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News Release

Tenafly Board of Education Plans Sept. 17 Bond Referendum

*District Focused on Projects to Repair, Renovate, and Renew All Schools,
Central Office and Athletic Fields*

Tenafly, NJ – July 9, 2024 - The Tenafly Public Schools (TPS) Board of Education will hold a bond referendum on Tuesday, September 17, 2024, to ask Tenafly residents for approval to sell bonds and use the funds to “repair, renovate and renew” all six schools, district offices and select athletic facilities. The Board unanimously decided during its July 8 public meeting to put that request to voters.

“The strength of our schools is essential to the quality of life in Tenafly,” said Board of Education President Jocelyn Schwarz. “We pride ourselves on high achievement and quality instruction and programming. Continuing to meet a high bar requires impactful improvements at every school.”

A key feature of bond borrowing is the state aid that is awarded to a school district when voters approve a referendum. The State of New Jersey uses a portion of everyone’s taxes from across the state to help school districts pay for capital improvements. That special type of state aid is distributed only to districts that use bond funding.

State aid is a significant factor for TPS. Proposed repairs and renovations are expected to cost approximately \$76 million. State aid is committed for \$16.5 million toward that total. For the owner of a home assessed at Tenafly's average, the property tax impact is estimated at \$881 per year for 20 years.

“Instead of slowly making improvements using the regular annual budget, bond funding would finance them at once, and taxpayers would benefit from state aid,” said Stephen Frost, TPS School Business Administrator/Board Secretary. “All New Jersey taxpayers already contribute to this, but it’s only awarded to school districts where voters approve bond sales. A

voter-approved bond referendum would bring some of those tax dollars back to the Tenafly community.”

The Board of Education deliberately planned for a referendum that includes “something for everyone,” Schwarz said. The plan can be considered in categories of:

- Building updates to every school
- HVAC upgrades
- Improved instructional spaces
- Restrooms and accessibility
- Safety and security
- School grounds updates, including athletic facilities that benefit student-athletes, fans and the community

“Our buildings show their age,” said James Morrison, a 32-year resident of Tenafly and the principal of Tenafly High School. That building is over 65 years old and it is the newest school in the district. All four elementary schools are more than 70 years old. Age is reflected in the lack of female locker rooms in the Geissinger Athletic Complex Fieldhouse, for example; it was designed only for males. Age is also reflected in restroom plumbing that needs frequent repairs, heating/cooling systems that use energy inefficiently, and school entrances designed before certain security measures became standard.

What is a bond referendum?

A bond referendum is a vote in which a school district seeks permission to borrow money through the sale of bonds that are bought back over time with property taxes. That provides up-front funding to make impactful improvements.

The TPS proposal includes:

- maintenance projects such as roofing, windows, heating/cooling systems, masonry repairs
- more space for one-on-one and small-group instruction
- layered safety and security updates
- continued progress toward more accessibility
- a new track, a more weather-resistant, turf field to be used for multiple sports, and public restrooms at Tenafly High School
- a new fieldhouse with locker rooms and restrooms designed specifically for males and females; an all-gender locker room and restroom; a concession stand; and public restrooms at the Geissinger Athletic Complex

Many more improvements are detailed on the special website tenaflyschools.org/vote. The site includes concept drawings of how additions would look at each elementary school and the athletic sites.

“Our buildings were not designed with services like small-group instruction, physical therapy and occupational therapy in mind,” said Heidi Chizzik, principal of Mackay Elementary School.

“Those services regularly take place in areas of our schools that are not conducive to learning, such as behind a stage or in the hallway. This proposal could change that.”

The TPS Board of Education has been sharing information through speaking engagements and one-on-one conversations for several months. Continued efforts to inform the community will include community forums to present plans and answer questions from residents.

- **7 p.m. Monday, Aug. 5** – A Virtual Forum will include time for questions. A link will be available at tenaflyschools.org/vote. The forum will be recorded and available on that website for anyone who is unable to attend.
- **7 p.m. Monday, Sept. 9** – An in-person presentation in the auditorium of Tenafly Middle School (10 Sunset Lane) will include time for questions. It also will include an optional tour of areas of the school and Geissinger Athletic Complex, where improvements are proposed.

“The Board of Education has spent years developing this plan that will put the funding decision in the hands of Tenafly voters,” Schwarz said. “Our focus was on both the school community and the greater Tenafly community, ensuring the investment in our district facilities would be well protected, and that there truly is something for everyone.”

For more information, visit: www.tenaflyschools.org/vote

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