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Audit: Grossmont funds being spent properly

By Karen Pearlman | 8:18 p.m. Feb. 15, 2016

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EAST COUNTY — The Grossmont Union High School District has been properly spending taxpayers' money for two voter-passed propositions to upgrade buildings and build new structures, according to an annual report from the district's Citizens Bond Oversight Committee.

The report presented results of an independent financial and performance audit for Propositions H and U. The report said "no deficiencies were identified" in the audits for the 11-school district.

Prop H is a \$274 million bond measure passed in 2004 by voters within the Grossmont boundaries. The report noted that Prop H funds were fully used as of June 30, 2015. Prop U is a \$417 million bond measure passed in 2008 that still has available funding.

The committee reports that in 2015, Grossmont spent \$39 million on districtwide work. The district has been upgrading campus buildings and building new ones by combining bond funds with outside funding, including state grants.

The oversight committee's report said that through the bond funds and the additional funding, the Grossmont District was able to complete projects at two high schools: Helix Charter (modernizing several buildings) and Granite Hills (new student support center).

The report said ongoing construction is continuing at three schools: Grossmont (new student support services and arts buildings), Monte Vista (modernizing three buildings) and Valhalla (modernizing one building).

It also noted that last year's expenditures were "significantly curtailed" because of a San Diego Superior Court ruling that has required the district to set aside \$42 million for the building of a future high school in Alpine.

The district has been fighting a lawsuit brought in 2014 by the Alpine Union School District and Alpine Taxpayers for Bond Accountability. The groups argue that portions of the bond money was supposed to be used to build a high school in Alpine.

Bond oversight committee President Nancy Herbst said the committee has been closely monitoring the lawsuit. Herbst said construction of the high school in Alpine is on hold until the enrollment threshold specified in ballot language is reached and state per-pupil funding is restored to 2008 levels.

The district currently has 21,576 students. Grossmont officials have said they project a decline of 149 students next year, and don't expect to return to the enrollment threshold trigger until after 2020. The enrollment threshold for a high school to be built in Alpine, according to Grossmont officials, is 23,245.

Herbst said the court's decision has stopped 11 other planned projects. She noted that the district's legal fees were \$2 million through the end of 2015.

The projects that are on hold include districtwide upgrades for security cameras and new events centers at Grossmont, Mount Miguel and Santana high schools.

Grossmont District Superintendent Ralf Swenson said the report should give taxpayers confidence that the committee is ensuring the district's bond program is "efficient and effective."

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