

Vashon Island School District
Capital Facilities Plan
Frequently Asked Questions

1. **What is the condition of Vashon High School?** Vashon High School's campus is made of seven separate educational buildings, along with other support structures. None of these buildings scored higher than a 66 out of a possible 100 points in an evaluation performed by the District's architect and staff using criteria from the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) for structural integrity, interior materials and finishes, mechanical/electrical systems, and building-code compliance. In addition, a "criticality" assessment by District staff of the compatibility of the facilities with educational programs, identified other conditions they consider to be deficient, including:

- poor lighting and air quality,
- inadequate classroom size,
- lack of space for collaboration between teachers and amongst students,
- isolation of teachers and inadequate student security due to distribution of teaching spaces,
- classrooms unsuited for the subjects taught in them, and
- An outdated technology infrastructure

The reports on the facilities are available on the district's website, www.vashonsd.org and click on the *Capital Facilities* page.

2. **What's the condition of current athletic facilities?** The existing High School gym was constructed in 1961 and has had only minor modifications in its 47-year history. The evaluation by the District's architect and staff identified conditions they consider to be deficient, including:

- The ventilation and mechanical control system have reached the end of their useful life,
- The locker rooms are poorly lit and lack proper ventilation,
- Single pane windows and incandescent fixtures are energy inefficient,
- The building does not meet current accessibility codes for people with disabilities: The toilets in the locker rooms are not wheelchair accessible, the path to the girls locker room is difficult for disabled people, and the only way to get to the wrestling room is to go up a flight of stairs,
- Lack of storage for athletic equipment,
- The weight room has no ventilation, and
- The stadium track, field and grandstand were also constructed in the 1960s, The track does not meet league standards and other schools no longer come to Vashon for track meets. The stadium field turf is uneven. Although the grandstand is structurally sound, it is not accessible for people with disabilities.

3. **What's the current condition of the theater?** The theater was designed as a lecture hall, not a performance space. According to the teachers and groups who use the theater, it is deficient in the following ways:

- Not enough space back stage for performers and scenery,
- The shape of the audience seating area means that people sitting on the sides cannot see the entire stage,
- No restrooms for actors,
- Work and storage spaces are too small,
- The “Green Room” where performers get dressed is a classroom that has to be disassembled and reassembled after every performance or rehearsal, and
- There is no sound booth, orchestra pit or fly loft.

4. **What are the possible benefits of a new classroom building?** A new building would provide more space in classrooms for small group/collaborative activities as well as direct instruction. Currently, classrooms and labs are located in seven

different buildings on campus. Bringing them together in the same building may facilitate collaboration among teachers. Current classrooms have limited daylight. According to some studies, increased daylight improves test scores and reduces off-task behavior.

A summary of how facilities may affect student performance is available on the district's website www.vashonsd.org. Click on the *Capital Facilities* page and scroll down for the report "Student Performance and Facility Design."

5. **What if the District does not to do anything for the next five years?** When a new building is constructed, or an existing building is fully renovated, or an entire system (heating, ventilation, etc.) is replaced, then the money comes from the District's Capital Fund. The Capital Fund cannot be used to pay teachers, buy text books, etc. When things like part of a heating or ventilation system break down and have to be replaced, the money must come from the District's General Fund, which is the same fund that pays for teachers, text books, and so on. The more money the District spends on repairs, the less it has for education. If the District does not go forward with the Capital Facilities bond, then in the next few years the District likely will have to spend money to repair or replace some costly parts of the current facilities, which could mean the District would have to cut staff and/or programs.

6. **Some people ask: How do you plan to maintain the new facilities when you haven't maintained what we have now?** Maintenance is an ongoing problem and has, historically, been under-funded in order to spend money on other things, such as keeping class sizes as small as possible. However, even with other budget pressures, the district has doubled funding for maintenance staffing for the current year. Additionally the school board has directed the superintendent to develop a plan to "fully fund maintenance" including cost parameters and a timeline. This plan, along with supporting budget assumptions, will be used to develop the 2009-10 district budget.

7. **Why isn't there an option for tearing down the whole high school and building a brand new facility?** Two guiding principles of the capital planning process have been to keep costs as low as responsibly possible and to follow the District's newly-developed environmental mission, which includes re-use and repurposing where possible. It would cost significantly more to replace the entire high school and some of the existing buildings can still be used for many years once they have been renovated.
8. **How do off-island students affect the planning for the new facilities?** We currently enroll approximately 80 off island students at the high school. According to an evaluation by the Superintendent, off-island students bring a net gain of \$200,000 to the District's General Fund, and make it possible to offer more elective courses. The District could stop accepting off island students, with the likely result that about five teaching positions would have to be cut and the number of high school electives would be reduced.

Off island students have not increased the need for core spaces, such as the library, gym, and cafeteria. The number of classrooms needed is based on student population, course offerings, and number of teachers. If the District stopped accepting off island students, it is likely that one or two fewer classrooms would be needed. Currently some teachers do not have their own room, which makes preparing for classes and holding conferences with students more difficult. For example, an English teacher currently teaches in the band room, which has no student desks. Since the number of teachers would be reduced if the District stopped accepting off island students, it is likely that there would be enough classrooms in the existing buildings for most of the remaining teachers to each have their own room. The proposed new classroom building would accommodate the current student population, including off island students, and the current number of teachers, with more teachers having their own classroom.

9. **Where would students go during a remodel?** The remodel would incorporate two phases. The first phase involves the construction of a new building to house classrooms, science labs and a new commons/cafeteria. During that time, some classes would be housed in temporary portable buildings. In phase two, students would move into the new building and renovations would occur in the existing buildings that are planned for reuse. Again, some classes would take place in portable building until the project is completed.
10. **How firm are the cost estimates?** The District and its consultants have made every effort to include contingencies in the estimate to cover construction cost escalation and unforeseen conditions. The budget also includes “soft costs,” such as construction management oversight.
11. **How might a remodeled high school effect operating and maintenance costs?** A new classroom building would replace four smaller buildings on the high school campus with one. This would result in less exterior wall and roof surface to lose heat and far fewer mechanical systems to maintain. Additionally, new or remodeled buildings can take advantage of new energy efficient technologies and improved exterior shell assemblies to reduce energy costs. Once the project is completed, utility and maintenance costs are expected to be significantly reduced on a per square foot basis, meaning the facilities would be more efficient than the current ones. The total cost for utilities and maintenance would be greater than it is currently, because the new building would add square feet to the campus. This means that the cost to operate and maintain the remodeled high school would be greater overall than the current cost.
12. **Do you plan to use sustainable building practices?** New school buildings are required to be certified through the Washington State Sustainable Schools Protocols, a set of guidelines and standards that contribute to better energy performance, resource efficiency and healthy learning environments. Particular design features that are incorporated in the master plan scope proposals include:

- ground-source heat pumps to provide heating and cooling,
- extensive use of daylighting to reduce the need for artificial lighting,
- ventilation that provides more fresh air with lower energy use, and
- healthy building materials that are longer lasting and require less maintenance.

Site development will incorporate rain gardens that aid in storm water treatment and infiltration, contribute to the viability of neighboring wetlands and reduce the amount of expensive detention measures that would have otherwise been required.

13. Would this bond support upgrades at Chautauqua and McMurray too? Yes,

Proposed upgrades include:

Chautauqua:

- a. Mechanical control system and boiler upgrade
- b. Classroom air handling unit replacement
- c. Washroom faucet replacement

McMurray:

- Mechanical control system upgrade
- Locker Room, Science and Shop ventilation improvements
- Science room eyewash stations
- Gym and Cafeteria lighting improvements

14. Some people have asked, “Why are you proposing to renovate buildings at a time when the District is experiencing financial stress?” While the District budget is very tight, it is “in the black” and we are putting some money into a reserve fund. The money to renovate high school buildings and construct a new classroom building comes from a different fund than money for teachers, text books, etc. On the other hand, if we do not renovate and replace the existing buildings, the District likely will have to spend money for repairs, and the money to do that does come from the same fund as the money to pay teachers, buy text books, etc.

Like every public school district in Washington state, our school district wrestles with limited funding. Over the past two years, we implemented processes for managing finances for the long term. Our goal is to get the District back on track by staying within our annual budget and maintaining a healthy fund balance (which is important to have for unexpected expenses like a boiler breaking down). Over the next two years, the school board plans to grow and maintain a fund balance of 4% of the district's annual operating budget.

15. If we hold off on building a new high school for a few years, are construction costs likely to go up? The District's capital facilities plan assumes the passage of a bond in February of 2009 and a construction bid date in February 2011. The estimates include an annual inflation rate of 6% per year, which the architectural firm considers a reasonable number based on their experience. A seven-month delay of passing a \$75 million bond (February '09 to September '09) would add approximately \$2.6 million to the bond amount. At the same inflation rate, a few years delay could amount to an increase of \$9 million. Construction costs in recent years have been escalating at an annual rate of 8-12% but predicting future rates is still difficult. The capital facilities plan includes an additional bid climate contingency (so called island factor) of 8% of the construction amounts to give the District some flexibility if needed and help ensure that the projects can be completed as planned. The District may gain additional flexibility if the current slowdown in general economic activity curtails the rate of construction cost escalation.

16. How do off-island students affect our general fund? We currently enroll approximately 130 off-island students at all three public schools. Each student generates approximately \$5000.00 in state apportionment. While off-island students bring no bond or levy dollars with them, they ride the bus which creates extra revenue for transportation. The board plans to revisit the issue of off-island students periodically.

17. What is the difference between the general fund and the capital facilities fund?

The District pays for its operating expenses out of the *general fund*. These expenses include staffing, maintenance, instructional materials and supplies, transportation and student services. The amount the District can levy taxpayers for the general fund is limited by the state. The *capital fund* finances long-term building and equipment expenditures. Capital dollars are completely separate from the general fund and by law cannot be used to buy classroom supplies or, in general, pay staff. However, careful expenditure of capital dollars can positively affect the general fund. For example, by installing energy efficient mechanical systems utility costs can be reduced which frees up funds for the classroom. Both funds are financed through federal, state and local taxes.

18. How does my assessed property value affect my tax bill? Each year, King County reassesses your property value. In general, if your assessed value goes up at a lower rate than the average increase for all properties within the district, the amount of taxes you pay goes down. If, on the other hand, your property value rises faster than the average increase for all properties within the district, your taxes increase.

19. Will the school district collect more money as property values increase? The only way for any school district to collect more local taxes, of any kind, is for its taxpayers to approve a larger levy (i.e. the bond issue, a Capital Levy, a larger Maintenance & Operation levy). Rising property values actually *lower tax rates* but they do not change levy amounts (or tax collections).

20. What is a bond and how does it work? Simply, a bond is a big loan. The community wants to improve its infrastructure but cannot afford to pay all of the costs associated with that improvement by the time the construction is completed (typically three to five years). To reduce the big impact most districts seek voter approval to repay the money over a longer period of time, a.k.a., a voted bond issue. A good comparison is a home loan; most folks cannot afford to buy a home outright so they finance it over time.

To issue a bond, the district enters into an agreement with investors (lenders) that fixes the repayment plan. Property taxes are then levied for district residents that pay off the bonds. By law, the school district is required to collect enough taxes to ensure the timely repayment of those bonds. The money that is collected to repay the debt cannot be used for any other purpose. So, while your assessed value may go up or down, the amount of property tax monies the school district collects will be solely guided by the repayment plan.

21. Why have you referred to the average tax rate as opposed to current tax rate?

Tax rates for our school district have not been consistent over the past two years. The rate went down in 2008 because of two factors: (i) the return of settlement money, from the Chautauqua lawsuit, to district residents and (ii) the expiration of the two-year Capital Projects levy (collected in 2006 and 2007). Current tax collections are low compared to more typical years.

22. How do other school districts manage capital facilities costs? All public school districts depend on taxpayers to fund capital costs. For that reason, districts attempt to continually identify long-term capital needs and present voters with projects as they become necessary. The goal is to address issues as they arise and to not allow them to accumulate to unbearable levels while also balancing the burden to taxpayers.