

Covenant for CMS construction

Continued from page 1A construction.

"Every project recommended was considered a top priority," Chamberlain said.

These priorities include four new elementary schools, six extensive renovation/addition projects, real estate acquisitions and the pre-construction for two new middle schools. The elementary schools, one located in southwest Charlotte, one in the northeast, Belmead Elementary and Bradley Elementary are scheduled for occupancy in 2008. The elementary school construction and design only of the new schools will be delivered by the COPS component. Designs for the other projects, high schools in the north and south, plus two middle schools, including one to relieve the stress on Alexander, are expected to be completed by next November.

County voters said "No" to a \$27 million bond referendum, establishing the need for a

different solution. The new plan includes up to \$400 million in general obligation bonds to be submitted in a public referendum in 2007, at which time the design for the two middle schools and high schools are expected to be complete and the county would be in a position to award contracts for construction of those projects.

Chamberlain said the county has used COPS in the past to fund school construction, including \$50 million issued in 1999, about \$75 million issued in 2003, and \$95 million issued in 2004.

"I'm glad the board did not just approve COPS," said Gorman.

Polling data helped the committee determine what was necessary, Gorman said. "Polling shows...we need this short term."

The long-term portion of the board approved plan is the intent to use lottery proceeds to pay off existing debt. Mecklenburg officials expect

the county to receive \$18 million in lottery proceeds this year, and those proceeds should not result in a tax increase. However, no definitive information could be given regarding the lottery.

"We don't have full experience because it's only four or five months with the lottery," said Jones.

Estimates show a need for \$12-13 million a year of lottery proceeds to pay off debt, but no accurate schedule has been determined.

Although his main focus is CMS, Gorman acknowledged there are critical needs throughout the county.

"We are interested in working for all citizens," he said. "The entire county is important, we need to work together to serve all of our community members."

"It is important as business partners to have a strong and committed relationship," said Jones.

Gorman and Jones laid out their "covenant," a series of

operational processes and intent to set clearer priorities for spending, and then signed the document for all in attendance to see.

"Harry and I have been making statements about the county and the school district working together," said Gorman.

Together the two plan to look at the revenue feed they receive, review the top priorities from their boards, and discuss, based on the revenue, an approach for funding.

"If we can get to that point, we can greatly reduce public angst that occurs each year around the budget process," explained Jones.

For now Gorman, Jones and Chamberlain await the approval of the County Commission. Should the Building Solutions plan be approved, Gorman plans to return to the board and ask if Jones can be added as an ad hoc member, for dealing with SBC information.

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Deal on Merchandise Mart has yet to close



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Bureaucrats at the Government Center want to get an Amen on the future of the Merchandise Mart, as in who'll actually inhabit the building.

According to Fly's spies, University Park Baptist Church, one of this burg's best-known megachurches, keeps pushing the closing date back, which has government types a little skittish. The Park was originally supposed to close on the mart in March, but nothing's been

finalized over the last four months. Meanwhile, the future of consumer exhibits at the building is iffy as it sits idly without generating revenue. Everyone's hoping for resolution, so keep ya shirts on. If anyone can make it happen, it's the folk at The Park.

Fly's spies are hearing a buzz that Charleston House, the down-home eatery that serves a little bit 'o soul with every bite, is on the market. Ron Goodwin, the Charleston House's main man, isn't saying one way or the other, but the rumors persist. Regardless of what happens, don't change what Fly loves most - leftovers.

Johnson C. Smith football coach Daryl McNeill didn't win a game with the Golden Bulls last year, but that didn't keep CIAA rival Shaw University from sniffing around to offer him a gig.

One of Fly's Raleigh spies reports Shaw Athletics Director Al Carter dialed JCSU to seek a meeting with McNeill. The offer was decent: five years at \$95,000 per. But coach Mac turned the Bears down.

According to the source, McNeill cited his arrangement at Smith, which includes a contract with four years left and a role in athletic administration. It's great to be wanted - even at 0-10.

Fly on the Wall is a column built on rumor, innuendo and a smattering of truth for those of you who don't know any better. The intent of this column isn't to make anyone feel good, other than those of

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