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\$247K ODNR grant to fund parking lot, storage building

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FREMONT -- Fremont City Schools will get \$247,500 to complete the parking lot, sidewalks and the building of a storage building at the baseball and tennis complex by Ross High School.

The school board approved the grant and entered into an agreement with the Ohio Department of Natural Resources at Monday night's board of education meeting.

During a presentation, Kimberly Theller, director of facilities and operations for the district, said the ODNR grant is a cooperative effort between the Fremont Area Foundation and the city schools.

She said the state budget has historically included a capital budget bill that contains money for construction, replacement and improvement, and that funding varies based on available dollars.

Members of the Fremont Area Foundation began approaching representatives in the General Assembly in 2007 to request money that would be applied toward facility debt specifically for the natatorium and stadium. That initial granted request was for \$300,000.

Last year, another request was made for debt reduction, but the criteria changed under Gov. Ted Strickland, and now with the current capital budget bill the available money has to be used for new recreational construction.

While the original plan was to support both Fremont City Schools and St. Joseph Central Catholic High School athletics, the grant criteria didn't meet the needs of SJCC this time, so Fremont City Schools will use the entire amount.

"For St. Joe, it just didn't meet the criteria for what they needed," Theller said, noting the foundation will still be trying to get money for St. Joe in the future.

The projects are to be completed by June 30.

Now the parking lots for the tennis courts and Alumni Fields are gravel, but will be asphalt. A tennis storage building will be built along with a covered picnic area, and sidewalks will be made to the fields.

The specs are being completed by a local architect and will be approved by ODNR by the end of the month. The school board will approve bid projects in January and bid packets will be distributed. Then bids will be open in February, and the work is scheduled to begin in March.

"Thank you to the Fremont Area Foundation," Superintendent Traci McCaudy said, noting school districts are not able to apply for this type of grant, and that it has to be used strictly for recreational use.

She also said Theller along with Fremont Ross athletic director Art Bucci assessed the needs of the athletic facilities a couple years ago to determine what's needed.