



The Journey to Infinity's New Facility

We are very close to breaking ground for our new school on Locust Lane. It has been a long journey to this point and the Board would like to take this time to give a review of how we got here.

Infinity Charter School (ICS) has been looking for a building to own since before we opened in 2003. We are limited to locations within the physical boundaries of Central Dauphin School District, since charter school laws state that we must reside in the boundaries of our hosting school district. The law also states that the school can only have one building; using two or more buildings is not allowed, even if they are on the same property. Because of these limits, we required a minimum of five acres, accessible by bus, in a configuration suitable for a large building. ICS, many parents, and multiple realtors searched for more than a decade to find a suitable property that fit within our budget.

We came close to purchasing land twice during those years. In 2007, we nearly purchased our current Locust Lane property. In 2008, we were very close to settling on a second location, a plot of land that many referred to as the "butterfly fields." As we made plans to purchase that property, we simultaneously prepared for a capital campaign (with an outside fundraising organization), chose an architect and had the building designed. Then, the economy 'tanked'. All plans were put on hold, as the fundraising consultants felt it would be nearly impossible to raise the \$8 – 10 million needed for the facility at that time. There are always complications with any undertaking this large, and those complications blocked both earlier efforts. In particular, at that time, the law did not allow charter schools to directly own the building they inhabited. Instead, they had to create a separate entity/business that would buy and build the new school, and the school would then rent the building from that entity. ICS was in this process when we lost both properties to other buyers. Since that time, the laws have changed and charter schools now have the right to own their schools.

Shortly after the laws changed, the Locust Lane property came onto the market again. One of our Board members was able to secure the purchase, and we became the proud owners in 2014. We were not in a position to begin construction immediately, but we did not want to lose the space a second time after seeing how difficult it was to find properties that met our complex needs. Because of that, the cart came before the horse in some ways.

In 2012, our founder, Nancy J. Hall, left Infinity. She took with her a great deal of expertise and knowledge that the Board needed to replace. So, the Board took the time necessary to learn the new laws and the full legal process for building a school. ICS is a public school that uses public money; as such, there are specific rules about soliciting bids and paying prevailing wages. We cannot just hire anyone of our choosing but must instead follow clearly defined steps. It took us a half a year to vet and select our current architect.

Once we selected an architect, we were excited and announced the new land and upcoming new building to the ICS community. The excitement was short-lived, as we were bombarded by the number of requirements that needed to be met. For example, in December, 2014, we completed environmental studies that returned a two-inch binder of information dating back to the 1930s, complete with pictures. Geographic studies required that two dozen holes be drilled where the foundation will be. Environmental Protection, traffic studies, water hookup, and electrical hookup followed. During that time, we learned that Locust Lane has a septic tank whose location has been lost over the years (we expect to find it during construction and remove it) and that the building has not had an occupancy permit since before 1983, when it was a Moose Lodge. All of these activities took time. While some of

them could be conducted simultaneously, others had to be sequential, and all of them had to be completed before we could get into the specifics of the design. In total, these activities took another six months.

That meant we finally had all of the pieces in place to further the design process, a year after purchasing the land. The design was overseen by our Building Committee, which consists of parents who are professionals with experience in architecture and engineering. After a few months, we had a design and cost in hand. At that point, we needed money, which in turn required a Request for Proposals to select a bank to fund our school. After that was finished, the Board announced the design, with pictures, to the ICS community – approximately one and a half years after the land purchase.

Once we had a design, all of the required studies, and a letter of commitment from the bank, we went to the township for approval. The process at the township level included a project review by staff and the township engineers. An unforeseen delay arose because Locust Lane is owned by PennDOT. To proceed, we needed approval from PennDOT, which required even more traffic studies than we had already done, including impact assessments of how our expected traffic would affect the Locust Lane traffic lights to the east and west of us. The original township requirement had us expanding the road to include a turn lane, as well as moving a fire hydrant and electric pole. After a great deal of back and forth with the township, PennDOT, and our land development engineers, we reached agreement that ICS will adjust some curbing on both sides of Locust Lane, install some signage, and provide some road painting. After that, the staff and professionals indicated to the Township that the project is sound. Unfortunately, the township meetings are only held every two weeks, and whenever a concern arose or a question was asked, the approval was tabled until the next meeting. The project approval was delayed two times even after all of the assessments were completed and all of the staff and professionals had recommended approval. During this time, we also had a school to run and fundraising to begin.

All of that takes us to the present day. We now have Township approval for our land development plan. Our next step is to advertise the project for bid. **This is the start of the building process!** During the selection of the four prime contractors (General, Plumbing, Electrical and Heating, Ventilating and Air Conditioning), we will be finalizing the bank loan, applying for a building permit, and fundraising like the dickens! When the contractors are hired, we will have a better handle on the construction timeline. Once we have the contractors' calendar, we will announce the projected completion date.

So, what can you do in the meantime? The funds for our new school are razor thin. We have cut, reduced, and skimped as much as we can, leaving fundraising to fill the gap. Dawn Brotherton is our full-time Director of Development (fundraiser). She will be submitting grants, looking for large donors, and planning fundraising activities for our school community. Please look for her emails and help wherever you can. Together, our new building will be a reality!

Sincerely,

The Infinity Charter School Board of Trustees