

Community Coffee with Megan

April 21, 2017

Today I will discuss the updates on where we are in our plans. There are many big, exciting plans; including many graphics that will be shared.

A lot of what is being shared today has not been published yet. There is a board meeting this week to finalize plans. So I cannot say that we are completely board approved, but there are no big changes or revisions expected from them at the meeting.

Site plan for Middle Campus: The equipment is not moving right now because we are waiting on the surveyor to finish; we are on pause for now.

Lower Elementary Update: The Green Farmhouse (GFH) teachers will move over to the Red Barn expansion. This will happen by the end of the 2018-2019 school year. This will allow for all LE to reside in one building. The GFH will be converted to an Elementary Art/Music Center. They can walk over for these 'specials' instead of riding the bus; eliminating the need for shuttling. It will make it easier to access the studio spaces during student work time; better connection between the classroom spaces.

Red Barn Expansion: Will include: larger teacher offices, new 3rd classroom, library space that can be accessed by all classrooms, small piano room, room for reading, current LE offices will be Spanish classroom, the new portion will be connected by a hallway, (we are in a crunch because of our timeline for the HS opening in 2017 so this makes it possible for the work to continue while school is still in session),

Traffic and New Upper Building: All of the traffic on the whole campus is going to change; we will all be confused for a while 😊 The quad building depicted in the drawing is the new UE building. It has 4 separate parts; 3 individual classrooms and the 4th area dedicated to Science and Music. There will be a place to do messy work/projects/labs, a common library, common work offices for teachers, 2 tiny offices for Brenda and Megan, piano space and a reading room. It is large, but designed to be just what we need. It is actually designed to look similar to the current LE classrooms. They will be open and easy to monitor. The cubbies will not be totally separate from the classroom as they are now. The rooms will be open with a kitchen inside, wall of windows looking out to the forest in the back, rain gardens to mitigate runoff from the roof and carline will come up to the front; close to the front of the building!! Each classroom will have their own outdoor entrance in the rear leading to a large water feature/rehydrate natural wet area. The whole middle campus will be like a beautiful welcoming palisade with a gigantic roundabout that will connect UE and LE carlines to keep

traffic moving. The center of the roundabout will have species of Oak trees native to Indiana. Future plans include a building large enough to accommodate our whole community; zero plans for that right now...no money secured, no design yet, this is a plan for much later. More parking will also be added in front of the red barn, but our goal is not to fill our campus with concrete and buildings; we love the beauty of the land!

The small circle at the entrance near the water will be an outdoor classroom; basic foundation with a roof so work can happen outside. There will be a play area between the elementary classrooms (LE and UE) so they can connect; there has been a dis-connect of recent due to the UE building being so far away. An awesome sledding hill will go out the back of the new UE building and has a very steep incline for lots of sledding fun.

The ropes course currently at UE will stay and be utilized by the High School.

The design of the UE building will have a modern, but rustic feel. It is not a towering mammoth building; rather a spacious natural fit for the space. We really wanted to give the classrooms the space they needed because they feel quite cramped right now. The current classrooms are now 1,100 sf, while the new ones will be 1,700 sf! The front fascia of the building will be reclaimed barn wood and natural stone from the area. Only locally sourced and sustainably harvested timber will be used (found within 100 miles away). We will still have individual cubby entrances in the front of each building. Unlike the current UE building, the basement in the new building is very small and will only be used for storage and safe refuge. The footprint of the building is quite large. There will be covered porches in the back and the courtyard in back will be for everyone to enjoy.

Parent Questions:

Will we add more classrooms since so many of them are filled to capacity?

During the last conversation with the board we all agreed that the goal to have 400 students (Infant through HS) is where we are stopping right now. It needs to be balanced because we are in a unique situation to meet a need that exists in the community. We will stay open to the idea of increasing enrollment if it best meets the needs of the community; it is a board decision, not just Megan's. The board and Dekko Foundation are focused on supporting the Montessori education for this community. However, this could be done through other methods without expanding OF specifically. Just by adding the HS, our goal has gone from 320 students to 400. We currently have 265 students enrolled this year. We already have 85 applicants for the 10 spaces open for next school year. The only programs that have room

right now are MS and HS. It pays to be a current family right now. We are bursting at the seams and the guess is within 8 years that we will be at full capacity.

After looking at the interest we have had in the HS this year we may have to re-examine our outlook. Five students are currently enrolled for the 9th grade class with the potential of another 3-4 students as tours continue. About ½ of those students are from outside the current OF community. We will have way more staff next year than what we will actually need. We could hypothetically have up to 25 students enroll if we had the interest. The current HS positions include: MS/HS business teacher, Integrated/Humanities/Math teacher, and Science teacher. In order to really address Human Resource sustainability, and for Oak Farm to move forward, we really need to look at philosophical alignment going forward. Teachers who have left the school generally have not come from a Montessori background. Many have been unhappy in the public school system, are drawn to Montessori, and then within a year or two find that it is not a good fit and choose to leave. Instead, we need to look for qualified candidates who are Montessori trained and snatch them up while we can.

We will not have the resources just from tuition alone to pay for all these improvements. Several years ago the Dekko Foundation gave a grant to OF to help families pay for graduating students to go to a Montessori HS. Since the inception of the grant, the foundation had been giving us \$325,000 a year to help cover tuition for grads. This money was unspent because we only had 1 student choose to go to a Montessori High School. We approached the foundation and had them approve this money to be used to build our own Montessori HS. We want to do it right from day one! In order to develop momentum in the program we want it to be the program it is to be; don't do it on the cheap. The greatest expense is always staff/talent and that's the way it should be. (About 75% of our operating expense is made up of salaries.) We have a great inaugural class of freshmen and we couldn't be happier!!!

What will the High School Look Like?

Our plan is to really naturalize the new area; mostly prairie and savannah areas. We will also be doing some forestation in the back area too. It will beautify the area and help block some of the industrial area. We will plant some place holder crops to help reduce thistle and try to prevent as many weeds from taking hold as possible until we are ready to plant. We will harvest our own prairie seed this fall with students and they will help plant it next spring. This will help us keep it from getting unruly before we are ready to finish landscaping.

Bike Shop: It will be on the corner in front of the current UE building. There will be a foot bridge from the HS to the bike shop. HS students will start their day at the bike shop, just like the MS students start each morning at the farm. The business teacher will lead the bike shop.

Who thought of the bike shop?

Maria Montessori!!! In her adolescent plans she had seen the farm for MS and a bike shop for the HS program. Will it be open to the public? Right now this property is zoned the same as the rest of the property; non-profit. We don't want to get in trouble with Indiana or the IRS. Running it as an education program is one thing; running it as a for-profit business will put us in a different category. We will take it slowly and see if we need to have it re-zoned down the road. The first year will be: Set up a bike shop! Under the guidance of the teacher they will learn how the repair business works and the basics of bike repair. We already have a ton of bikes that need repaired here and ready to go. They will eventually learn how to use the InnoLab to learn how to do aesthetic work on bikes; decals, designs, fun things. Then they will learn about design and prototypes/custom made bikes. You won't be able to walk in and see brand new Schwinn bikes for sale; the educational value of something like that is nil. They need to either provide a service or design to be impactful. The business scope and sequence: 9th & 10th grade students will be the laborers, 11th & 12th grade students will design and work on prototypes, fulfill management roles (mechanical, HR or leadership) and utilize the InnoLab. There will be a lot of choice for students, but a prepared environment for the students. Just like in Primary; once you've had the lesson you can go and use the equipment. The Business teacher will supervise all of the above, plus the MS micro economy and business education for both. Lessons of: "How do we get the word out? What do we need to be successful?" The students will decide what the name of the bike shop will be called. It will have a garage door that opens on both sides. It will be pretty bare bones on the inside; it is a workshop. It will also be a temporary home for InnoLab for 1 year. It will have 2 separate bathrooms available. A decision has been made that all bathrooms we are building from now on will just be single use bathrooms.

Will the state recognize an Oak Farm diploma?

CORE 40: We are not an Indiana board approved school. You HAVE to administer the ISTEP to every grade, meet the Indiana requirements including curriculum assessments, etc. We can't issue an Indiana diploma, but we are following the CORE 40 standards. We are only using Indiana board titles for classes; it will be an equivalent. It will be viewed the same as a home school diploma would be viewed. Indiana does accept ISSAICS accreditation. Colleges also look at SAT / ACT as well as class GPA, etc. We will not be doing class ranking; no valedictorian. We will not have AP courses. We want to write our own courses and this would not be possible if we offered AP courses. We will offer SAT prep and AP prep; scores will be listed on the students transcript. We will follow the formula for standard grade reporting; not the 25 page progress report that our parents are accustomed to receiving 😊 The college

process is overwhelming! Parents will be important in the decision making process, but we will work with the students to complete the paperwork and application process to take that stress off of the parent(s). Duo credit will be made available to students when they are offering something that we are not offering (local schools and universities). The OF staff would make sure that the outside work is meeting our expectations.

The Impact programs: The impetus for this program is to motivate students to gain expertise. We ask them to choose a project that will have an environmental or social impact on the world. They will work on the details with their advisor. (1:15 student ratio for this program) They will help them think through all the processes of choosing and implementing their Impact choice. This advisor will also be advising those same students in college prep; they will follow the student all 4 years.

We will not be offering a Vocational degree program: The Impact center in Kendallville does a great job and offers this to Kendallville and surrounding communities.

The High School PE program will run as all elective. Students will work to choose specific interests. “Real World Fitness”! It’s really about helping the student find how having an active fitness life will help them beyond school. What does it look like for them? The sky is the limit; a wide array of electives. We will also count outside school activities like dance, sports, yoga etc.

What is happening with the recent land purchases?

We don’t have any current plans for the 2 ranch house currently sitting on state road 8

There is no new news on the property across the street on Lemper Road. It is zoned as industrial, but they have said they will hold off using their ability to use the easement through our property for semi- truck traffic. We want to be respectful of the relationship with the city of Avilla and the community.

What can I do to help? It seems like so much is happening behind the scenes and I would like to support the Administrative staff.

One of the most important things that people can do is to help us get the word out about the new high school and the great opportunities at Oak Farm. The people who are part of this community should have access to as much information as possible so that there is no ill will or people left with questions. Thank you so much for expressing your gratitude for Oak Farm! We are so well supported and are fortunate; we want to be of service to our community of families, friends and supporters.