

# CIP funds can't be used to offset budget cuts

By **Pamela Willis**

**ThisWeek Community News**

Saturday April 13, 2013 6:52 PM

In light of the fact that Upper Arlington schools officials recently announced they must raise athletic fees and

reduce staff positions to cut \$6 million over two years, Director of Business Chris Potts is reminding residents that capital improvement funds are not operating funds.

"Capital improvement money is completely different than operating money," he said. "In light of the cuts, I want people to understand that the capital improvement money cannot be spent on operating expenses like personnel and benefits.

"We were able to maintain our school buildings because of the permanent improvement levy that was passed in 2007, which allows us to maintain our old facilities," he said.

Voters approved a 6.2-mill combined operating and permanent improvement levy in 2007, with 2.2 mills of that amount earmarked for permanent improvement funds.

District leaders said the \$6 million in cuts are necessary after voters failed to approve the 5.8-mill levy request in November 2012.

Superintendent Jeff Weaver said the bulk of the cuts would be "through elimination of positions to address our cost per pupil and labor cost concerns."

The number of classroom teachers will be reduced by at least 25 over two years, along with eight administrative positions and two physical education teachers at the high school.

Athletic pay-to-participate fees were increased from \$85 to \$100 a sport at the high school.

Potts said he doesn't want residents to think the district can wait to take care of some capital needs or use capital improvement funds to offset that \$6 million.

He said Ohio law dictates that capital improvement money can only be used on improvements that have a lifespan of at least five years; the money cannot be used for district operating expenses.

*"Capital improvement money is completely different than operating money. In light of the cuts, I want people to understand that the capital improvement money cannot be spent on operating expenses like personnel and benefits."*

— **CHRIS POTTS**

Director of Business, UA school district

Potts said the district has been able to maintain buildings that now have an average age of 57 years with the approximately \$3 million per year that the continuing levy provides for permanent improvement.

Prior to 2007, the district practice was to transfer \$750,000 from the general fund to the capital improvement account to try to maintain aging buildings and grounds, Potts said.

"While this money helped, it was not nearly enough to keep up with the many projects that had developed or been deferred over the years," he said. "The \$3 million from the passage of the 2007 levy can be used for building and campus improvements, transportation operation and vehicle replacements, technology upgrades and textbook replacements."

Since 2007, the district has spent about \$10 million on capital improvements that included additions to Greensview and Barrington, roof replacements, heating and cooling upgrades, parking lot improvements, science lab renovations, building entrance reconfigurations, restroom renovations and disability and access upgrades.

Potts said sections of the roofs at Barrington, Greensview and Upper Arlington High School will be replaced this summer, along with two building cooling units at Hastings and Jones middle schools.

"We will also move forward with the replacement of the stadium turf field at the high school," he said. "The field was originally installed with privately raised money in 2002.

"The original warranty and projected lifespan of the field was eight years," he added. "Through quality maintenance and upkeep, the district has been able to stretch the life of the field by three additional years, but the time has come for replacement."

He said the turf replacement will cost \$379,770.

"We were fortunate to have the initial cost of the field given privately, but as a district, we must maintain that investment," he said.

Revenue the district collects from two cell towers at Jones Middle School and Upper Arlington High School -- approximately \$100,000 per year -- is also used for capital improvements and will be put toward the turf replacement, Potts said.

"While our capital improvement plan is flexible and changes each year as things evolve and develop, it is important that we continue to complete projects that maintain our buildings and grounds and provide our students and staff with the best facilities possible," Potts said.