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Eastbrook rebuild a go (<http://daltondailycitizen.com/local/x1709535520/Eastbrook-rebuild-a-go>)

Rachel Brown
rachelbrown@daltoncitizen.com (<http://daltondailycitizen.com>)

Eastbrook Middle School will be rebuilt, but Whitfield Board of Education members aren't 100 percent sure how they'll pay for the \$24.1 million project.

In the 3-2 vote on Monday, board members Rodney Lock and Bill Worley voted against rebuilding the school for that very reason. The school system has borrowed enough money to rebuild Eastbrook, but officials have said they will have to repay the loan either by raising property taxes or asking voters to pass another Education Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (ESPLOST) after the current one expires in December.

Dalton Board of Education members would have to sign onto the ESPLOST before it could be placed on the November ballot, and DBOE Chairman Steve Williams has said city board members are "hesitant" about doing so given the state of the economy. He has also said they're open to talking with county school officials.

Whitfield board Chairman Louis Fordham acknowledged the financing problem was "weighing heavily on (his) shoulders," but he voted with Gary Brock and Thomas Barton to move ahead with the project.

"This is a commitment to an ESPLOST 4 on behalf of this board whether Dalton city (schools) is at the table or not," Fordham said. "... I'm fairly confident that Whitfield County and Dalton Public Schools are going to work very well together."

Worley said he wasn't convinced enough had been done to ensure the school will be built in a way that isn't extravagant.

"There's no doubt that there needs to be something done, but we're put here as stewards of the taxpayers' money, and we've got to make sure it's there," he said.

Lock, whose children have gone through Eastbrook, said he doesn't think now is the right time to rebuild the aging facility.

"I know it needs to be done, but ask yourself one question: Does it have to be done today?" he said. "... You need to know where your money is coming from. What about the city?"

Barton and Brock are the only two members not new to the board since January. Barton said the previous board planned for years to rebuild the school, and he won't go back on his promise to do that. He said the money is coming from \$6.5 million in state funds, some \$4.1 million previously budgeted to renovate the school, and the remainder from savings when construction of Coahulla Creek High School and Cedar Ridge Elementary didn't cost as much as budgeted.

"Eastbrook's got to be fixed, some way, somehow," Barton said. "If I get voted out, I get voted out, I guess."



Whitfield Board of Education members voted 3-2 on Monday to rebuild Eastbrook Middle School. (Misty Watson/The Daily Citizen)

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 **tenngri** 1 month ago

Absolutely Eastbrook should be rebuilt. It should have been rebuilt long ago. It is a disgrace to our community that it hasn't been rebuilt before now. As for "extravagant" rebuilding, I do not think that Cedar Ridge is extravagant, but I haven't yet seen Cohulla High School to have formed an opinion about it. Cedar Ridge is a beautiful building for our 21st century learning. And our children should have good, decent, beautiful places to learn and work in. I'm glad that Eastbrook will be rebuilt, and I hope that it isn't rebuilt in the old factory style, but that it is rebuilt as a beautiful modern school.

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Brock has said in the past the school badly needs to be rebuilt.

The board vote came after a community meeting last week in which more than two dozen parents, students and local residents offered opinions on whether to rebuild Eastbrook. Many said the current building is deteriorating, has a leaky roof and is constantly plagued with mold, roaches and rats.

Assistant Superintendent Richard Schoen described the proposed new building as “not an extravagant facility” and said rising materials prices would almost certainly drive up construction costs if the board waited to rebuild the school.

The new school will be built on top of the current ball fields with the bid going to Bremen-based R.K. Redding. Officials said it could be as long as three years before the fields are rebuilt. Students meanwhile will be bused to Cedar Ridge Elementary’s fields. Schoen said school officials are talking with county recreation officials about other locations they might use after the Eastbrook fields are torn down.

The current school building will be torn down.

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