

Rockford Public Schools, District 205
Facilities Master Plan 2025 – 2030
Business Partner Workshop
Meeting Minutes

Career Tech Center
Wednesday, January 24, 2024

DLR Group members present:

Leanne Meyer-Smith, AIA, K-12 Education Leader/Principal
Kristin Stone, AIA, Project Architect
Morgan Wynne, AIA, Architectural Designer/Associate

Business Partners Present:

Earl Wilsey, Schmeling Construction
Bethany Zacek, Perfect Stitch
Tom Carey, Swedish American
Tabatha Dougherty, CEANCI
Cyrus Oates, Oates Dental
Kevin Finnestad, Jerhen Industries
Gina Caronna, The Workforce Connection
Antwon Harris, Antwon Harris Group
Kevin Holdmann, TAC Rockford
Robert Shook, Woodward, Inc.

Rockford School District Staff Present:

Bridget French, Executive Director of College and Career Readiness
Scott Sevey, Director of Career/Technical Education
Jessica Hayes, Work-Based Learning Coordinator
Greg Brown, Chief Financial Officer
Chris Magee, Guilford Academy Coach
Michael Phillips, Chief Operating Officer

Mike Phillips, COO, opened the meeting at 5:37 p.m. We have our DLR Group here tonight. They are our planning and consulting group and since September, when we launched the Facilities Management plan, we have held several workshops: secondary educator workshop, elementary school workshop, and a student workshop about the day in the life of the student. We brought high school students from across the district to this building because we really wanted to learn what they were looking for. One of the main themes we heard from our

students was that they want more hands-on learning. We may have some of their videos in here tonight. We are very excited. The school district purchased the building back from Rock Valley and finalized it back in August. There may be people here from Rockford that may remember that the school district actually built this building back in the 60's and 70's, and it was a career center then for many years. Then Rock Valley College took it over and used it as a career center. But we have an exciting opportunity now to take this building back over. As I said, we have had a number of workshops with internal and community members, and wanted to reach out to our business partners and really hear from you what your vision is for a building like this, and what we can do within these walls to help our business partners and help our schools to grow. With that said, I am going to turn the meeting over to Leanne to lead the workshop.

Ms. Meyer-Smith gave a brief introduction of who the DLR Group is, and Mr. Wynne and Ms. Stone introduced themselves.

Ms. Meyer-Smith told the group that they were going to talk a little bit about the process, a little bit about what makes it successful for students. They were going to give some examples, showing how they have built in different areas of the country, to start thinking about what can be done with a building like this. Then we have a little activity. We will try not to make that too painful, we know you have had a long day, so we'll go through this PowerPoint quickly. We will make the PowerPoint presentation available to you on the district website. I want you to know that you will all be ambassadors after this meeting. You can go out and tell more people about this project. We will be having a second workshop at the end of February, and we want to gather as many people as we can that would have some interest in this building and help us with the vision. So, we want to make sure you understand the change in teaching and learning and why this is important and how we can transform this building, aligning the facility with the educational goals of what the students need.

All of Rockford's projects that we have been working on with the Master Plan have these three ideas. We want to make sure there is an inclusive process, which is why there have been so many workshops. We are looking at student achievement and making sure we keep that in mind, and community voice and input.

So, what are the steps for completing this project, this CTE project? We are looking at a fourteen-month to sixteen-month planning period to get all of the input, to get specifications, technical drawings, and to complete the bids. The goal is to move in here in the fall of 2025.

Why is what we are doing and a career pathway important? We like to start off with this quote, "We teach today's students as we taught yesterday's, we rob them of tomorrow." (~ John Dewey) So we try to keep in mind that it is not the same as when we went to school, and it's not going to be the same two years from now, five years from now, and certainly not ten years from now. When we are thinking about ideas, we want to make sure that we really try to push the envelope and try to think what skills students are going to need when they move forward.

A little bit of history about careers in the labor force and how this has changed. If you think about the United States at the start of the Industrial Revolution number one, we were all prairie, and we were hands-on, and farm, and handicraft economy. But then cities started to go up and there were more opportunities and wealth created going to the cities. So, the world started to change. We started needing managers that would help with the labor.

Then the second Industrial Revolution came, where as the upper and middle classes grew, we needed more managers. So, people went to the city so they could have more wealth, and we started to need more science and education to help the managers, so it became popular to go to college and have secondary education in the workforce.

Now we are moving into where we are right now, the 1990's, the Industrial Revolution number three, the evolution of careers. There is a shift from mechanical and analog electronics to digital. We are now connected globally with the internet, cell phones, mobile communication, and the labor force is very diverse. We all know about COVID and what happened there, it's very entrepreneurial, people do not stay in the same career, in the same job, and now people don't even want to. They start out thinking they are going to do all these different things; they are going to change in the middle of a career and start something new. It is now more important to have quality of life now than staying at the same company for forty years.

So, what is coming next? Industrial Revolution number four were technological advancements, where humans will really effect change. We will not be memorizing; we will not be figuring out the knowledge. The knowledge will all be there, it is what we are going to do with it. It is going to be more important to figure out what you do with that knowledge than to have the knowledge yourself. So how do we get ready for that? What does that mean for the labor force for these students? We need to make sure that right now we start to align some of our educational curriculums with hands-on opportunities, what we're going to do with jobs we don't even know are coming. How do we get the skills that students are going to need to be able to move forward? Students are really adaptable, and they will tell us, and they will lead us if we are willing to listen.

So, this is what we are planning for today. Eighty-five percent of jobs that will exist in 2030 haven't even been invented yet. There are so many jobs right now that no one has even heard about. You grow up, you read a story book and you were like, I'm going to be a fireman, policeman, nurse, or teacher. Now you cannot even put all the jobs in a book, like a drone operator. It's going to change faster and faster.

We have a video we would like to show you that shows how fast change is coming. *Video was shown.* The point of the video is not that humans are going to be replaced, but more and more of these (*robots*) will be using our skills, our thoughts, and our technology to do tasks for us. There will be other issues, other thinking that will come out of that that we will have to solve. So, problem solving, thinking strategies will not be replaced and there will always be more of that. But it is interesting that the pace of change in 2030 will be so rabid that we will learn in the moment using new technologies, augmented reality, or virtual reality. But the ability to gain new knowledge will be more valuable than the knowledge itself.

That is what we need to talk about with the students. How do we get them to have those thinking skills and probe questions, test theories, work together, collaborate inquiry-based learning cycle? I am sure most of the educators understand that, but it is really just putting the title to what it means, letting them figure things out. Hands-on, let them explore, let them try, let them fail, let them try again, think of something new, learn by doing in the moment. It is that kind of spirit we are talking about.

The trends and career technical education that we are seeing now, it started even before COVID, but COVID really highlighted it. High school students especially, after they had been home for a little bit, did not want to go back and do those things any more. They had already figured out their path and wanted to just skip a couple of years and get right to it. So, Career and Technical Education has become really popular and in demand right now. We cannot work on enough projects for districts.

Six in ten students are planning on pursuing a career path. These are just some stats we will provide. What is really interesting is that right now only one in ten students will really need a master's degree. Only two in ten really need a bachelor's degree for their chosen career. There are definitely some careers and professions that need a bachelor's degree and master's degree, but seven out of ten could really use a one-year or two-year certificate or specialized training in what they want to do to be successful.

So, who needs a career-based pathway? It used to be, when I was in school, for the kids who maybe did not like academics, they were a different kind of group, but not anymore. Those that want to participate in career pathways are often students that are still going to four-year or two-year colleges. They want to get involved in a pathway before they go there. Maybe they are thinking of dental school, medical school, or something and they want to take some of these pathway classes, they don't want to sit through history class any more. They want to get right to where they are going, so they will take this pathway class and still intend to go to college. But then there are also students that want to go right to the workforce. They have already identified where they want to be. Maybe they want to go into welding, into manufacturing, and they want to get the training and move right on to an instant job. But there are also students who are very unique. They have not quite figured out what they want to do, or they are entrepreneurs. They want to open some business that has not even been started because they are interested in because they are interested in computers, but they are also interested in electronics, or robotics, and they want to combine that and come up with a whole new career. These pathways are very important for a multitude of students. To get people thinking about that is what a building like this will be all about.

This is from your website, some of the programs that we are looking at already. Students have some hands-on experience right now, and we want to make sure we can continue that at a really high level in a building like this; that we can take it to the next step with some industry partners and really offer programs that can be pathways to the workforce pipeline. We want to make sure with your guidance and some partnership with some companies here in Rockford that we can make sure it is beneficial for you and that students will graduate and want to stay

here and work in Rockford with some of these technologies. So, these are some of the industries that we have seen, and maybe all of you are from some of them, but if you're not all there, let us know. We are going to talk a little later about what you see in your community and what we should be targeting, because the next workshop we need to start to talk about what programs are going to go in this building.

These are some examples of technology campuses that DLR has worked on across the United States (refer to PowerPoint presentation). I know this looks really fancy because it was a new building, but you could do all of that same work inside a building like this. Imagine this two-story space and all the rooms. There is the ability to create some large spaces, such as this that you have here, but just giving it some transparency or opening it up. We would like to say that it puts it on display for students walking through the building to see some other pathway that they might be interested in. They may say, "Oh, I'm working on the hospitality pathway, but I'd like to try automotive.", so it allows students to try different things. This is a commons area where they can all mingle together. There might meet four or five different pathways where they can experience and collaborate with each other, just like in the real world. And this could be the culinary program that runs the restaurant in the middle of the school. So, I see a lot of potential in this building as well. Some of the other areas, we have the aeronautics program, woodworking, electrical engineering, and all the construction trades. This is one in Kansas; same idea, has a big commons space for students to gather, and mingle, and get to know each other. We are talking about at this building too, having some of the AP classes, some of the advance placement classes, so that possibly you would have a great physics teacher who would teach the AP class, but then could go into the electronics lab and lead something in there too. I am just saying there are a lot of possibilities for sharing really talented staff. Here are some areas that are getting a lot of light, so we have a lot of opportunities here. This one is Lee's Summit in Missouri. It has a very interesting space, just like this, kind of a main street and all of the rooms are off to the side, with a lot of flexibility to use this space as part of their program. I see some health care and some science happening in this space. Finally, this is a project I am working on right now in Kalamazoo, Michigan. Nine different high school districts have come together to build one new facility. They are all smaller districts than Rockford, and they figured out that they could never support this at each of their individual districts. They did have a donor, I think Striker Medical is in there and helped them out with some seed money, and this will be opening in about two years. You can see it on I-94 if you ever get over towards the Detroit area. Very popular, again, has a central commons area for all of the pathways to come together and mingle and have community space. When you have a facility like this, it is really important and helpful for the community to have events here. There could be career fairs, job interviews, all kinds of beneficial things for everyone. Not just to be used by the schools. A lot of daylight, that's important.

That was it, that's the spiel. I hope you saw some things that got your mind thinking. What we want to ask is your opinion on what you think about this facility. Have most of you been here before? I know it was Rock Valley College. It is next to Jefferson high school; this is the building in the middle. If you look at this space here (refer to map in PowerPoint), this is all the space that is around. It is really a jewel of a facility. So, I talked a little bit about the plan this

time, but we are really going to get into the plan and tour the building next time. That is incentive to come back.

This is the activity we would like to get you talking about and share some ideas. When you think about this facility becoming a college and career center, what are some of the strengths that you would associate with a project like this? What are some weaknesses? What are some opportunities that maybe we have not thought of that you would like to bring up? And what are the threats of doing a project like this at this building? Does that make sense? I am sure you guys have done a SWOT like this before.

A question was asked regarding the facilities in the presentation. In those high schools and those areas, do they have any touch screens? I am talking big screens, touch screens they would be able to use to interface with.

Ms. Meyer-Smith agreed that way finding is a huge task. DLR actually has a group inside of their firm that does nothing but signage, way finding, and branding. The touch screens have become huge in that because you can change them so much. They can do a lot, we can turn them sideways along the door of the classroom so they can touch and see what is going on in there, get announcements. It is becoming very affordable to use the touch flat screens. That is a really good question. And usually in a commons like this, we would have a big one with multiple screens so you could divide this room up.

Business Partners spent time working in small groups.

Group inputs on Strength/Weaknesses/Opportunities/Threats (SWOT):

Strengths:

Industry Support

Academy Model

Student Interest – Pathways are Strong

Career-Focused events

Invite Community support

Existing structure

Community excitement

Career pathways that currently exist offer opportunities that connect to industry needs

Welding, Nursing, Manufacturing, Transportation, Education

Willing industry partners to get/stay engaged

Visionary Initiative

Industry Connection

Community Support

Weaknesses:

Project Based Learning not fully established throughout

Teacher/Staff turnover

How can students at Roosevelt in credit recovery access this space

Location/Time

Existing scheduling

Weak local business involvement

Teachers need to spend more time with industry leaders to understand “sage on a stage” is no longer an effective teaching method – connecting to workforce is critical

Curriculum integration

Opportunities:

Teachers to get Professional Development on equipment at CCE center

Bring everything together in one place

Specialized spaces for CTE – convertible spaces

Consolidate equipment

Sharing resources

Evolution of scheduling

Blending of CTE & Core curriculum

Pathway showcase

6500 sq. ft. potential dental clinic to directly serve our students

More direct talent pipeline into industry

In medical field there is a need for technicians – CCEC could provide direction connection to filling those jobs

Need to move to hands on learning in order to remain relevant

How can we connect our programs to maximize space?

Visibility

Industry involvement

Craft the learning space to drive project-based learning

Innovation hub

Threats:

Four high schools merge

Transportation (bus)

Credit deficiencies

Travel time for students/Equity for travel

Jr. Year scheduling

CTE staffing

Blending of schools

Budget

RVC Cooperation (also an Opportunity)

Lack of knowledge among students/families about opportunities available and how to get there

Students don't have enough positive role models in their lives to help ensure they are connecting interest to high wage, high demand jobs

Lots of competing interests – every industry partner hopes to see their program represented in CCE – how do we balance it all?

Sticking to the purpose of the building

That was some great input that we will bring back to our next meeting. Working with your groups, thinking about how our industry partners work with us in the school district, and then how can Rockford School District help the industry partners? How can we help each other? And finally, talk about the skills, what should we be bringing or doing here? How would you direct us to proceed? How will we decide the priorities of the industries that come here? What skills should we be helping the students with?

Group was brought back together for discussion.

Scott Sevey, Director of Career/Technical Education spoke for the first group. Within every industry that we have pathways, we need to create two types of icons. How we can help you and how you can help us go hand in hand. You can help us because every industry has people in their industry who are really gifted and talented at teaching and training other people. I will need you to be willing to lose those people once in a while because I need really solid CTE teachers. If you can give me one really solid CTE teacher, and I can give you ten brand new employees who have been trained by that person. It is not rocket science, it's pretty simple. But it is really hard in the moment to lose the productivity of that person and I totally get that and recognize that. But we need to think along those lines. In order to create that pipeline, we also need to work together to create experiences, because asking people to jump ship to a different industry is really scary. We need to have experiences where I can take an employee of John's, and I can bring them out and they can spend a few days working in the classroom.

Or they can come over once a week and mentor in the classroom in such a way that they get their feet wet and say, "Hey, this education thing, I can maybe do that.". That creates experiences that let them taste and see it. I think this would be a really good thing. At the same time, it also gives our industry partners opportunities to be in our classroom, talking with our students, and to recruit our students. Sometimes with recruitment we think, well I have positions that I have to fill now. But we are not doing ourselves any favors if we are not thinking about, how am I going about actively recruiting now for positions that I'm going to fill four to six years from now? By being active in the classroom, you have the opportunity to say things to the student like, "hey, you want to be an engineer, you really demonstrate a lot of thought processes that we want in an engineer. Would you consider coming and being an intern and working at our place every summer? Our goal is that when you graduate college, we will hire you.".

Industry partner commented, I think you have a really good thought, but I think this needs to go both ways. I think educators need to come to us and see what the challenges we face are. We have a department of sixteen people that are professional trainers and they are exploring very interesting, advanced teaching techniques, like using virtual reality and things like that. I think it would be extremely useful for educators to come and experience that because we do not speak each other's language.

Mr. Sevey commented, just so you know, my previous role was Academy Coach at Roosevelt and we had some of our teachers come and sat in Woodward's training room in order to observe things like, how is chemistry used in the manufacturing process, how do we use blueprint reading as a form of literacy and support services.

Industry partner commented that it needs to also flow down to the junior high level because we're not connecting the sixth, seventh and eighth grades.

Mr. Sevey responded that he was right there with him. There is nothing you have said that is wrong. I basically think we've covered that; I don't want to monopolize the time. We did not get to the last question on entry level employment things. I will say this, Tabitha is here from CEANCI, and we have been trying to help her with that as well, as we do our academy advisory board meetings and as we engage with industry partners to look at those entry level skills. I agree that what our teachers say are entry level skills, and what our industry partners say are quality entry level skills, those things do not always match. We are gathering some more data on that so we can start to move that needle and orienting towards the needs that you have.

Industry partner commented that he thought that was good, but we still need for manufacturing, for the labs, the curiosity and interest, this is probably the most important thing. Are they curious?

The next group's input included that they had the same parallel discussion; that it needed to be a two-way street discussion. Industry needs to partner with education and vice versa, and we need to live in each other's worlds so that we both understand and speak a similar language,

because we do not. Collaborating with industry partners is critical and vice versa. Next, we need to address the racial and equitable gaps for our students to be successful because if one group in Rockford wins, and the other loses, then everybody loses. I grew up in the South, I grew up in South Carolina and have lived here now for two years, and I hope this does not offend anyone, but I think one of the things that holds this area back is our inability to openly admit that Rockford is a highly racially divided city. It is worse than anything that I ever saw. I went to a high school that was 75% African American, so I was a minority. But when I came here, I saw a division that is so profound, that it is actually hurting the entire region. We are neglecting groups, not just one, but multiply groups of people because they do not have the same access to the inclusive education classes that we are all so used to. I said it, and if you want me to leave now, I am offering you the chance. It is a make-or-break situation.

The next group's input included a comment regarding business being able to run and manufacture parts in the school. Next is personnel, we want to see our industry partners sending their people out here, whether it be a technician from the dentist's office, or a phlebotomist from the local blood bank, and bringing in people who would make great mentors. I know Scott and I have had that conversation a couple times over the last couple of weeks. One of the things we threw out there were organizational scholarships. We have a couple of local businesses that if grouped together, I think could do great things by putting that out there. We could put out scholarships for those who show interest, and curiosity. As a matter of fact, I was just reached out to from a friend of mine, totally unconnected to anything, as she said she had a machinist's scholarship and I've got nobody to give it to. Well, it just so happens that we have four people at our shop that we are going to try to hook up with it. But I think motivational scholarships of any amount would be a big game changer for many who don't have it.

The next group's spokesperson said that she was actually still in college and graduating with a bachelor's in business. I am also the manager of an upholstering shop that opened in April. I am only working part-time because we're that small, but I've always had a heart for youth groups, students that intern, I wish I had that opportunity when I was that age. I agree that we have to have a two-way pipeline and speak each other's languages. I think the biggest thing I took away from this in talking about skills, something I learned about looking for jobs, before I was in upholstery, I was a licensed Illinois insurance agent. When I got that job, the first thing my boss said to me in the interview was, "Do you know anything about insurance?". I said no and he said, "Great, that is exactly what I want. I want you to have such a basic level of knowledge and some soft skills that you are completely moldable and teachable, and you are able to move from one place to another and learn as you go. That is what we are kind of talking about. Helping to create checklists between all of the industries. For all the manufacturers to get together and say, these are the skills we want these students to know, they do not need to know them our way, we just need them to know. The same thing with medical, we want the students to know these skills so they can move into a medical field. So that was one of the bigger things we took away was developing soft skills.

Another business partner commented that sometimes they have the knowledge, but they don't know how to take that knowledge and apply it. And some are so terrible at speaking and connecting with people, having no interpersonal skills, that they fail. It is devastating for them.

Ms. Meyer-Smith commented that she would say that is true. That is what they see in their practice, in schools at all levels, that there needs to be a greater bringing together, and making students collide with each other and develop that empathy. We see a lot of lack of social skills and empathy for one another. So, the biggest goal that I would have moving this forward is that there is some space for the students to come together. No matter what pathway they are in, they are not just locked away in a section and they never see the other sections. You have to find a way to make them come together. Food is a great connector, food and coffee. So, we have culinary, and I'll put in that plug because we see those as very successful in buildings like this.

I want to thank you all for coming. The next workshop is on February 26th. So please come back and bring some friends. We will tour the building at that time. Then we'll be looking at priorities, not for the exact programs that will go it, but what kinds. Should there be a health care, should there be manufacturing, should there be a business? What are the buckets that we might want to fill for our students? We will start to talk a little about that.

Please refer to the DLR SWOT Analysis Results on our website, posted below the minutes, for additional input and comments.

Meeting was adjourned at 7:05 p.m. Next Business Partner Workshop will be at the College and Career Education Center on February 26, 2024, at 5:30 p.m.