of Trustees – the development is currently eyeing an opening date of the fall of 2022, which would give the developers, the districts and the planners enough time to go through a proper design process and construct the first phase of a two-phase school that would initially accept 9th and 10th grade students.

When asked if Banta would be contributing any additional funding to the construction of the school, Dell'Osso said that the offset between the \$100 million and the \$150 million for a high school with all of the amenities would have to come from cutting back on what the school offered – whether that means leaving off the costly football stadium, or building the site without a swimming pool.

The fact that the developer will be footing the bill, and that the school will likely open as a charter high school, the costly process of constructing a school to the standards of the Division of the State Architect can be circumvented somewhat, Dell'Osso said, although the plans do currently call for the classroom buildings to be DSA compliant.

The savings on other buildings and features, she said, could be half of what a normal school with state funding would pay for the simple fact that it doesn't have to go through that rigorous process.

While the formal details of what the school will feature have yet to be worked out, Dell'Osso said that she would like to see there be partnerships between the school and some of the businesses that will be coming to the development in the near future so that students can have internship opportunities. The school would also like to

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include AP classes as well as a dual-enrollment program that allows students to take college courses while at the same time they're attending high school.

An additional, still yet unscheduled meeting detailing the progress of the project will be planned and announced to keep the public informed.