

New year, new faces at Unit 1



Fall sports season gets underway



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## Unit 1 considers financing \$21 million for facility improvements

BY ANN GILL  
EDITOR

As the Unit 1 School District implements its facility improvement plan, the Board of Education is researching funding options including the issuance of bonds.

On Aug. 2, the Board declared its intent to issue up to \$21 million in working cash bonds to fund priority improvements.

"Intent is the big word there," said Superintendent Chris Spencer. He wants to be clear to the community that the resolution adopted by the Board does not mean the district is getting the money, rather, "we have an opportunity to if needed."

The district has explored several funding methods to cover the cost of the various projects including restroom renovations, furniture replacement, turf fields and building additions.

The Board and administration have also discussed strategies with an outside public finance director who has worked with the district on several projects.

Three options were presented for the Board's consideration.

One is to deficit budget and that would deplete district reserves and allocate operating funds, an idea not favorable to the Board.

Issue bonds, incur the debt and take advantage of the property tax agreement the district has in place with Constellation Energy—Dresden Generating Station.

According to the superintendent, the third option of utilizing the budget and bonds puts the district in the best position.

"That is probably the best avenue for the Board to go and we've moved forward with some of that paying with cash on hand for some of these projects already," Spencer said.

Funds on hand were utilized for construction of an access road and additional parking at the middle school, classroom renovations and an updated fitness room at the high school, and new flooring at the middle school.

These are all projects that were included in the facility improvement plan that was presented to the Board in December 2022.

The facility improvement plan was drafted by the district's architectural firm, Cordogan Clark, based on input from focus groups comprised of faculty, staff and administrators from each of the district's educational buildings and departments. The goal was to generate a wish list of needs and wants.

Architects were directed to develop an improvement plan following the district's strategic planning meeting in July 2022. At that meeting stakeholders—board members, administrators, staff and citizens—made it clear

that a focus should be placed on district facilities.

Building maintenance and longevity, athletic facilities and fields, classroom space and storage were among the topics brought forth.

From the initial plan, a priority list was developed with specific projects being considered over the next three fiscal years.

Installation of a turf playing surface at the high school stadium for football and soccer teams, a resurfaced six lane track and potentially new lights is a project estimated at \$2.1 million and it's on the list for the coming year. Last week, the Board authorized putting the project out to bid.

Restroom renovations, new furniture and a storage facility construction are on the list for fiscal years 2025 and 2026, with the option of an

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## Carbon Hill, Coal City awarded improvement funds

STAFF REPORT

Over \$1.4 million in federal funding has been awarded to the villages of Carbon Hill and Coal City for public infrastructure and housing rehabilitation projects.

Gov. JB Pritzker announced on Aug. 4 that the villages were among 54 communities across the state to be awarded a portion of \$56.9 million in Community Development Block Grant (CDBG).

Carbon Hill will receive \$784,970 for public infrastructure improvements aimed at making critical repairs to water, sewer and drainage infrastructure.

"Since day one as Governor, it has been my priority to ensure that every family, individual, and child in Illinois has access to safe and healthy water, housing, and infrastructure," said Governor JB Pritzker. "That's what my administration's Rebuild Illinois capital plan is all about and now, in further partnership with the federal government, over 50 projects across Illinois will receive grants to support projects that will better our communities for years to come."

Coal City was awarded \$650,000 in housing rehabilitation funds, the second round of funding granted to the community.

"Communities in every corner of the state should have access to resources to keep Illinois families safe and healthy with a proper roof over their heads," said DCEO Director Kristin Richards. "The Community Development Block Grants will provide critical assistance to rehabilitate dozens of homes and improve infrastructure in the areas that need it the most without placing the sole burden of funding costly projects on local entities."

The funds awarded to Coal City will allow the village to rehab the interiors and exteriors of approximately 10 owner-occupied single family homes.

The CDBG dollars are overseen by the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO).

The housing dollars are earmarked to assist low to moderate income homeowners complete repairs such as new roofs and windows, as well as kitchen and bath renovations, and making spaces handicapped accessible.

The financial award can be utilized across the entire village rather than a specific neighborhood as with the first housing rehabilitation project.

The village of Braceville and city of Morris were also awarded \$650,000 in housing rehab funds.

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SAM VOTA, a sophomore at Coal City High School, took part in the school's annual marching band camp that concluded with a preview performance of this year's field show titled, La Nouba.

## Horns up



MARCHING COALERS Gio Bruno [left] and Lexi Higgins-Weatherhead showcase what they learned during band camp at a concluding performance on Aug. 4.



COAL CITY HIGH School sophomore Olivia Sage will be marching with the Coalers Marching Band this season. The band and color guard have a busy season ahead with field shows, competitions and parades.

## Unit 1 will deploy new system for checking in and out

BY ANN GILL  
EDITOR

Paper sheets on clipboards will become a thing of the past as the Unit 1 School District is set to implement a new system for students and visitors checking in and out of its school buildings.

The new system—SchoolPass Visitor Management—approved by

the Board of Education last week, will expand the district's ability to screen visitors and keep track of student movement in and out of their attendance center.

The district began screening visitors several years ago as part of its safety plan.

"One of the things we do when we screen visitors who come to our campus is scan their drivers license and what

that does is perform a background check against the sexual offender data base," explained Jason Smith, the district's chief school business official.

The system being implemented will require visitors to use self-serve kiosks to check in rather than a station located behind the administrative assistance work area.

Enhancements to the sys-

tem will allow the district to customize the screening.

"So say there was a custody issue or an order of protection, we can key those in on our side and also screen for that as our visitors come into our campus," Smith said.

One of the most important functions, he said, is the system allows students to check in and out of the building.

Currently students com-

ing in or going out during the school day must sign the paper located in the front office of each school.

"This will integrate with our student management system and will update the attendance tables automatically with the ultimate goal in the event of an emergency this system, through the dashboard, will show how many people are in the building,

how many are gone and where they are. So it helps to tighten up our on premise security," Smith said.

The cost to the district is

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