

Greater Albany Public Schools Capital Project Program FAQ (2.26.18)

What are the projects in the bond?

The bond, approved by voters in May 2017, will fund improvements to address critical needs, improve instructional space and expand buildings to accommodate growth. It includes energy improvements and safety and security upgrades at schools throughout the district and significant additions of vocational technical, or CTE, classroom space at all middle schools. It will also replace Oak Grove Elementary School with a larger, modern school, construct a new school near Timber Ridge and construct the first phase of the replacement of West Albany High School.

How were the projects identified?

A community-based District Facility Advisory Committee (DFAC) studied facility needs and reviewed a facilities study from an architect to develop the bond package. DFAC made a recommendation to the superintendent. Additional input was gathered in community forums.

What is the bond amount?

Voters approved a \$159 million bond. The district was awarded a matching grant from the state totaling \$6.9 million and was able to sell the bonds under favorable terms to gain an additional \$28.5 million for a total of \$187 million (the district undersold the original \$159 million by the amount of the state matching grant). The added funds will not result in a higher tax rate for property owners than was anticipated.

What is the timeline for the bond projects?

Planning for the projects began immediately after the election in May 2017. Construction will start in summer 2018 and all work should be completed by the end of 2021. The schedule for the new construction projects is:

- Oak Grove, new elementary school near Timber Ridge, new classrooms and gym at SAHS: Begin construction in June 2018 with an expected completion date of fall 2019—in time for the start of the new school year.
- WAHS Phase 1 modernization: Begin construction in fall 2018 with an expected completion in summer 2020.

The successful school bond is providing for significant facility improvements, sometimes referred to as safe, warm, and dry. Even at West Albany High School, where we will be constructing 72,000 square feet of the planned phased replacement, there are a handful of safe, warm and dry projects. Why are you spending money on the remaining structure?

The school is 65 years old. Much of the facility has simply reached the end of its functional life. The school was evaluated by staff and building experts, who identified projects that were necessary to make the school functional for instructional purposes within the next 10 years.

Because of rapid growth in North Albany, the bond included funds to increase capacity at Oak Grove by replacing much of the existing structure and refurbishing the remainder for continued use. Why are we now replacing all of Oak Grove?

Oak Grove has at least four different additions/alterations since it was built more than 70 years ago. Architects were consulted prior to the bond measure to see what could be done to create additional educational and common space (e.g. creating a separate cafeteria space) at Oak Grove while rehabilitating the portion of the school that was deemed reusable in an effort to reduce costs.

They believed the existing gymnasium could be refurbished and reused. After the bond passed, resources were available to conduct an intensive review of the existing structure and found it to be economically challenging to enlarge the gymnasium (it is too small) or to functionally convert it into a cafeteria space and construct a new gymnasium elsewhere.

When cost estimators reviewed the plans that would have reused much of the existing facility, they said that, all costs considered, it would be about the same amount of money to start over. A second intensive cost analysis confirmed this. In addition, the revised plan allows for a structure with a longer life expectancy, lower maintenance costs, lower energy costs, and a greatly improved floorplan that reduces student circulation space. For these reasons a new Oak Grove School will be built rather than the original plan of a mixture of old and new.

With increased capacity at the new Oak Grove Elementary what are the plans for Fir Grove?

At this time there are no plans to discontinue the use of Fir Grove. Oak Grove Elementary currently has about 290 students while Fir Grove has 150. The new school will have capacity for either 400 or 500 students. The School Board will decide whether to add the additional four classrooms when the construction bids are received. If the building is constructed with the higher capacity Fir Grove students could initially be housed at the new school. However, it is unknown how long space would be available given the amount of growth expected in North Albany.

With increased capacity at the new Elementary School what are the plans for Clover Ridge?

Clover Ridge Elementary currently has about 350 students while there are 125 third graders at Timber Ridge. The new school will have capacity of either 500 or 600 students. The School Board will decide whether to add the additional four classrooms when the construction bids are received. When the new school opens it will likely be for K-3 with Timber Ridge moving to a 4-8 grade configuration, providing needed space at Timber Ridge for their growing population. The current Clover Ridge Elementary facility will be maintained by the district in the event that future growth necessitates its use.

The bond is creating significant employment opportunities for individuals and companies working in the trades. What is being done to maximize exposure to local contractors?

The district’s bond project managers maintain an extensive database of local contractors that is used to send courtesy notices for all upcoming projects. The notices are also being posted to Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn. Additionally, where practical, projects are being packaged to provide opportunities for smaller contractors who may not have the bonding capacity to bid on larger projects. In short, the district is actively engaging the local building community to maximize opportunities to keep bond dollars local.

Is it true that there will remain many unmet needs—unfunded projects at school and related to enrollment growth. Are there plans for future bond measures to address these needs?

The Citizen District Facility Advisory Committee met for over a year beginning in January 2015 to examine district facilities and evaluate options. With the help of architects and engineers, over \$185 million of unmet facility needs were identified at school facilities. These needs were not related to enrollment. Further, existing facilities were evaluated regarding their remaining useful life, which included the cost for maintenance and critical upgrades to ensure that they were suitable for instructional purposes. Ultimately, decisions were made to construct new schools, improve others, and tackle \$50 million of the highest priority critical upgrades to existing facilities (sometimes referred to as “safe, warm and dry”). The final proposal balanced costs to taxpayers with urgent project needs.

West Albany High School is scheduled for the first phase of what is hoped will be a two-phase full replacement. Other aging facilities in the district will need replacement or rehabilitation in future bond. And, despite efforts to annually fund ongoing major facility needs, the magnitude of unmet needs will undoubtedly result in the need to be address these critical projects in future bond measures.

The original bond plan was to include a second gymnasium/multipurpose space in the future second phase at West Albany High School. How was it able to be included in the initial phase?

As a result of the climate of the bond market at time of sale, many bonds were sold at what is known as “premium,” thereby generating \$29 million additional dollars for the district. This was done while staying within the estimate cost for the taxpayer. The School Board voted to earmark up to \$11 million of the additional dollars for the West Albany High School rebuild project to increase the amount of the overall work that could be completed in phase one (thereby reducing the amount needed for phase two).

During the ensuing planning process, architects and staff determined which aspects of phase two would be the most advantageous from a cost and educational perspective to include in the current phase. Many components that were originally planned for phase two were considered including classrooms, media center, wrestling, weight room, health occupations, multi-purpose room/gym, and fine arts and crafts.

A design priority was to keep inter-related disciplines together. For example, this means keeping the math and science departments together, as well as language arts, including foreign language, and social studies. Unfortunately, the additional dollars were simply not sufficient to add two related departments in phase one.

Additionally, the media center was planned for phase two because it is sufficient for current needs and was recently renovated. Also, its location in the master plan is integrated into the core curriculum (general education) classrooms to be built in the future phase. The existing weights and wrestling rooms are also functional for the next ten years, but there is insufficient classroom space for health occupation CTE programs or gymnasium/multi-purpose space to accommodate current needs.

The school board ultimately considered two alternatives: one that included a gymnasium/multi-purpose space and one that did not and opted for the option that included the gymnasium/multi-purpose space. The bond premium funds will allow for additional square footage for two health occupation classrooms, and an additional CTE business lab (completing the move of all business department spaces to the new addition). The additional gymnasium is 8,400 square feet, including spectator seating for 400. As a point of reference, the gymnasium/multi-purpose space is equivalent to approximately six general education classrooms. Given that phase two construction of general education classes will be in a two-story configuration, a new classroom addition instead of the gymnasium would have split these classrooms into three on one story and three on another which was deemed impractical.

The new Oak Grove School will be a tremendous asset, but what can be done to address the traffic concerns at NAMS/NAES during the 2018-19 school year?

Start and stop times were modified across the district in the fall of 2017 to improve student learning. Studies show that secondary school students should start school later and elementary schools earlier based on natural student sleep schedules.

The district modified bell times, moving high schools back slightly later but allowed for having all four middle schools start at 8:50 a.m. In North Albany, transportation needs required that all four schools share buses to allow coverage of all routes, necessitating similar start times. The rebuild of Oak Grove School will temporarily relocate those students to North Albany Elementary and North Albany Middle Schools. This will increase student enrollment and parent traffic.

The district will do all it can to minimize the impact but, because of limited transportation resources, Fir Grove, North Albany Elementary and North Albany Middle Schools will need to continue to share the same buses. Parent traffic could be reduced if more students ride district transportation and/or parents could to carpool.