

Q & A on Syosset Facilities Referendum

January 2018

Text in Black appeared in the original document.

Text in Blue was added 1/31/18.

Text in Green was added 2/2/18.

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BACKGROUND

The District is holding a facilities referendum on February 13, 2018. The Referendum includes 2 propositions for voter approval. Although both propositions address facilities improvements, they have different financing mechanisms and so are presented for approval separately.

Proposition 1 – “Facilities Improvement Proposition”. The first proposition contains the following elements:

- Building repairs identified by the school’s architects and engineers.
- Air conditioning in every classroom and in the auditoriums of both middle schools and the high school.
- Improvements to the science labs to help implement the Next Generation Science Standards.
- Improving traffic safety at the high school and on South Woods road.
- Creating a parent drop-off loop and visitor parking at Syosset High School.
- Replacing the temporary structure that houses the high school weight room.
- Widening the existing stadium to accommodate soccer, replacing the existing running track and widening it to 8 lanes, and replacing the natural turf field with artificial turf.
- Adding additional parking at Berry Hill and Baylis Elementary Schools.
- Improving parent drop-off and traffic circulation at Walt Whitman Elementary School.
- Enclosing exposed student walkways at Syosset High School and South Grove Elementary School.
- Financial details:
 - Proposition 1 will cost \$45,810,00, which will be paid for by expending \$11,464,500 in Capital Reserve Funds, and issuing \$34,345,500 in debt.
 - The debt repayment will be reduced by approximately \$7.1 million in facilities reimbursement funding from the State.
 - An existing debt is about to be paid off. The net change in the tax levy when the new debt replaces the old debt will be approximately \$400,000/year.
 - This means that for every \$10,000 in annual school taxes paid by a homeowner, the net increase in school taxes would be \$20.65/year.

Proposition 2 – “Energy Performance Contract”. The second proposition would improve the energy efficiency of the District’s 10 buildings. Some of the building repair issues identified by the District’s

architects and engineers concern the heating systems. Those issues are addressed in Proposition 2 among the following projects:

- New energy-efficient furnaces at Baylis, Village, Willits, and Robbins Lane Elementary Schools as well as the South Grove Annex.
- Building energy management systems in every building.
- Solar panel installation on roofs at Willits, Berry Hill, and Baylis Elementary Schools, and on H.B. Thompson Middle School and Syosset High School.
- LED lighting replacements along with the replacement of 68,000 sq. ft. of associated ceilings.
- A “co-generation” facility at Syosset High school which generates both electricity and heat from natural gas.
- Additional building weatherization.
- “Smart plug” type devices to reduce energy consumption from computers, vending machines, refrigerator compressors, etc.
- Financial details:
 - The project cost of \$19,989,248 will be financed either through a bond or a “lease-purchase”, whichever is most cost-effective at the time of construction.
 - The cost of paying for the building improvements will be completely offset by the energy savings they generate.
 - The savings are guaranteed by contract: if the savings do not exceed the cost in any given year, the contractor performing the work must repay the difference to the school district.
 - The District will reduce its energy consumption by approximately \$1.2 million/year.
 - Voter approval is not required. However, securing voter approval unlocks an additional \$2.2 million in facilities reimbursement from the State.
 - Over 18 years, the project is estimated to create a net savings to the District of \$7.7 million (on average \$422,000/year).

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GENERAL QUESTIONS

Q – When are there opportunities to get more information?

Community Information Meetings – These meetings will be held:

- Wednesday, Jan. 24: 7:30 p.m. at South Woods Middle School
- Monday, Jan. 29: 7:30 p.m. at South Woods Middle School
- Wednesday, Feb 7: 7:30 p.m. at South Woods Middle School

Syosset High School Tour – We will be offering a tour of the areas in need of renovation on:

- Saturday, Feb. 3: 10:30 – 12 p.m.

Q – How many people are needed to pass the propositions?

A – Both Proposition 1 and Proposition 2 need a simple majority (50% + 1 vote) of the actual voters in order to be approved.

Q – What are the polling logistics?

A – Polling will be conducted just like the District budget vote and Board election in May:

- *Polling Locations:* Robbins Lane, HB Thompson Middle School, and Syosset High School.
- *Polling Times:* February 13, 2018 from 6:00 a.m. until 9:00 p.m.
- Absentee Ballots may be obtained by contacting the District Clerk at 364-5605.
- *Voter Registration:* Voters registered to vote in a general election are automatically registered to vote in the school referendum. Voters wishing to only register for school elections may do so:
 - Monday, Jan. 22: 4-8 p.m. at South Woods Middle School
 - Monday, Feb. 5: 8 a.m.-12 p.m. at Syosset High School

Q – What happens if one or both of the Propositions are not approved?

A – If neither proposition is approved, the District has the option of putting it to a second vote or adjusting the scope of the either (or both) proposition(s) and holding a second vote. In the meantime, if one of the building systems fails, it would be addressed on an emergency basis, as was done with the Fire Alarm panel that failed at H.B. Thompson Middle School and the furnace that failed at Walt Whitman Elementary School.

Because some of the work is interrelated, if only one of the propositions is approved, work would begin as soon as possible on any aspect of that project that can stand alone. Other aspects of the work may have to be redesigned, or additional voter approval may be sought for the interrelated parts.

Q – Will there be additional security in place during the polling?

A – Yes. The District will have additional security personnel present during school hours.

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FINANCIAL QUESTIONS

Q – What is the length of the borrowing? What is the interest rate on the bonds? Are these rates fixed or variable? Can the debt be staged instead of borrowed up front?

A – Since it will take many years to do all the proposed facilities work, the District will not incur the debt all at once (like a mortgage). School districts are permitted to borrow only what is necessary for active projects once the work is ready to start. This is done with short-term notes called Bond Anticipation Notes (BANS). As these small BANS accumulate, they are aggregated and refinanced into a Bond. School districts borrow using fixed rates.

Q – If the net borrowing will be about \$27 million, why does Proposition 1 ask for voter approval of \$34.3 million?

A – The State will partially reimburse the District for some of the construction costs. The District must borrow the money up front in order to pay the contractors, then the debt is repaid through a combination of District and State money.

Q – What will be the cost to repay the debt from Proposition 1 to an “average homeowner”?

A – The debt service on the new borrowing would be approximately \$3 million per year. However, the District is poised to pay off some existing debt. The annual difference between the debt we’re retiring and the new debt we would incur will result in a tax levy increase of 0.2065% - about \$400,000. For every \$10,000 in annual school taxes paid by a homeowner, the net increase in school taxes would be \$20.65/year.

Q – The proposed projects are based on cost estimates. How are the actual costs of school construction projects established?

A – All aspects of every project are subject to public bidding requirements. After final plans are approved by the State Education Department, the project specifications are put out to bid. The District must then award the contract to the lowest responsible bidder.

Thus, the price is ultimately determined by the sum of all the lowest bids (not the estimates), but the overall cost of a project may not exceed the amount authorized by voters. If the actual cost comes in below the estimate, then only the actual cost is expended, not the entire amount authorized. For example, the District returned \$536,000 to the general fund from 2016-17 roof and electrical projects successfully completed below budget. Another \$836,000 is estimated to be returned from several projects in 2016-17 and 2017-18 once the final cost reports have been approved by the auditors.

Q – How does the “savings guarantee” in Proposition 2 work?

A – The District creates a contract with a single energy services company (ESCO). The contract specifies the estimated energy savings that will result in each year once construction is complete. It also estimates the energy usage based on past experience. If the actual energy savings fall short of the cost of the construction, the contractor is required to reimburse the District for the difference. (Note: adjustments are included to future energy use measurements in case there is a particularly warm/cold winter or other factor that impacts energy consumption.)

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ATHLETICS FACILITIES

Q – Why is the stadium being reconstructed?

A – The stadium reconstruction is designed to address several issues identified with the function of the athletic program at the school district:

1. The existing track is in very poor condition. Repairs efforts over the past 2 years have not been cost effective, so the track will require complete reconstruction. This would be the opportunity to consider widening the track to 8 lanes in order to host larger meets, or complete existing meets in fewer heats.
2. The existing stadium is designed to accommodate football and lacrosse, but is too narrow to host soccer. Widening the field allows it to be used for an additional boys and girls sport.
3. Natural turf fields have limited ability to sustain extended use without significant wear. Artificial turf fields can be used repeatedly without “rest/recovery periods”, allowing more extensive use of the field for physical education classes and multiple sports teams on weekends.

Q – Is the stadium being relocated?

A – No. In working with the architects, it initially appeared that the only way to make the stadium wide enough to accommodate soccer would be to relocate it. However, in response to community feedback, the architects found a creative solution that will allow the stadium to be widened and include an 8-lane track, while remaining in its existing location. This will have the advantage of leaving all of the existing varsity and middle school soccer fields untouched and available for use during construction.

Q – Will traffic circulate behind South Woods Middle School?

A – No. However, we are planning to extend pavement along a bare path and extend a sidewalk behind the gym in order to improve access for emergency vehicles.

Q – Will the additional paved areas increase traffic on the campus?

A – No. We plan to gate these paved paths, but have them available to improve circulation on very high traffic days (parent teacher conferences, etc.). We plan additional parking and a drop-off lane between South Woods Middle School and the stadium which should encourage parents to pick up students on campus instead of on Wilshire Drive.

Q – Will there be new outdoor bathroom facilities included in the stadium project?

A – Yes. The proposal includes pricing for a small bathroom facility near the stadium, tennis courts and varsity baseball and softball fields. This will allow the District to avoid the need to leave the high school open and unlocked during athletic contests. The exact location has yet to be determined.

Q – Can the stadium be used at night?

A – No. Lighting is not proposed as part of this project. Outdoor stadium lighting has a very extensive public approval process that must be followed, should the District ever consider adding lighting at some point in the future.

Q – Has the safety of artificial turf fields been studied?

A – Two state agencies (and New York City) have released studies on artificial turf fields:

- The NYS Department of Health stated the following “Our review of the available information on crumb rubber and crumb rubber infilled turf fields indicates that ingestion, dermal or inhalation exposures to chemicals in or released from crumb rubber do not pose a significant public health concern.” https://www.health.ny.gov/environmental/outdoors/synthetic_turf/crumb-rubber_infilled/fact_sheet.htm
- The NYS Department of Environmental Conservation had similar findings. http://www.dec.ny.gov/docs/materials_minerals_pdf/crumbrubfr.pdf
- As did the New York City School Construction Authority. https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/eode/turf_report_05-08.pdf

The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is conducting a new study, due in 2018, which we will review when complete.

Q – What is the infill material the District anticipates using?

A – There are a number of infill materials with varying degrees of cost, cushioning, and durability. Crumb rubber is the most common infill material in use. Our plan specifies an upgraded crumb rubber product that is coated to seal the rubber, lighten the color to reduce the temperature of the field, and potentially add anti-microbial substances.

Q – What happens to the synthetic surface when it wears out?

A – Depending on how heavily it is used, an artificial turf field will need to be replaced every 10 to 15 years at a cost of \$500,000. A comparably sized natural surface requires about \$40,000 a year in maintenance. Thus turf is slightly more expensive to maintain, but can be used more frequently and earlier in the spring than natural turf. When the field is replaced, both the turf and infill are recycled. Some of the infill is reused in place and some of it is remanufactured into new crumb rubber. The carpet playing surface is also recycled by grinding it into new material. Neither would be landfilled.

Q – How common is artificial turf?

A – Our architects estimate that “nearly 80% of School Districts on Long Island have a synthetic playing surface as part of their facilities”.

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WEIGHT ROOM

Q – How large is the existing weight room relative to the proposed replacement?

A – The existing weight room comprises 3 installed “temporary” units totaling approximately 3,500 ft² with no bathroom or locker facilities. The replacement is larger because of the following:

- 4,400 ft² Physical Education Class Station – The increase in size of the actual weight room floor could allow the District to relocate exercise bikes that are presently along the spectator area of the pool. Students in PE class currently must take turns on the bikes because the space cannot accommodate enough equipment for all of them.
- 1,525 ft² Additional bathrooms and locker rooms – There is a lack of adequate bathroom and locker facilities in the high school, the replacement creates 2 locker rooms (boys and girls) with bathrooms.
- 2,730 ft² Security Corridor – The addition is designed with a corridor to attach the “E-Hall” and “A-Hall” wings of the high school. Currently students must walk outside to access the weight room during the school day.
- 1,145 ft² Mechanicals/Administration – The structure is designed to be secured separately from the high school, allowing it to be used to host activity without access to the high school structure. Examples would include elections or serving as a temporary shelter. Thus it has 2 individual stall bathrooms along with mechanical, vestibule and office space.

Q – How was the estimate of the cost to replace the existing weight room developed?

A – School construction costs are currently estimated at approximately \$500 per square foot. The structure planned is about 9,800 ft², so the cost estimate is about \$4.9 million.

Q – How does the District benchmark these cost estimates?

A – We consulted with our school construction management firm, which is independent of the architecture firm. In addition, we contacted Nassau BOCES, which employs 3 architecture firms, all of which are estimating new construction costs at roughly \$500/ ft². (Note: Syosset’s architecture firm, H2M, also does work with Nassau BOCES.) Recently, costs have been running higher than estimates because of construction materials pricing pressure from hurricane reconstruction efforts in Texas and Florida. We are hoping that by the time we begin construction over a year from now that they will have come back down.

Q – The cost of \$500/ ft² seems expensive, even compared to luxury residential and light commercial construction. What drives that cost?

A – A more detailed cost estimate can be found here: <<LINK>>. School construction costs tend to be higher than comparable residential or commercial construction. This is the result of several factors:

- Specialized Building Code – Schools must meet a more robust building code than other commercial structures. Schools must meet both the IBC (International Building Code) or the State Education Department “Manual of Planning” – whichever is more stringent for any given element. Examples of significant differences include: upgraded wind-loading requirements, fire-rated corridors, more stringent ventilation, fire alarm, and electrical systems, etc. Schools must also meet higher initial durability standards that save maintenance and replacement costs over the long run.
- State Public Works Laws – Several state laws impact public construction costs. Schools’ contractors are required to pay state-regulated (“prevailing”) wages and submit certified payrolls monthly. Private construction may use unregulated wages. Also, schools are required to bid to multiple prime contractors. Known as the Wicks Law, this has been shown to impact school construction costs.
http://www.nyssba.org/index.php?src=gendocs&ref=Wicks&category=advocacy_legislation
- Supply and Demand – There have recently been a number of school facilities bonds approved (totaling more than \$900 million on Long Island since 2014-15). Although interest rates remain low, this recent surge in demand has led to price escalation for construction costs, particularly for electrical and HVAC.
- Approval Delays – The increased school construction has also created delays in State Education Department (SED) approvals – essentially adding a year of inflation costs to every project. SED currently (1/2/2018) shows a 990 project backlog on their website.
<http://www.p12.nysed.gov/facplan/status.html>

Q – Is the weight room only used by athletics teams?

A – No. The weight room is an additional instructional station and can be used for conditioning and wellness units in the Physical Education curriculum.

Q – Can the weight room be expanded in the future to a field house?

A – No. The weight room is designed as a stand-alone structure. No additional structures are contemplated at this time.

Q – What are the costs of adding new fitness equipment to the weight room?

A – The total additional cost to furnish the facility would be up to \$150,000, depending on how much of the existing equipment will be salvageable when the weight room is dismantled (in either 2019 or 2020, depending on the speed of state approvals). The architects have put a \$50,000 allowance for equipment within the “General Conditions” line item for construction. The remaining amount would be funded through a future budgetary appropriation after evaluating the existing equipment during demolition. The District receives approximately 22% in state reimbursement, so if an additional \$50,000 in equipment is needed, the net budget impact would be \$39,000. If \$100,000 additional is needed, the net budget impact would be \$78,000.

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GENERAL QUESTIONS/SUGGESTIONS

Q – Can the District explore exhaust fans in the common areas that are not planned to be retrofitted with air conditioning such as cafeterias and gyms?

A – Yes. The District will explore ceiling-mounted exhaust fans in these larger spaces.

Q – Is the mobile lab furniture for the science rooms just as sturdy as fixed furniture?

A – Yes. Both types are built to the same specifications. However, the mobile furniture gives more flexibility to allow rearrangement of the rooms for large scale experiments.

Q – Will we seek out grants and donations to offset some of these costs?

A – Yes. The District is currently exploring a legislative grant that may offset some of the cost of the science rooms and we will explore any other opportunities that materialize.

Q – Will we seek advice from research institutions on creating “state-of-the-art” lab spaces?

A – Yes. The District has strong relationships with institutions that co-sponsor our students for science competitions and we will look to ensure that our facilities complement theirs.

Q – Is it possible to install traffic control devices or speed bumps on Southwoods Rd.?

A – Not at this time. We have explored these ideas with the Town of Oyster Bay. They were very receptive to our proposal to widen the road near the tennis courts and offered to plow it once completed, but their traffic engineers do not recommend traffic control devices at this time.

Q – Can we direct traffic on Southwoods Rd. at the high school and at Stillwell Park?

A – No. District employees are not permitted to direct traffic on public roads. Only school crossing guards employed by the Nassau County Police Department may do so.

Q – How does the District choose architects? Should a District of our size employ multiple architects?

A – The District issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) for architectural services in 2013-14. The District received 10 bids, the Board interviewed 4 finalists and selected H2M. Districts typically employ a single firm to help ensure familiarity with each District’s unique physical plant and legacy systems, to provide

consistency among drawings, and to coordinate construction and State Education Department approvals.

Q – How does the District supervise the contractors? Do we provide incentives to do the work quickly and well?

A – The District employs both our architects and a construction manager to help supervise the projects. Both are supervised by the District’s Director of Operations and Deputy Superintendent. They will employ a number of specific means to help ensure that construction remains on track. Those include:

- Bid bond – These bonds are used to ensure that the low-bidding contractor agrees to enter into a contract to complete the project. If the low-bidding contractor tries to walk away from the project, the bid bond can be collected by the school district. The amount is typically 10% of the amount bid.
- Performance bond – These bonds are issued by an insurance company or bank to guarantee satisfactory completion of a project by a contractor. If the contractor fails to complete the project, the company that issued the performance bond is responsible for hiring another contractor to complete it.
- Construction Manager – They are hired by the school district to help plan and oversee the construction of projects from beginning to end. There will be a full time monitor in the district overseeing all construction projects. They help ensure that the schedule is maintained, that projects are being built to match the contract documents, and to make sure that the sites are self-contained so that the contractors are isolated from the students and staff.
- Project meetings – During a construction project, the construction manager will host weekly meetings with the contractors. The schedule is reviewed at each meeting to ensure that the contractor is hitting all the milestones.
- Liquidated damages – The contractor must pay \$1,000 for every day that the project goes beyond the agreed upon date of substantial completion. A project is deemed substantially complete when it is fully operational and occupiable by the owner.
- Payment process – The contractors are not paid anything up front. They are only paid for work that’s been completed, or for materials that are at the job site. This is additional protection for the school district in case the contractor does not complete the work, there is enough money left to pay another contractor to complete the work.

(Note: the term “bond” above means deposits by a contractor or insurance company that are held in escrow and forfeited to the District if the contractor does not perform. That is not to be confused with the “bonds” that are the debt instruments (similar to a mortgage) that the District uses to finance the construction. They unfortunately use the same term, but it has a different meaning in those two contexts.)

Q – Will there be workers on site?

A – During the school year, any work that would cause a disruption will be completed after school hours. Under no circumstances will any work take place at a site that has testing. Non-disruptive work, work during break periods and work during the summer, will be completed during the day. The construction sites will be enclosed by fences outside and temporary partitions inside so that they’re secure and isolated from the students and staff.

Q – How long will the construction last?

A – The majority of the work is scheduled to be completed between summer 2019 through the summer of 2021. The weight room would be phased so it will have minimal impact on the students. An example of the schedule would be as follows: Construction to start in the spring while school is in session and be enclosed within a fence where the existing portables are. The construction site would then expand over the summer to tie the corridors into the existing building. The corridors would be completed before students returned in September. Temporary partitions would then enclose the areas that remained under construction through the fall.

Q – Will there be a loss of instructional space during construction?

The architect and construction manager will work with the school district to limit the amount of space that's lost during construction. Projects like the science rooms or other interior renovations will be completed over the summer. Projects like the turf field and fitness center will require programs to temporarily relocate during construction.