

Frequently Asked Questions:

What is included in the total referendum cost of \$13,105,000?

The total project cost is \$13,105,000 and cannot, by state law, exceed that amount if approved by voters. Costs include all renovations, construction, building system replacements and repairs, site work, furnishings, fixtures and equipment, professional service fees, and required permits for all the identified projects at each school.

How was it decided which projects to include in the referendum?

A comprehensive facilities study was completed by Hoffman Planning, Design & Construction, Inc. and its team of consultants over the past three years. The review identified a prioritized 20-year list of building infrastructure needs across the District including roofs, lighting, plumbing, electrical, heating and cooling systems. This information was combined with the results of the District-wide survey of residents. A group of community members met multiple times over the course of 2016 and 2017 to review all the information and to discuss the priority needs of the district.

Why are these projects needed now?

Programming and safety needs at both PK-8 schools require classroom additions and vestibule changes that cannot be met out of budget. Additionally, the high school career and technical education spaces are outdated and inefficient in meeting industry standard requirements. Current infrastructure and HVAC systems do not support adequate learning environments. Current physical education and athletic spaces are utilized over capacity throughout the year. This past year, construction costs, driven by supply and demand, have seen increases in price of 10%-20%, especially in steel and wood. Construction costs typically inflate 3%-4% year over year. These factors, combined with current low interest rates and tax levy, make this an ideal time to support this need.

Has the District been taking care of building maintenance?

The District has committed to an average of \$318,000 each year for the last 5 years on facility improvements and needs. The scope of the proposed projects is just too large for the District budget to absorb.

Why can't these projects be completed out of the regular operating budget?

Many future projects directly connected to the Birnamwood and Wittenberg Elementary and Middle Schools, such as roofs, heating and ventilation systems, concrete and blacktop repairs, as well as transportation purchases are planned for out of the normal operating budget. The proposed projects in this referendum, such as new building classroom construction, significant

changes to school vestibules, and major infrastructure upgrades to the high school cannot be met with our existing budget.

What is a mill rate?

Mill rate is also known as the millage rate. One mill is equal to 1/1,000th of a currency unit. To calculate the property tax, the taxing authority multiplies the assessed value of the property by the mill rate and then divides by 1,000. For example, a property with an assessed value of \$50,000 located in a municipality with a mill rate of 10 mills (also shown as a dollar figure of \$10.00) would have a property tax bill of \$500 per year.

What is a tax levy?

The school tax levy is the total amount of money to be raised through school property taxes. The school board sets the levy each year at the annual meeting in October. The school tax rate or mill rate is the dollar amount per \$1,000 of assessed property value that a property owner pays in taxes.

What happens if the referendum is not approved?

The District has a responsibility to provide safe, operational and accessible schools to all students, staff and community members. The School Board would likely return to the community for additional feedback and begin planning to return to voters again, in the future.

I don't have children in school. Why should I care about the future of the Wittenberg-Birnamwood School District?

Thriving schools also help to keep a community vibrant not only as a primary employer but also by attracting families to the area. Selling a home becomes increasingly difficult in an area without a presentable community school causing property values to drop. Schools are usually a gathering place in a community. Program and services are opportunities for citizens to use facilities while also enjoying the fellowship of other citizens.

What do our enrollment trends look like?

Our District enrollment is stabilizing pretty consistently between 80-90 students per grade level. This trend is expected to continue.

How does open enrollment affect the district budget?

Families have two open enrollment options. First, there is a set open enrollment window from February to April where a family can declare their interest in open enrolling their child(ren) into another district. The Board of Education goes through a formal process for declaring how many available seats could be filled by students applying to open enroll in the district. Second, a family can use the alternative open enrollment program that is available through the remainder of the year. The family must identify an extenuating circumstance that would cause the family to want to open enroll their child outside of the regular open enrollment window. These alternative

open enrollment applications are approved by the District Administrator. Transfer amounts for students open enrolling to any district range from \$7,379 to \$12,431 (DPI estimates).

What does the term taxing authority mean?

A local tax is a tax assessed and levied by a local authority such as a state, county or municipality. A local tax is usually collected in the form of property taxes and is used to fund a wide range of civic services from garbage collection to sewer maintenance. A taxing authority is any government entity that is authorized by law to assess, levy and collect taxes.

How has the district demonstrated fiscal responsibility?

The district has continued to hold the line on taxes while continuing to offer an excellent service to our families. District fund balance (cash reserves) over the past 9 years has grown to a level that no longer requires the District to short-term borrow, resulting in interest costs savings of approximately \$100,000 annually. The District has held the line on expenses, with current operating expenses being less than they were 10 years ago.

Will there be long and short-term plans developed for maintaining District buildings and sites?

The District has a 10+ year capital improvement plan that is addressed annually within budget. It contains projects that are scheduled to be completed at all three District facilities. This plan has been submitted to the Department of Public Instruction.

Why is there a second question for a gymnasium addition at the high school? Why is it not part of Question 1?

The question to support the construction of a new gymnasium is separate from Question 1 as our district-wide survey indicated that although many residents felt strongly about the need to build new physical education and athletic space, others were much more focused on all the needs specifically addressed in Question 1. We felt it was important to give all populations an opportunity to weigh in on this decision.

Is this referendum a step in the direction of closing the Birnamwood School?

No. The Birnamwood School will always stay open. Space and programming needs exist throughout the district. Our current building capacities and locations allow us to serve these needs.

This school was good enough when I went here. Why do we need to change it now?

Student safety is the top priority throughout the District. The physical design and layout of our current school buildings does not allow us to maximize this priority as is. Therefore, changes to our vestibule area will allow each building to monitor and direct traffic within the school building more consistently and efficiently. Additionally, programming such as special education, technology and student offerings have changed significantly from the way it was designed and

presented even 10 years ago. Enhancement of all areas noted in Question 1 will make our learning spaces more inviting, healthy and support current economic and industry standards.

Without the 7th and 8th grade students being moved to the high school, why do we still need another gym?

Due to scheduling, at times, the gymnasium is required to hold two separate phy ed classes at once in the same space. Weather permitting, we do our best to alleviate this by providing other outdoor and fitness center options, but it is not always possible. Additionally, we have more extra-curricular youth programs going on now than we ever have, resulting in students as young as 2nd and 3rd grade practicing until 8:30pm in the evening. From October through March, all three facilities are booked almost every night of the school week, with the exception of Wednesday evenings where the District has an understanding with the local religious education schedules. An additional gym would help alleviate some of this congestion and late night scheduling. Parents want these positive opportunities for their children, so having the adequate space to provide them is good for all kids.

I heard enrollment is not growing. Why are we adding on to our schools?

Enrollment is stable. Additionally space in our schools needed to address many programming needs that are mandated of the school district. We currently have children receiving services in closets because of a lack of space, primarily at our two PK-8 schools.