



February 28, 2006 Bond Referendum

Questions, Answers, and Fast Facts

Answers to your questions. Continually updated . . .

New Q & A posted February 15

Q: If the bond is successful, where would students in the current Kenneth Hall Elementary attendance area go to school? Who will go to the new school?

A: Because the opening of the new school is still over two years away and because population and demographics continue to change within our District, final determinations won't be made until Spring 2008.

That said, we *can* project that, in most cases, students living in the City of Spring Lake Park and in the current Kenneth Hall Elementary attendance area would attend either Park Terrace or Woodcrest Elementary. Both would be newly renovated by fall 2008.

The new elementary school would be constructed in the northern section of the district boundaries in Blaine, close to over 2,000 new housing units, close to where the district is projecting over 800 new students. Students living north of the Anoka County airport could expect to attend the new K-3 elementary school. At this time, however, it is still undetermined which school the students living south or west of the airport in Blaine will attend.

While many of the students from this area in Blaine would undoubtedly attend the new school, there are still decisions to be made. The District wants to be sure that the equity and balance considerations we talked about during the past two years' discussions about reconfiguration remain

intact. These considerations are a District priority as well as a necessity for compliance with State and Federal law.

Q: Why is the referendum vote taking place in February . . . and not in November?

A: Minnesota state law provides for school districts to seek a bond referendum (for buildings) during a number of times throughout the school year, not just as part of November General Elections.

The timing of the facilities study and the work of the task force did not allow for a November 2005 election. Waiting until November 2006 would be too long. The District asked for a referendum in February because to wait would create a greater risk of higher construction costs as well as higher interest rates. The District has been publicizing the facilities improvement study ever since it began, in March 2004, and especially since the Task Force began its work in February 2005, over a year ago.

Yes, people are used to voting during General Elections. However, since we knew that the study and the State Department-required Review and Comment would not be completed by November 2005, we announced, early on, that the vote would be held in late February or March 2006. That is why we have made such an extensive effort to get the word out to our residents, via mailings, meetings, website, local newspapers, and cable television. In every one of the over fifty meetings, to groups large and small, absentee ballots

have been made available for anyone who is not able to vote on February 28. We really have tried hard to be sure that everyone who wants to vote knows about the referendum and has a way to vote. In fact, even David Strom, president of the Taxpayers League of Minnesota, has complimented us on our open and above-board effort to get out information to all of the voters.

Q: Is it true that the new elementary school will also have a community center?

A: No, it will not. A few people have asked this question, probably because we have indicated that the new school would be used by the community during evening and weekend hours.

This would be no different than all of our other schools. Because each of our schools is an important part of the community, each is available to the community, as much as possible, at times when it is not used as school building. Gyms, classrooms, cafeterias, and classrooms can be and are used at night and on weekends for Girl or Boy Scout meetings, youth athletic leagues, dance recitals, political caucuses, spaghetti feeds, pancake breakfasts, and the like.

The new school building would be first and foremost a K-3 elementary school.

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Q & A posted February 8

Q: What is a bond referendum and when was the last one?

A: The easiest way to remember is “bond is for building, levy is for learning.”

Bond is For Building: (Bricks and mortar). Bond referendums are seldom proposed. This is only the third significant bond referendum in 36 years. The most recent School District 16 bond referendum was approved 11 years ago, in 1995, with overwhelming public support.

Levy is for Learning: (Instruction, staffing, the classroom).

Q: What are the basics, the main points of the facilities improvement plan?

A: The facilities improvement plan would

- add classrooms at all schools, address a projected 20 percent enrollment growth
- include renovation and new construction to address deferred maintenance needs of 35 to 50 year-old facilities
- meet all state and federal guidelines, address issues of safety and security
- build a new K-3 elementary school in the high-growth northern section of the district, near Highway 242 and Cloud Drive in Blaine
- provide for the long-range educational facilities needs of this and the next generation of students

Q: Has the District properly maintained its facilities?

A: While district facilities are clean and well maintained, many of the buildings have outlived their original intended lifespan.

The District takes great pride in the community's facilities and those charged with the task of maintaining the facilities perform their work in top-notch fashion. The district has done everything possible, but within its means. We've had years of flat state funding and a financial strain for over a decade.

Our buildings and grounds budgets have been frozen for years and we get by with fewer custodians than fifteen years ago. With limited financial resources, and a goal of keeping budget cuts away from the classroom, building maintenance funding and projects have not kept pace with where we would like them to be.

Q: This is a big project, a costly one. In what ways will this have an impact on kids and for how long?

A: This is an important, long-term investment in kids. The bond referendum would fund much of the district's long-range facilities improvement plan. It is a major, comprehensive plan that would serve students and the community for decades to come.

With a local tax base that has doubled in the last five years, the \$95.9 million bond project would mean a net increase of less than \$16/month for the average homeowner in the district.

The impact of that investment will be attractive, safe, more modern, and up-to-date schools that will effectively serve students and proudly benefit the community for the next 20-30 years.

Q: How did you come up with the needs identified in the long-range plan? What was the process?

A: A comprehensive planning process was utilized, with broad-based community involvement. Following a review of district facilities by architects and engineers that began in March 2004, a 28-member school-community task force, (including parents of school-aged children, empty-nesters, senior citizens, and business people) studied plans and options for ten months before presenting a unanimous recommendation to the School Board in November 2005.

Prior to the recommendation, the task force held public meetings and received public input.

The task force had 22 meetings, toured and examined every facility, walked the grounds, and spent over 60 hours

researching and discussing the district's significant facilities needs.

Q: Can you provide an overview of the needs—and solutions—recommended by the facilities task force?

A: For those looking for greater detail, the history of the task force work, research, findings, and recommendations are available at: www.springlakeparkschools.org.

A summary:

■ Bond referendum funds would build a new K-3 elementary school in the fastest growing area of the district and construct additional classrooms at the high school, middle school, and elementary schools. All schools' facilities—including gyms, cafeterias, athletic and fine arts areas—would be updated to serve current students and a major increase in student enrollment.

■ The district would complete deferred maintenance projects left out of the last bond referendum in 1995. Only half of the needs identified at that time were funded. As one task force member said: “The previous needs are now ten years older, ten years more expensive, and now there are ten more years worth of needs.”

Bond funds would repair and modernize 35 to 50 year-old facilities, including replacing and repairing old single-pane windows, original boilers, and worn out roofs. A task force member urged: “Let's fix it, let's do it right, let's do it all this time.”

■ The housing boom in Blaine will bring the district over 800 new students, making it among the few districts in the metro area experiencing a growth in student enrollment, and requiring additional classroom space.

■ To meet a 20% growth in student enrollment, every school would need additional classrooms and expanded facilities and services.

■ The district would build a new 750-student K-3 elementary school in Blaine where population growth is the fastest in the district. Sixty percent of the district's

students come from Blaine—the number is growing—yet none of the district's schools are north of Highway 610.

■ The 40-acre “high school complex” presently includes Spring Lake Park High School and also Kenneth Hall Elementary, Early Childhood Programs, Community Services, Learning Alternatives Community School, District Office, and the district maintenance garage. Using current state guidelines, this number of programs on one site would require almost 80 acres.

According to the Minnesota Department of Education, there is too much activity on this site. To meet minimum state standards and earn state approval for the facilities plan, the district must close Kenneth Hall Elementary School.

The State Department will allow the district to retain some of the school's space, such as the cafeteria and gymnasium, for student and community use.

■ The district will also take down the 50 year-old sections of the high school and build a new, two-story section for classrooms, as well as consolidate and expand the physical education and fine arts areas. The new construction is more cost-effective than renovating the district's oldest facilities.

Space that is gained on this site will assist in providing more much-needed outdoor teaching stations for physical education, improve student safety and security at school entrances, and provide safer traffic flow for buses and vehicles.

In this plan, the new main entrance for the high school would be located on the east side of the school, facing Highway 65.

■ The Westwood campus would receive new elementary and middle school classrooms, expanded facilities, and a new, joint elementary-middle school entrance, enhancing safety and security as well as pedestrian, bus, and car traffic.

■ Park Terrace Elementary will get additional classrooms and a major overhaul of a school originally constructed as an “open school” with no permanent classroom walls.

■ Woodcrest Elementary will get an entire

new classroom wing to host the district's early childhood programs, that will connect the two existing wings at the south end of the school.

Q: I heard you are projecting a 20 percent increase in enrollment? Is this true? Where is this taking place?

A: This is one of the biggest and most immediate needs of the bond referendum. The district is among the few in the metro area that are experiencing student enrollment growth. The district must build new classrooms in all schools to serve over 800 new students. Lunchrooms, gyms, and facilities for student services must also be expanded and updated.

■ 2,000 new housing units are being built, primarily in the northern section of the school district

■ 200 new students enrolled in one year alone, from fall 2004 to fall 2005

■ 442 new elementary students are projected

■ 393 new secondary students are projected

Q: Where would the new 750-student K-3 elementary school be located? How was this site selected?

Q: The new multi-purpose K-3 elementary school would be located in the northern section of the school district, on a 20-acre site, adjacent to a planned city park, near the intersection of Highway 242 and Cloud Drive. It would accommodate as many as 750 students and have after-school and weekend community uses as well.

The district has an agreement to purchase this land, the only land yet available within the district that fits the district's criteria and is of the necessary size.

While 60 percent of District students come from Blaine (up from 50 percent just five years ago), no existing schools are

located north of Highway 610. This is where most of the district's growth (over 800 new students) is occurring.

The new school would open in the fall of 2008.

Only two properties larger than 15 acres, that fit the necessary criteria, were available to the district: one at 19.5 acres and the one selected at 20.5 acres. All other available land is already owned and being developed, too small, too expensive, or is being sought by a professional sports organization.

Q: Why an elementary school in the northern part of the district, instead of a middle school that would be used by all students?

A: Both a new middle school and a new high school were discussed by the Task Force and seriously considered, along with countless other options.

One reason that both options were dropped was because of the additional cost.

In addition, there was absolutely no land available within our school district boundaries of the size that we needed. We would need at least 40 acres to build a middle school, or at least 60 acres to build a high school.

The 20.5 acre site on which the elementary school will be built is one of only two sites of over 15 acres that were available within our district boundaries.

Almost two-thirds of the entire Bond Referendum amount will be spent at the Westwood site and the High School site, and those are the two sites which every student will someday attend.

The proposed new elementary school would be built in Blaine, where much of the new growth is occurring.

In the facilities plan, all schools would receive significant upgrades, all would serve students very well.

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Q: There is undeveloped land near 109th and Lexington in Blaine. What about that area for a new school?

A: As for the undeveloped land in our district off of 109th and Lexington in Blaine, only the property on the northwest corner of that intersection is within our school district boundaries. Part of that is the other piece of property (19.5 acres) that we actually looked at.

There are other pieces of land that we could possibly "put together" to accumulate 20 or more acres, but that has become extremely cost-prohibitive. (And now, a professional sports organization is purchasing properties as well.)

Q: Why is this bond such a large figure?

A: The reasons how it could get this high are many including the size and amount of the facilities, and construction costs that increase over ten percent every year.

To keep the cost to taxpayers down, only half of the needs identified in 1993-95 were included in the 1995 bond referendum.

Also, the last extensive study of facilities needs was almost twelve years ago. At the time, \$60 million in maintenance, repair, renovation, and upgrading needs were identified.

In large part because *that* was such a large figure, a 1993-95 citizen-staff task force significantly whittled away at the list of projects and recommended only the most necessary projects. This totaled \$28.8 million and, in 1995, voters approved a bond referendum in this amount. At that time, over 100 projects were completed on time and on budget.

Bottom line: a lot of work was not addressed ten years ago. The needs are still there and costs to address them will only continue to grow.

One facilities task force member said, "now is the time for the district to complete the task it started ten years ago with its 1995 bond referendum and to

prepare these facilities for the next generation of students."

Q: Why so many changes at the High School-Kenneth Hall complex?

A: According to the Minnesota Department of Education, there is too much activity at the high school complex site, that additions or significant improvements could be made to Kenneth Hall Elementary or to the high school, and that both should not be on the same site. This led to only one viable alternative: reconfiguring and expanding Spring Lake Park High School and closing Kenneth Hall.

Spring Lake Park High School alone should be on a site with 55-60 acres. Instead, it occupies a 40-acre site that is also home to Kenneth Hall Elementary, Learning Alternatives Community School, district services, district maintenance garage, early childhood programs, and Community Services. This small site has as many students, staff, and daily visitors as the entire population of the City of Osseo.

State guidelines are explicit: when the cost "of renovating or improving a school facility approaches or exceeds 60% of the cost of new construction, a school district needs to replace the facility." (*See Minn. Dept. of Education website*). Kenneth Hall Elementary, as one example, has a figure of 75%.

Q: What are the deferred maintenance Issues? Short-term versus long- term solutions? Decisions regarding renovation versus new construction?

A: At one point the facilities task force was considering a list of \$60 million in "deferred maintenance" needs identified by architects and engineers. "Deferred maintenance" is the term used to describe needed but yet undone projects that are necessary in order to maintain the physical integrity of each facility.

The needs are great. Twice in the past two years, the entire Spring Lake Park-Kenneth Hall Elementary complex was shut down (once from Thursday-Sunday), forcing school cancellations due to major problems with the 50-year-old electrical system.

Not unlike the needs facing 35 – 50 year-old houses, the bond proposal includes the following work on each of the school's facilities:

- upgrade electrical capabilities
- upgrade original plumbing and piping
- replace original boilers
- replace energy-inefficient single pane windows and hollow metal window frames
- upgrade mechanical and HVAC systems
- remove and replace vinyl asbestos flooring
- repair and replace brick exteriors
- replace carpeting and casework as needed

After months of review, the final recommendation was not for \$60 million, but for \$20 million in deferred maintenance and renovation and a corresponding increase in new construction costs.

By doing this, the structures will be newer, have a far longer lifespan, and will be a better investment than by only doing deferred maintenance.

Q: What will the referendum cost the average taxpayer in the district?

A: The cost of the 20-year bond would be less than \$16/month for the owner of a home with the average taxable market value (\$200,000) in the district. This is the figure the county uses to appraise your home, and not the value of your home if you were to sell.

\$150,000		
\$11.75/month		\$141/year
\$200,000		
\$15.66/month		\$188/year
\$250,000		
\$19.66/month		\$236/year
\$300,000		
\$23.58/month		\$283/year

Q: I've seen your chart on what it would cost. What about a home value that's not on your chart?

A: Find out how the bond referendum would affect your property taxes. A "property tax impact calculator" is available on the web site, www.springlakeparkschools.org, that will calculate your specific tax impact.

Q: I heard that the cost of the referendum could go down. How is this possible?

A: With the growth of new homes and businesses within the school district's boundaries, the annual cost of the referendum, per property, is very likely to go down.

Each property is assigned a "taxable market value" by the county assessor. In the case of a bond referendum, the total amount needed is divided among taxable properties on an annual basis based on their taxable market value. In the last five years, the taxable market value of properties within school district boundaries has doubled. This trend is expected to continue.

As more houses and businesses are built within the school district, there are more properties to assume the cost of the bond. Since "the pie" (or total cost of the bond) will be cut into more pieces, it is likely that the information we are sharing about the cost of the referendum is the maximum tax impact a property owner would experience and that this would decrease over the length of the bond.

Q: Why is the referendum presented in one "question" instead of 2, 3, or 4?

A: It is presented in one question—instead of multiple questions—because the facilities task force and school board are unanimous in the belief that all of the pieces of the plan are vitally necessary, all of the pieces are interlocking, and all are part of a single plan.

The task force didn't bring to the School Board all that they wanted. After 10 months of intense study, they recommended to the Board all that they believed was needed.

The task force and school board believe that this is the best plan to solve serious infrastructure needs, to create much-needed new space for significant enrollment growth, and to solve facilities needs for at least a generation.

In a short time, interest rates will become less favorable, construction costs will increase, and land for a new school will soon no longer be available. In time, boilers and electrical and mechanical systems will be nearly impossible to repair.

Q: Why are some facilities needs scheduled for summer completion when the referendum vote hasn't taken place?

A: Some of the district's needs are so immediate and so crucial that they must be completed before the start of the next school year. Additional classrooms at Park Terrace Elementary and Westwood Elementary are included in the referendum, but will be done this summer.

Because of the rapid enrollment growth, because the district knows it will need those classrooms by fall of 2006-07, they were originally funded through a lease levy, so that winter and spring planning and developing could result in summer construction.

If the referendum passes, the district will pay off the lease levy which will, in turn, reduce the overall levy to property owners. There are choices for financing projects and the district is always looking for ways to provide the best services for students while minimizing, when possible, the financial impact on the community.

This is not unlike when the district refinanced previous bonds and passed the savings on to district taxpayers.

The district will also solve long-time problems of the high school track and athletic field this summer. This project is not a part of the bond referendum, but is

an important part of the overall facilities utilization and improvement plan.

Panther Stadium has a severe drainage problem, an unsafe track that cannot be used for the second year in a row for North Suburban Conference events, and an athletic field useable only for a select few athletic events and is off-limits for other student use, including physical education classes.

These facilities must be worked on this summer to ensure their use by the start of the 2006-07 school year. The facilities task force studied this need and supports this project.

Q: What if the February 28 referendum doesn't pass?

A: Would we conduct another election? Almost certainly, and probably soon. It is the school district's responsibility to address the needs of students and their facilities.

Would it be the exact same long-range plan in the referendum? Probably not. If the facilities plan were scaled back, a number of the crucial needs would probably remain undone, and without solutions for the foreseeable future.

Deferred maintenance and renovation needs won't go away. They will, however, become more expensive to complete.

The extensive enrollment growth will continue to occur, creating school crowding that will negatively impact student achievement.

Interest rates and construction costs will increase. As a task force member said: "Now is the time to do it all, to do it right, and to get the biggest bang for our buck."

An unsuccessful bond referendum vote on February 28 would require the district to undergo additional planning, discussions, and meetings; we would learn from the experience, and re-examine our next steps.

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Q: Yes, they're old, but are the mechanical systems really that bad?

A: Well, yes. Here are two stories to illustrate:

March 2003: A high school boiler room flooded when a water pipe deteriorated and burst. Water filled a transformer room and blew a fuse, a 13,800-volt fuse stat from the 1950s. These fuses had not been manufactured for many years.

A search produced only three, available from a "collector" in California. We purchased all three fuses—at \$5,000 each—knowing we'd need them all one day. Spring Lake Park High School, Kenneth Hall Elementary, and Learning Alternatives Community School closed for the day.

April 2004: A power outage at the high school complex was, again, a result of the early 1950s electrical system. The conduit around a high voltage line rotted and caused the wire to deteriorate and short out.

Both the underground conduit (the parking lot needed to be excavated) and wire had to be replaced to the building. Spring Lake Park High School, Kenneth Hall Elementary, and the entire complex was shut down from a Thursday through Sunday as a result.

Q: What would you gain in energy efficiency with these mechanical upgrades?

A: Efficiency gained would be considerable:

Boilers: We would replace a number of boilers, some as old as 50 years. Energy and operating efficiency should improve by over 30 percent.

Windows: Most of our windows are single pane, with little R-value. These would be replaced by thermal pane windows with a high insulated R-value, solar gain, and reduced heat loss.

Electrical: We would significantly upgrade, to current standards, from what are in many cases, old, problematic, unreliable electrical systems.

Air handling units: We would install far more efficient systems that meet current Minnesota guidelines.

Q: How can I find out more before the February 28 vote?

A: Quite a few ways...here are some of them:

■ District Website

Visit www.springlakeparkschools.org and select Facilities Improvement Plan/Bond Referendum. This site has one-year's worth of information that details every aspect of the process leading up to the School Board decision for a vote on a bond referendum.

■ Have your questions answered

You will receive a response (within two work days or less whenever possible) if you leave your question on one of the Hotlines below. *Please Include a name, address, and phone number with your question.*

E-Mail Hotline:

2006BondReferendum@district16.org

Phone Hotline: 763-795-5195

■ View a series of online facilities videos

Visit www.springlakeparkschools.org to view an 11-minute video on the findings and recommendations of the community-staff Facilities Task Force, two 6-minute videos offering a "virtual tour" of facilities needs and improvement plans at each site, or a 28-minute public access television program on the referendum.

■ Pick up a DVD

If your Internet or computer's capacity does not allow you to view an online video, you can stop by any of our schools, the district office, or Community Services to check out, for review at home, a DVD copy of two of the video presentations.

■ Cable television

Informational programming on facilities needs and the bond referendum are available on the school district's cable channel as well as seven additional channels.

Comcast, serving Blaine and Spring

Lake Park Channel 19: Spring Lake Park School District 16, Channel 14: North Metro Community Access, Channel 15: North Metro Media, Channel 16: City

of Spring Lake Park Government, Channel 16: City of Blaine Government

Time-Warner, serving Fridley Channel 15: City of Fridley Public Access, Channel 16: Fridley Education Channel (Wed. evenings), Channel 17: City of Fridley Government

Q: I wasn't able to attend any of the meetings, will there be more?

A: In January, there were over a dozen daytime or evening meetings and/or tours and another 40 meetings with groups including parents of preschool children, city councils, senior citizens, taxpayer groups, and area service groups. More will be scheduled whenever there is an interest or an audience.

We'll come to your home, a coffee shop, or wherever, to meet with you, your friends, or neighbors. Call Kathy at 763-785-5513 to arrange a meeting.

Q: When, where, and how do I vote?

A: The special election for the bond referendum is **Tuesday, February 28, 2006.**

Election hours are 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.

■ School district residents living in Blaine vote at **Westwood Elementary School**, 701-91st Ave NE, Blaine.

From Highway 65/Central Ave., go west on 89th Ave. Turn right on Jackson St. Proceed to 91st Ave. NE and turn left. Go one block, turn right on "Westwood School Road."

■ School district residents living in Spring Lake Park or Fridley vote at **Woodcrest Elementary School**, 880 Osborne Rd, Fridley.

Take Highway 65/Central Ave. to Osborne Rd. Go west two blocks. Turn left on Van Buren St. to enter the parking lot.

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Q: How can I get an absentee ballot?

A: Just call 763-785-5513 to request an absentee ballot application form or download a form by going to www.springlakeparkschools.org.

More detailed voting information is also available on the web site above.

Q: How will you keep us informed if the referendum passes?

A: We will communicate with you as much or more after the referendum passes, as we have before it passes.

- If the referendum passes, mail and website updates will be provided to district residents throughout all planning and construction phases.
- A Construction Oversight Group will be formed and any resident may participate. Meetings will be held every 4-6 weeks to review design and construction progress, hear from the architect and construction manager, and provide feedback. Call 763-785-5513 if you would like to be involved.