

School bond referendum scheduled for March 26

Subheadline: Committee to determine facility needs to be included

Slug: LANNWS-07-15-23 BOND UPDATES

Print depth: 29.38 (4377 characters)

Start date/time: Jul 13, 2023 12:01 AM

Section tags: nc-lan
nc-lan/news
nc-lan/news/education
nc-lan/news/elections

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Content

Lancaster County School District unanimously decided to pursue a March 26, 2024, bond referendum at the July 11 school board meeting. The planning has just begun, and voters will ultimately determine the outcome at the ballot box.

The full board voted on five items, which were all unanimously approved. Board member Margaret Gamble was absent from the vote.

Facility needs committee

A facility needs committee will be created, with each board member bringing two community members to the table whom they see as advocates for community needs. The facility needs committee will be run by the 14 community leaders, who will be selected Friday, July 14.

Originally, the bond subcommittee planned to have only community members in those meetings, but Superintendent Dr. Jonathan Phipps and board Chair Brad Small suggested district leaders also be involved for added perspectives.

“I just think, potentially, some district employees can give clarification. There’s going to be questions that come up with the insight of some district personnel, but I’d totally agree with having community members drive it,” Small said.

Bond counsel and architectural firm

The board also approved allowing the superintendent and procurement office to solicit bond counsel services for the proposed bond. A request for proposal (RFP) will be submitted to bond counsel to accept or deny.

Three bond counsels have been discussed in past meetings — Frannie Heizer with Burr and Foreman, Theodore DuBose with Haynsworth Sinkler and John K. DuBose III with Smith Robinson.

The board also approved selecting an architectural firm to facilitate costs and designs of future proposed builds, LS3P. Mary Beth Sims Branham is the Columbia office leader, principal and vice president. She has worked on educational architecture designs for over 40 years, and presented the firm's services at the June 28 bond subcommittee meeting.

She explained that the district has already been working with LS3P, after signing a contract that renews each year until 2026.

“Anything the district might need architecturally and engineering-wise, for the next five years, we're your architect, and we're able to assist with projects, and will be contracted through April 11, 2026,” Branham said.

Allen Taylor, Columbia studio leader and principal, said the firm did an assessment of existing facilities in 2021, to determine needs for improvement.

“We have assisted in two different mobile classroom projects. They're at Harrisburg Elementary and Indian Land Intermediate,” Taylor said. “We also did the design work for the bus transportation office that's going in at the bus parking area and that is slated to begin construction here this summer.”

Approved timeline and budget

The draft process for the proposed bond has several checkpoints for board members to meet. The facility needs committee will have its first meeting July 19.

The subcommittee will meet via Zoom Aug. 2, Aug. 30, Oct. 12 and April 10. Recommendations for full board votes typically come to fruition in subcommittee meetings. The school board meets once a month.

The bond counsel will be selected at the Aug. 15 board meeting and recommendations for facility needs per district will be finalized by Aug. 30.

The public will have 10 days to provide public comment on the facility needs list from Sept. 22-Oct. 2, and public comments will be due by noon Oct. 6.

The total amount of the bond has not been decided, as it will be dependent on the facility needs approved by the board after this process.

The bond election will take place March 26, with April 2 as an alternate date. Results will be certified March 29 or April 5.

The entire referendum process could cost more than \$140,000. The special election is expected to cost about \$70,000, the architectural firm gave a rough estimate of \$33,500 and bond counsel is estimated at \$3,500.

“I'm not sure (of the final cost) until we get the bids from the attorneys on bond counsel if this is (accurate),” said district Chief of Finance Jatana Norris. “So I would say this is a real loose estimate on the bond counsel, so I want to make that clear that this is a plus, not

minus.”

The board’s bond subcommittee is comprised of board vice chair Melvin Stroble, board members Eddie Boykin, Margaret Gamble and Small. There have been four planning sessions via Zoom to discuss recommendations to bring to the full board for a vote.