

Community Forum Feedback

On June 4, 2019, the Farwell Area School Board reviewed the feedback from two Community Forums in an attempt to decide how to proceed on a potential bond issue for the Farwell Schools. The Community Forums were scheduled after the May Bond effort failed by just 34 votes or 51% to 49%.

The Feedback from the community has shown that the two biggest reasons for the Bond failing were the number of years and the amount of interest that would be paid over 25 years. Another big sticking point was the long range plan, many members of the community wanted to know that the FAS Schools had a long range plan for fixing and maintaining the FAS facilities.

During the Community Forums, stakeholders discussed, voted, and commented on many options and aspects of this very complicated and important decision. 60% of those in attendance would prefer to move the High School and Middle School Drop Off areas to Michigan Street and only allow buses and properly marked vehicles into the JPAC lot during drop off and pick up times versus creating a new bus only area. This change from the May 7 Plan would save approximately 1.7 million dollars.

75% of those in attendance voted to demolish and replace the Teachout Wing versus 2% that would like to keep it and remodel this area. 23% wanted to explore other options. The facts that support the demolishing choice are room size, cost of remodel versus new constructions, and the unknown costs that are associated with any major remodel job. The requirement to upgrade the classroom bathrooms with ADA accessible bathrooms would shrink the size of these already small classrooms. 57% supported replacing the Teachout Wing's 6 rooms with 6 rooms, while 43% only want to replace with 4 rooms.

The merits of both Bond initiative and a Sinking Fund were discussed and debated. Based on the amount of immediate needs, 71% who attended the Community Forums favored a Bond Proposal over a Sinking Fund at 24%. Although not voted on, many in the audience expressed a desire to have a combination of both Bond and Sinking Funds.

Based on this feedback, Superintendent Steve Scoville put together Five Courses of Action (COA) for the Board to debate on 6/3/2019. The options included: COA #1 Repeat the May Ballot Request of 24.5 Million for 25 years; COA #2 Start the Whole Process Over; COA #3 Delay until May or November 2020; COA # 4 2.1 Mil Bond Renewal for 19 Years 3 Months & a 1 Mil Sinking Fund for 10 years, with a plan to renew both in 10 years; and finally COA #5 2.1 Mil Bond Renewal and a .9 Mil Bond Increase for 19 Years 3 months and a plan to seek a sinking fund in 4 to 7 years.

Although COA #1 only failed by 34 votes, the feedback from the community is that we can improve the size, scope and duration of this issue. The draw back was the amount of interest and the number of years. The thought was that we can come together around a better option versus trying to push an option with split support.

The draw backs to both COA #2 & #3 is that time to fix these issues is not on our side. Delaying replacing outdated roofs and boilers for another year does not get cheaper. In fact, these bills along with other items that need to be replaced in the very near future will be added together making the cost of the repair replacement bill cost prohibitive. We will also continue to take money from our general fund to operate and repair our outdated equipment.

COA #4 2.1 Bond Renewal for 19 Years 3 month and 1 Mil Sinking Fund for 10 years, with a plan to renew both in 10 years is one of the options that many in the Community Forum supported. The strengths of this plan is that we get a quick infusion on funds via a bond and start building a fund for long range planning with the sinking fund. The draw back to this option is the need to cut nearly \$11,200,000 worth of needs from the May Bond request.

COA #5 2.1 Bond Renewal for 19 Years 3 month and a .9 increase for 19 years and 3 months raises 79% of the funds of the May proposal with only 49% of the interest. This option gained the most support during the first Community Forum, gaining 36% of the votes. This would require the Board to cut \$5,200,000 from the May proposal. It would reduce the interest cost from \$17,700,000 to \$8,830,000.

The Farwell Area School Board of Education will further discuss all of these options at a Special Board meeting on Friday June 7, 2019 at 6:00 pm. The board wants to reconvene when all members are able to be present and wants more time to seek the community's feedback on this very big decision.