

# Dist. 86 facility plans in public's hands

April 4 referendum will ask voters for \$76 million for renovations at both schools

By Ken Knutson

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Voters in Hinsdale High School District 86 will be asked April 4 to decide whether to issue \$76 million in bonds for upgrades and upsizing at both Hinsdale Central and Hinsdale South high schools.

The roots of this referendum can be traced back to 2010, when the school board approved a 10- to 15-year master facility plan at cost of just over \$100 million. The district made incremental inroads on the list through summer projects over the

next few years, but by the end of 2014, board members determined the time had come to refresh the plan.

The result, as presented by a special steering committee in September 2015, was a far more ambitious capital improvement vision comprised of 94 projects and a \$200 million price tag. The scope reflected the increasing issue of overcrowding at Central and problems associated with aging buildings not designed for 21st-century needs. Central opened in 1950, while South dates back to 1965.

Pam Bylsma, assistant superintendent for academics, spoke to

the challenges students faced due to cramped conditions and environments not conducive to technology or a smooth traffic flow.

"Imagine facilities that would expand rather than limit our students' academic, athletic and extracurricular offerings as well as student practice and performance opportunities," she said.

The Central student body numbered 2,841 then and had ticked up to 2,873 by the start of the 2016-17 school year. That's also when, after lengthy discussion and debate that saw the \$200 million in projects whit-



led down first to \$130 million then \$94 million, the board voted on a \$79.9 million referendum for the Nov. 8 election.

The measure was rejected by 4-3 vote. Superintendent Bruce Law told board members that Central's optimal enrollment was 2,490. The underutilized South, meanwhile, has space for almost 180 additional students. But simply relocating pupils was not a viable solution, he said.

"There is no shifting of students that is going to solve our space issues," Law said, underscoring the severity of the situation. "We have been thinking of contingency planning, but it's no longer contingency. It's now real."

So the only ballot question Hinsdale residents saw on their Nov. 8 ballot was for constructing a new Hinsdale Middle School. After exploring the scope of improvements feasible with scaled back plans of \$40 million, \$50 million and \$60 million, board members on Jan. 9 considered a new proposal: a \$95 million referendum.

In addition to renovating library, special education and fine arts space at both campuses as well as building a new aquatic facility at Central and pool upgrades at South, the plan also included adding 18-19 classrooms at Central.

That turned out to be too much sticker shock for some on the board.

"I've already spoken up that I'm not in favor of spending \$95 million," said board member Bill Carpenter, who recommended elimination of the classrooms to bring the total cost down to \$76 million.

That amount was ultimately approved for the April 4 ballot by a 6-1 vote, with Claudia Manley as the lone dissenter. Roughly two-thirds of the funds, or \$48.3 million, would be spent at Central.

The plans continue to be tweaked. At its committee of the whole meeting Monday, the board was slated to review cost-saving opportunities identified by three construction management firms. The potential reductions submitted ranged from about \$6 million to more than \$12 million. That indicates that although the referendum amount is locked in, the actual final product envisioned is still a work in progress.

Board President Kay Gallo at the Jan. 9 meeting said the public will determine what they are willing to support.

"I think it needs to go out to the voters for the voters to decide what they're going to tolerate," she said.



South residents filled a meeting room Aug. 15 to object to plans for a November referendum.

## D86 facilities timeline

District 86 board members and others have been talking about facility needs at Hinsdale Central and Hinsdale South high schools in earnest for more than two years. Here are a few of the highlights of that conversation:

### 2014

- **Dec. 1** — board votes 4-1 to spend up to \$85,000 to "refresh" the 2011 master facilities plan

### 2015

- **Sept. 14** — the master facility plan steering committee presents a plan encompassing roughly 94 projects at a cost of about \$200 million

### 2016

- **Jan. 21** — board votes 4-2 to approve a modified \$130 million master facilities plan, which earmarks roughly \$93 million for Central and \$37 million for South

- **April 18** — board votes 5-2 to identify \$94 million worth of projects as critical

- **July 11** — a citizens task force presents a \$92 million facilities improvement plan to the board

- **July 25** — board discusses a revised plan that totals \$79.9 million

- **Aug. 15** — board votes 4-3 against putting a \$79.9 million referendum on the Nov. 8 ballot

- **Sept. 22** — board discusses options to deal with growing enrollment at Central in light of decision not to go to referendum

- **Dec. 12** — board members review \$40 million, \$50 million and \$60-\$65 million options for an April 4 referendum

- **Dec. 19** — board learns that Superintendent Bruce Law has instituted a diving moratorium at both pools following a study that indicates the diving wells do not meet current depth standards

### 2017

- **Jan. 9** — board votes 6-1 to put a \$76 million referendum on the April 4 ballot