It looks like modernization time may have finally come to Lafayette. Last week Mayor Gray submitted a programming request to the city council asking that $1,050,000 in funds be appropriated to provide swing space so Lafayette students can continue to stay here on site and not be moved to another school location during a modernization. On Friday the project manager and educational specifications writer met with me to go over the time line for the scope of the work. So this week’s column is a report to let you know what is happening now.

The Department of General Services (DGS) prepared a request for proposals for architectural/engineering services for the modernization of Lafayette. We are getting a complete modernization, not just a phased in update like many other schools. Classrooms will be updated in five areas, lighting, air quality and conditioning, technology, acoustics, and furniture and fixtures. Shared space areas, gymnasiums, auditoriums, cafeterias and kitchens, are being improved. Also included are components like mechanical, electrical and other ‘behind the wall’ systems. It is very unusual for an elementary school to get a total modernization because most involve moving the student body out of the building for the duration of the construction. DCPS is planning on creating swing space here. There will be a conference on March 5 at the Reeves Center where interested firms can obtain more specific information about the process for Lafayette.

While that is going on, the educational specification writer is preparing a packet of information on Lafayette. There is a general educational specifications book for DCPS. That is the starting point. But information was collected last week on current staffing levels so a more specific set of requirements for Lafayette could be developed. This information will also be shared with architects and builders. Other specific site information is being collected. Traffic patterns around the school, parking issues, the school/park relationship are an additional part of the total modernization.

On March 12, interested firms will be able to tour Lafayette and see for themselves the scope of the work and the condition of the building. By March 20 they need to complete an application that states they have the experience, staff, and resources to complete a project like this one. DGS staff then evaluates each proposal using a rubric giving different weights to different areas of the application. DGS hopes to name the winning firm by the end of April.

In the meantime a School Improvement Team or SIT is named at Lafayette. This team includes teachers, parents and community members. It works with DGS to ensure that the facility improvements meet the school’s needs. SIT input is crucial during the design phase, design discussion and swing space discussions. Initial SIT work will take place this spring with a design concept plan due in June. Over the summer SIT will then work on more specific details related to the plan as it is more firmly developed. To keep the entire school informed about what is happening there will be a series of community meetings held here at Lafayette to share plans and drawings and to get feedback. DGS also keeps a website where they will post all presentations so you can look through them and respond even if you are unable to attend the meeting.

I know there is a lot of consternation about all of this with a new principal coming on board. The part of the process where I will be the most valuable is occurring right now. I have lived most of my waking hours for the last 13 years in this building and I pretty much know it inside and out. I can speak to what has been fixed and what is still causing huge problems. For example, the windows in the school were replaced several years ago and are in very good shape. They may not have to be replaced allowing those funds to be used in other areas of the school. There is lot of wasted space in the lower level of the building, including locker rooms and showers. Right now it is used for storage, especially of PE equipment. That needs to be included in any plans. Many of our auxiliary spaces are used by more than one teacher. A new plan will fix that. Hopefully the new principal will be on board at the same time the initial concept drawings are ready to view. But the questions being asked right now about the current building are ones that I have the answers for.

So if you are a parent who is interested in being a part of SIT please let me know. You will be committing to a series of meetings both in the morning and in the evening for the next several months. Some work may take place over the summer so you will need to be around for at least part of that time. I really don’t need any more emails to arrive in my mailbox. Please just give a note to Mrs. Bright with your contact information.

So when will the new Lafayette be ready? Most of the 2014-15 school year will be involved in planning and permitting. Actual construction will not start until June 2015. It is expected that most of the work will be completed in August 2016. As more information becomes available I will continue to do these updates.