

BondPlanner: Passion for Assisting School Districts Develops into a Facilities Needs Tracking & Cost Management Software

Steve Harper is passionate about assisting school districts. As the founder of multiple companies providing software for various markets, his main focus recently has been to make the planning, construction, and post construction phases for school district leaders easy to manage.

“School districts are struggling with their budget. I want to help them build the environments to teach our kids at the very best cost.”

STEVE HARPER

“I also want to help them find ways to allocate money for future projects and to provide a tool that easily gives them the answers to share this information with their constituents. That’s always a driving force in my mind when considering our products, said Harper.

With this focus, Harper developed his newest software, BondPlanner. The product was developed to answer a question put forth by Tim McClure, Assistant Superintendent For Facilities at Northwest ISD in Fort Worth, Texas. “What can you do to help us with planning?” asked McClure, who was already a customer and fan of Harper’s construction tracking software, Owner Insite (OI). While OI has a master planning and programming dashboard component, it doesn’t fully provide all of the details necessary to fully answer the intricacies of capital improvement and bond planning.

“Tim walked me through the very manual process he used to formulate the plan for their district. It was essentially a very complex and cumbersome Excel spreadsheet which was prone to errors. All of the information flowed through him, making it necessary for him to do each update, which required a lot of effort on his part. He was looking for a real-time solution to the problem.” said Harper.

Since he was already working with a number of other school districts, Harper validated the need for a comprehensive yet easy-to-use system to aid in facility assessment, campus inventory and long-range financial planning. “The answer was a resounding YES,” he said. “This was a problem that plagued school districts of every size.” Realizing there was a problem to be addressed, Harper reached out to Roy Gatling, who has spent over 30 years in the information technology sector.

“Steve and I had been looking for a project to do with each other for a few years, and this seemed like the perfect opportunity,” said Gatling.

In November 2016, Harper and Gatling developed the framework for the application. They did a field test of the platform with McClure, who provided a few notes on the functionality and capability of the tool. “We then validated it with a few other school districts and got really positive feedback. So now we’re in production and giving school districts an application that enables them to consolidate, manage and report on their planning data,” said Gatling.

BondPlanner provides a host of capabilities, such as a catalogue of all the district’s campuses, their building systems and lifecycles, replacement costs and provides cost projections years into the future based on their projected needs and associated costs.

“It’s easy to create projects with contingency rates and developing bond scenarios is as simple as clicking a mouse. It’s a very comprehensive application.”

ROY GATLING

BondPlanner also provides the ability for school districts to perform their own facility assessments to inform the overall capital plan. Additionally, the district can import data from a third party vendor that has done a facility assessment. “Typical reports from a consultant would be a PDF document, and that isn’t an optimal format. It needs to be in a database,” said Gatling. “We saw and heard the need to give school districts control over this process and extract more value from the information.”

Now that the passion project has come to fruition, Harper and Gatling are on a mission to bring BondPlanner to school districts around the country. Their hope is the software can help school leaders manage their operations more effectively, support their needs with real data and justify the investments associated with using taxpayer dollars.

With more school districts signing on every day to BondPlanner, Harper and Gatling know they have built something important. “We just want to make a positive difference for the schools. If we do that, we can play some small part in helping school leaders make an even bigger difference on the kids.” said Harper.

BondPlanner creates and delivers a product that makes the job of K-12 school facility/bond planning faster and easier. We want to be the intelligent assistant that helps you with your facility and bond planning effort.

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