

2017 Potential Operating Levy and Bond Referendum

Superintendent Matt Hillmann, Ed.D. | 06.12.2017

The Board of Education has engaged in serious discussion about the possibility of conducting an election on November 7, 2017, for the purpose of expanding and extending the current operating levy and for the purpose of selling bonds to implement components of the Master Facilities Plan. If the Board chooses to pursue this election, it is important to direct District administrators to begin making the necessary preparations to ensure an efficient election process.

It is important to briefly review the steps that preceded this discussion:

- Hazel Reinhardt, of Hazel Reinhardt Consulting Services, presented a detailed demographic report to the Northfield Board of Education in June 2014. The study included five- and ten-year projections for the District's student population, as well as a housing unit projection.
- A facilities study was conducted in the summer of 2014 by ATS&R, the District's architectural consultants.
- A series of 18 community meetings were held in the Fall of 2014. Meetings were held for parents/community members and staff at each site. Attendees were asked to tell the District what was good about their facility, what could be better about their facility, and what one change they would make to the facility to better facilitate teaching and learning.
- ATS&R worked with District staff in the Spring/Summer of 2015 to develop two approaches to the issues identified during the 2014 community meetings.
- An additional series of seven community meetings were held in the Fall of 2015. The two approaches were presented with an estimated cost of each potential project. Participants were asked to identify what they liked, what they didn't like, and any other questions they had about each approach.
- In March 2016, an online ThoughtExchange process was used to gather additional data on the two approaches developed by the District and ATS&R.
- In June 2016, the facilities-focused ThoughtExchange results were presented to the School Board.
- On November 14, 2016, the Master Facilities Plan Executive Summary was presented to the School Board. It was adopted on November 28, 2016.
- In November/December 2016, the annual ThoughtExchange process was used to gather feedback about the District's performance. Implementation of the Master Facilities Plan was among the top questions asked during the process.
- The Finance Advisory Committee discussed and provided feedback on the concept in April 2017.
- The Board held three work sessions to discuss possible Master Facilities Plan implementation strategies. During these work sessions, there was discussion about the importance of the

long-term financial stability of the District that resulted in consideration of asking the voters to expand and extend the current operating levy and consideration of a Master Facilities Plan bond election.

The general consensus from the work sessions indicated the Board's preference for asking voters to consider:

- Repealing the District's current operating levy and replacing it with an operating levy at the maximum amount authorized by Minnesota law for 10 years with an inflationary factor included.
- Authorizing the District to sell \$109 million in bonds for the purpose of implementing the Master Facilities Plan. This includes constructing a new high school on the current high school property and demolishing the current high school, constructing a new elementary school at the same location as the current Greenvale Park Elementary site and repurposing that building as an early childhood center, and modest renovations at Bridgewater Elementary, Sibley Elementary, and Longfellow School. The new high school is estimated to cost \$78.5 million and the elementary projects are projected to cost \$30.5 million.

If the Board directs administration to make preparations for a Fall 2017 election, the following items would take place:

- The District would complete the Minnesota Department of Education Review and Comment process.
- The District would begin preparing ballot language, identify polling places, and completing other necessary requirements to administer the election. These items would be brought forward for the Board's consideration on August 14, 2017.
- The District would begin preparing communications to inform the public about the election and its potential impact on the District and its taxpayers.