

GFH piece of facility plan falling into place

Kristen Cates , GreatFalls Published 8:05 p.m. MT Jan. 26, 2016 | Updated 8:12 p.m. MT Jan. 26, 2016



(Photo: Courtesy of GFPS)

The last piece of the Great Falls Public Schools facility plan appears to have fallen into place after trustees saw a plan for Great Falls High that appeased them during a work session Tuesday night.

It means come Feb. 22, trustees will be asked to vote on a facilities plan for all of the schools totaling \$103 million and seek public support for either a bond levy or building reserve to pay for the expansive project.

"I feel I can defend everything that is in that project," trustee Don Ryan said. "This is a community project. Not just a school district project."

Superintendent Tammy Lacey said while they may take a vote in February on a bond or building reserve, she doesn't expect an election to be held until the fall

"We want to make sure we get all of the information out to voters," she said.

Rough estimates indicate a \$103 million bond would cost approximately \$83 per year on a home with a \$100,000 taxable value.

Trustees have already approved a plan calling for Longfellow and Roosevelt elementary schools to be rebuilt (Roosevelt in a new location); opening Skyline as the 16th elementary school and adding onto the building; moving the preschool programs to Paris Gibson Education Center; building a multipurpose facility at C.M. Russell High School; moving buildings and grounds from Lowell Elementary to the old Little Russell Elementary; and doing renovations and upgrades at all of the other schools.

The biggest sticking point has been Great Falls High, which has had its own subcommittee working for the last few years on how to maintain the historical integrity of the school while also bringing it into the 21st century. Part of the \$38 million plan called for a "connector" of some sort to be built between the main campus and south campus. Trustees looked at everything from a breezeway to a more expansive hallway with some classroom space.

Until Tuesday, the plans were just conceptual. But with the assistance of the consulting firm, trustees got a better idea for what a \$38 million investment will look like at the 80-year-old, register of historic places-recognized building will look like.

The "connector" has also been labeled the hub. Lacey said it will include offices for administrators and shift the main entrance to one location, which will help with safety concerns. It will also include additional classroom spaces, a student commons area and a student cafeteria.

The addition will also include a new career and technical education center, which will more than double in size from its current space and the current career and technical education building will be re-purposed for classroom space. Additional parking will be added along the south edge of the practice football field and Memorial Stadium, along with additional parking on the northeast corner of the main campus property.

Trustee Jason Brantley, who lives across from the school, said he liked the plan, but was concerned about the northeast corner parking lot ruining some of the aesthetics of the tall trees and green grass. However, Lacey and others said building codes are going to require extra parking space when an addition is built.

Beyond the expansion, Lacey said classrooms on the main campus will be renovated to make them more tech-friendly and possibly expand space. The heating and ventilation at the school will be upgraded, as will lighting, plumbing and some windows.

Lacey said the benefit of building the hub is that students can be moved into that space while renovations are done in their classrooms, thus negating the need of renting trailers or potentially moving students to another building while the work is being done.

"I like this a lot better than previous designs," trustee Jeff Gray said. "To me, this is a vision that looks 50 to 80 years ahead."

Trustees were also encouraged by the public to move forward with a final proposal.

Andrea Barrow, who sits on Lacey's parent advisory panel, said a lot of parents have been talking about the project and want to see some final decisions made.

"Parents are supportive and people are excited," Barrow said. "You've done a great job being thoughtful. I think you need to consider timeliness."

School board approves \$99 million bond levy proposal

David Murray , dmurray@greatfalltribune.com Published 8:43 p.m. MT Feb. 22, 2016 | Updated 8:18 a.m. MT Feb. 23, 2016



(Photo: FILE)

The Great Falls Public Schools Board of Trustees voted unanimously Monday night to approve a plan to spend \$98.86 million over the next 10 years to address delayed repairs and significant upgrades proposed for nearly every public school in Great Falls.

If approved, the combined high school and elementary school bond proposals would add approximately \$76.35 annually to the property taxes on a \$100,000 home.

[Lacey presented Great Falls Athena Award for leadership](http://www.greatfalltribune.com/story/news/local/2016/02/22/lacey-presented-great-falls-athena-award-leadership/80781408/)

(<http://www.greatfalltribune.com/story/news/local/2016/02/22/lacey-presented-great-falls-athena-award-leadership/80781408/>)

The board of trustees set an Oct. 11 election date for voters from within both the high school and elementary districts to approve or reject the bond levies. Two separate questions will be presented to Great Falls voters at that time; one for approximately \$52.7 million to upgrade the city's high schools and another \$46 million request to repair and renovate the elementary school system.

Great Falls Superintendent of Schools Tammy Lacey pointed out that the buildings operated by Great Falls Public Schools are, on average, 58 years old, and that no substantial construction has taken place within the districts for half a century.

"We had quite a bit of proliferation in 1960s thanks to Malmstrom Air Force Base and the Federal government," Lacey said. "Since then we haven't much done much building. My generation has never paid for a school, and we certainly have reaped the benefits of having our high-quality public schools."

The nearly \$99 million price tag represents almost \$9 million in reductions from an anticipated request of \$107.57 million circulated just a week earlier. The difference in price came from the last minute deletion of a proposal to renovate, staff and reopen Skyview Elementary, adding it as the 16th elementary school within Great Falls' K-12 system.

At the Monday night meeting, trustee Don Ryan commented on the changes.

"When we saw the kindergarten numbers drop last year, and we saw about 100 less kids, it really took some of the impact off our elementary schools as far as the need for new classroom spaces," Ryan said. "Right now Skyline is working very well as a pre-K center, it's working really well for the county extension office – so we said, 'let's leave Skyline alone.'"

[Dupuyer out of students](http://www.greatfalltribune.com/story/news/2016/02/22/dupuyer-out-students/80770562/)

(<http://www.greatfalltribune.com/story/news/2016/02/22/dupuyer-out-students/80770562/>)

Half a million in additional costs were added to the proposal to replace the elementary district's aging telephone system.

"This is a plan that is going to keep our district viable for the next 50 years," said trustee Jeff Gray. "I think it's a plan that's going to show the community that we are a growing community, and a community that believes that strong schools are going to help us grow and attract more businesses and more people to Great Falls."

"It's been 46 years since we've opened a school in Great Falls," Gray added. "The good news is that the money right now is as cheap as it's been in a long time ... and I think that when we get the message out this \$98 million will be accepted and approved by the community."

FACILITIES PROPOSAL BREAKDOWN

High School District - \$52.70 million

Great Falls High: Upgrade technology and renovate classrooms in the historic building. Build a new student hub and office center that will become the main entrance, connecting the south and main campuses while providing additional classroom space. Kitchen/dining area improvements, remodel Career Technical Education facility. Parking/storm drain/utility upgrades. Improvements to Memorial Stadium - **\$37.33 million.**

•**CMR:** A new multipurpose center is planned along with infrastructure repairs and additional classroom space. Replace water piping, fire alarm system, elevator repair, foundation repairs, sidewalk repairs, window replacement, replace lockers. Multi-use facility with tie-in structure. Track and field upgrades - **\$11.32 million**

•**Paris Gibson Education Center:** Replace roof, new cafeteria tables, bathroom/classroom modifications, boiler replacement, replace exterior doors, window replacement - **\$3.35 million.**

K – 8 District - \$46.16 million

•**Longfellow Elementary:** Raze and rebuild a new elementary school at the current site. New Native American library, new kitchen equipment - **\$15.23 million**

•**Roosevelt Elementary:** Raze Lowell Elementary (currently used for buildings and grounds and other projects) and build a new Roosevelt Elementary on that site. New kitchen equipment. - **\$14.95 million**

•**North Middle School:** New fire alarm and fire suppression systems, door replacement, boiler/heating repairs, roof replacement, structural and foundation repairs, architectural/mechanical/electrical replace - **\$3.16 million**

•**Little Russell Facility:** Renovate lighting, repair/replace boiler, exhaust system, walks and approaches, renovate environmental/tech classroom, new construction of 80 x 180 facility - **\$2.50 million**

•**East Middle School:** Boiler and miscellaneous repairs, fire alarm system, heating and cooling system, roof repair, window replacement - **\$2.26 million**

•**\$500,000 to upgrade phone systems throughout the district**

•**All other schools** will receive funding for facility upgrades (everything from roofs to plumbing to lighting and more): approximately **\$20 million**

Combined districts total: \$98.86 million

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Lacey answers questions on Great Falls school facility plan

Jenn Rowell , jrowell@greatfalls Tribune.com Published 9:04 p.m. MT June 15, 2016 | Updated 11:42 a.m. MT June 16, 2016



(Photo: Annisa Keith)

The Great Falls Public Schools bond levy election date has changed to Oct. 4, a week earlier than the district originally planned. [Fullscreen](#)

Superintendent Tammy Lacey said during Wednesday's **GFPS Facilities Tour** the Tribune, that the Montana Secretary of State had called her just before 5 p.m. to tell her about the date change.

That means ballots will now go out around Sept. 19.

Lacey said she'd have more information about the date change in the near future and would share that publicly as soon as she has it.

During the forum, Lacey walked through the facilities plan and the \$98.8 million bond levy proposed by the district.

The proposal includes \$45.9 million for elementary and middle schools and \$52.9 million for high schools.

Many of the buildings included are aging, but age isn't the primary factor in which repairs are included in the proposal, Lacey said. Some buildings have major structural problems that could cause the buildings to become unsafe or unusable.

Some pipes in elementary schools are corroding from the outside in, and others are corroding from the inside out, Lacey said.

At North Middle School, staff has rigged a tarp from the ceiling with a hose through it to funnel leaking water into a bucket when it rains. The roof at North had begun to fail and officials at the time built a new roof over it and the new roof has started leaking as well. Lacey said the school was built on the site of an old city landfill so the ground there has always been problematic.

At Chief Joseph Elementary, the roof is settling and crushing metal door frames.

During the tour of Longfellow before Lacey's presentation, GFPS staff showed attendees the cracking walls, warped gym floors, and other floors that used to be level, but now need ramps between rooms to adjust for the foundational problems.

"None of this is fancy; this is basic stuff that needs to be taken care of," Lacey said.

During the tour, Lorie Miner said she wanted to know about the plan for shuffling kids around during the construction of the new schools.

"It's great to be able to see it," she said of the tour. "The atmosphere to learn in is really important to me. I think it should be a safe, nice place."

The facility plan calls for demolishing Longfellow and building a new school on a different part of the same property.

The plan also calls for replacing Roosevelt with a new elementary where the old Lowell school currently sits. Lowell is currently used by GFPS painters, plumbers, carpenters and other buildings and ground staff. They'll move to Little Russell, which hasn't been used as a school since the 1970s. Then Lowell will be demolished to build a new school.

Once that school is completed, Roosevelt students will move there and Longfellow students will move to Roosevelt while the new Longfellow is being constructed. The district then plans to sell or repurpose Roosevelt as it has done with other facilities that were no longer used as school facilities.

"I know it's a big ask," Lacey said of the \$98.8 million bond that would be an estimated \$68.74 in annual taxes for 20 years on a \$100,000 market value home in Great Falls.



(Photo: Annisa Keith)

She brought applications to the forum for the state tax assistance program that can lower property taxes for qualified residents.

Attendees asked questions during the forum by writing them on index cards. Among the questions was one asking how residents know the costs won't go up. Lacey said the total cost estimates factored for cost overruns, inflation and other escalating costs. Those estimates were developed by consultants with professional knowledge and experience in the construction industry, Lacey said.

Another asked if the district would do estimates on cost savings for the energy efficient improvements included in the facilities plan. Lacey said they hadn't done those yet, but that they can and will work on those with the consultant.

Some attendees asked if designs or blueprints are available and Lacey said that no design work has been done yet since the district doesn't want to incur that cost without knowing if the bond will be passed by voters.

Another asked why the district didn't take a lesson from Third World countries and just have a central building to reduce overhead costs and get computers for each student to do their work on their own.

Lacey said the community surveys early in the planning process included a question about maintaining neighborhood schools or creating mega schools. She said the community overwhelmingly favored maintaining the neighborhood school system.



(Photo: Annisa Keith)

Lacey said she did the presentation on camera Wednesday afternoon and that video will be available on public access channels soon.

After the presentation, Deb Evans said it was the second time she'd heard the presentation and wanted to support the proposal.

The first time she heard it, she said her initial reaction was embarrassment at the state of some facilities.

She's been in Great Falls for more than a decade and worked as a recruiter previously.

Education is a major factor in bringing jobs and employers to Great Falls, she said.

"I don't see any other way out of this," Evans said of the bond. "We have to fix it."

For online information about the facility plan and the bond levy, go to www.gfps.k12.mt.us/facility.

Read or Share this story: <http://gftrib.com/28G81gV>

Roosevelt Elementary would be replaced

Tammy Lacey 12:05 p.m. MT July 25, 2016



(Photo: Courtesy Photo)

Why does the district want to build a new elementary school to replace Roosevelt School on the North Side?

Roosevelt Elementary, located at 2501 2nd Ave. N., is the oldest public school building in use in the city. The original three-story building was constructed in 1928.

Its one-block campus, surrounded by three one-way streets, makes it one of the most dangerously situated schools in town. Its location, structural and plumbing issues, handicap inaccessibility and lack of modern educational amenities make it cost-prohibitive to repair. The Great Falls Public Schools' facility plan calls for replacing it with a new, multi-story, Americans with Disabilities Act-compliant elementary school in the same area. The neighborhood has affordable housing which leads to predictions of steady, if not slightly increasing, future enrollment.

The new school will be located at the previous Lowell Elementary School site, 3117 5th Ave. N. That building was constructed in 1938 and was closed as an elementary school in 1979. It currently houses the Great Falls

Public Schools' buildings and grounds headquarters where carpenters, plumbers, painters and electricians do their work. Lowell cannot be remodeled due to its longtime industrial use and small size and age, so a new school will be constructed. The new building will provide operational savings as it will include modern energy-saving measures.

The plan calls for the Building and Grounds Department to relocate to Little Russell Elementary at 2615 Central Ave. W. with the construction of an 80-foot-by-180-foot shop building. Little Russell was built in the 1930s and was closed as a school in 1986.

The estimated costs associated with the demolition of Lowell, construction of a new school, and work at Little Russell are \$17,450,771. This includes associated costs such as design and contractor fees, geo-technical services, labor costs, permits, interest, contingencies, etc.

The property tax increase associated with just the Roosevelt replacement project on a \$100,000 "market valued" home is estimated at \$11.64/year or \$.97/month for 20 years.

Additional details are on page 11 of this website: <http://bit.ly/28SoqEB> (<http://bit.ly/28SoqEB>).

Tammy Lacey, Great Falls Public Schools superintendent, writes a weekly column on the district's building plan, which goes before voters in a special bond election Oct. 4. Send questions to recke@greatfallstribune.com.

Bond issue costs

Here are the estimated costs for 20 years, to the owner of a house appraised for tax purposes at \$100,000 in Great Falls, of school building improvements written about so far in Superintendent Tammy Lacey's "Schoolhouse Talk" column. A vote on two bond issues, primary and secondary, will be held Oct. 4 in Great Falls:

- Great Falls High School infrastructure — \$14.95 per year, \$1.25 per month
- Great Falls High School additions/hub — \$11.93 per year, \$.99 per month
- C.M. Russell High School infrastructure — \$3.14 per year, \$.26 per month
- C.M. Russel High School building additions — \$5.01 per year, \$.42 per month
- New Roosevelt Elementary School, all costs — \$11.64 per year, \$.97 per month

Subtotal of costs to homeowner covered so far: \$46.67 per year, \$3.89 per month, for owner of \$100,000 house

Total costs to homeowner of the two bond issues: \$68.74 per year, \$5.73 per month

Costs remaining to be discussed in Schoolhouse Talk: \$22.07 per year, or \$1.84 per month

School board selects professionals for first bond projects

Sarah Dettmer, sdettmer@greatfallstribune.com 8:30 p.m. MT Nov. 14, 2016



(Photo: FILE)

On Nov. 14, the Great Falls Public Schools Board of Trustees unanimously voted to approve the request to hire Indefinite Delivery, Indefinite Quantity pending successful fee negotiations.

This move is one of the first steps in beginning work on the projects proposed under the school bond.

IDIQs are used when the exact quantities of services and supplies cannot yet be specified for a fixed time, according to the U.S. General Services Administration.

About 51 applications were submitted by 26 different companies for the nine open areas of work. Of those who applied, 10 companies were chosen.

"There was an incredible amount of talent, and I was very impressed with the quantity and quality presented," said Jan Cahill, chairman of the school board. "It was not an easy decision. I look forward to working with (them) in the coming months and years."

The chosen IDIQ professionals were CTA Architects and Engineers, Davidson Architecture, Nelson Architects, DOWL, TD&H Engineering, GDP Consulting Engineers, Morrison-Maierle, Terracon, Everson Cordeiro Engineering and Lacy & Ebeling Engineering.

The selected companies were chosen by a committee made up of Superintendent Tammy Lacey, Director of Business Operations/Procurement Officer Brian Patrick, Supervisor of Buildings and Grounds Shaun Hammatt, Cahill and Trustee Bob Moretti. The group met on two occasions to review and select the IDIQ professionals.

"It's great to see so many local firms involved to help us through this process," Trustee Jason Brantley said.

The next step in the process will be to enter into fee negotiations with the selected groups. Cahill said the fees will likely be accepted and the process will move forward barring any "out of bound" requests. If a company was to overstep and ask for an unreasonable amount of money, the board would select a different group to complete the project.

The board also unanimously voted to approve the request to disseminate request for qualifications for the Roosevelt Elementary replacement school, the Little Russell School site and request for proposals for the district phone system and improvements to Memorial Stadium.

The eventual work to be completed by the selected professionals will be paid for with the bond proceeds approved by voters during the Oct. 4 election. By Montana law, proceeds from the school bond must be used for funding capital improvements and cannot go toward teacher salaries or other non-tangible items.

Lacey said she would like to have the first bond sold before the new year.

The RFQs and RFPs will be posted on the district website at <http://www.gfps.k12.mt.us/content/facility-action> (<http://www.gfps.k12.mt.us/content/facility-action>).

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Plans for Little Russell move forward

Sarah Dettmer, sdettmer@greatfallstribune.com Published 5:12 p.m. MT Jan. 24, 2017 | Updated 9:57 a.m. MT Jan. 25, 2017



(Photo: TRIBUNE PHOTO/JULIA MOSS)

The new operations building to be constructed on the site of the former Little Russell Elementary is anticipated to be the first major step in beginning the major work outlined in the Great Falls Public Schools bond voted into effect on Oct. 4.

Building and grounds will move out of the former Lowell Elementary site and into the new building at the Russell site. Lowell will then be demolished and a new elementary school will be built in its place.

When the new school is built, students from Roosevelt Elementary will then permanently move into the school.

Students from Longfellow Elementary will move into vacated Roosevelt while Longfellow is demolished and rebuilt on the same site.

Then, the Longfellow students will permanently move back to the new Longfellow school.

But none of this can happen until the new operations building is established at the Russell site.

GFPS has hired Dale Nelson of Nelson Architects to begin the design of the new building. Construction is estimated to be finished by Oct. 1.

However, the district faced a roadblock when it came to the zoning of the site.

Only a quarter of the site is within Great Falls city limits — the rest falls in the county. The district received a letter from the county planning board stating that they did not believe the operations building to be an educational facility, so they denied its congruence with the urban residential district.

Per Montana Code Annotated 76-2-402, whenever an agency proposes to use public land contrary to local zoning regulation, a public hearing must be held with the local board of adjustments.



The Little Russell School site falls partly within Great Falls City limits and partly in the county. (Photo: Photo courtesy of Superintendent Tammy Lacey)

Though they are required to hold a public hearing, it is only to allow a public forum for comment and the board has no power to deny the proposed use of the land.

"We received several comments from the community," Superintendent Tammy Lacey said. "We've decided to move the entrance to the site based on these comments. We're committed to building a clean site without stuff laying around."

however, families neighboring the site have expressed concerns with the district's decision to move forward.

"The district isn't listening to the neighbors," Michelle Myhre said. "We feel that as a community, we have our hands tied and they're going to go ahead with what they want to do. The area was zoned as urban residential, not industrial. We don't want an industrial site here."

Myhre said many of her neighbors are older and are not adept at finding information online, so the plans for the Little Russell site came as a shock.

She said she is worried the structure will be an eye sore as well as an invitation for crime in the area.

Myhre started a petition with her neighbors and has been going door to door collecting signatures. So far, she has 18.

During the Jan. 23 meeting of the School Board of Trustees, Lacey addressed concerns about the Little Russell site.

"Because this issue was voted for by 62 percent of the constituents, we can't really go back," Lacey said. "We've budgeted \$2.5 million for this site. We're going to be building a nice, brand new building."

The Great Falls Tribune has printed four articles specific to the Little Russell site since January 2016.

Additionally, a sample ballot was printed in the newspaper. The ballot language included a line specific to the Little Russell site. The ballot addresses, "improving the former Russell Elementary School site by constructing a new operations building and renovating the existing building for use by the Buildings and Grounds Department."

Lacey said the district plans to use the \$2.5 million to build a nice building that has part of the budget set aside for landscaping and a fence. Currently, the Little Russell building has plywood over the windows and equipment sitting out in the open.

Lacey also suggested the district will pay to install security cameras on the property as they have on all other district buildings.

"I understand that change can be unsettling," Lacey said. "The site has been more or less abandoned since 1986. It's going to be different, but it's going to be better."

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