



Board of Education Column

By Greg Clark, Board of Education Planning Committee Chair

Planning Committee Update

The Board's Planning Committee exists to make sure the full Board has all the information it needs to make decisions regarding our resources and physical assets. In addition to overseeing the District's budget, one of the main focuses of the Planning Committee is to work with our administration to develop, update, and implement our long-range financial and facilities plans.

There are three major topics that we must carefully consider when deciding how to best implement our Long-Range Facilities Plan: bond referendums, excess mill levy votes, and state legislative activity.

The only way to fully implement our Long-Range Facilities Plan is with a successful bond referendum in the amount of \$350 million. Surveys of the community reveal that a majority of patrons would support a bond, but the percentage is not quite large enough to meet the 60% threshold required for the bond to be successful. We are still considering a bond referendum, including a bond for less than the full \$350 million, but it would likely not happen in 2025.

The District currently operates with an excess mill levy, which our patrons graciously voted for eight years ago. Currently, that is set to expire in two years unless we successfully get it passed again. This excess mill levy is critical for the district to continue operating with the high standards our community has come to expect from FPS. At risk, if the excess mill levy were to disappear, are our region-leading small class sizes, diverse course offerings in the arts, and well-compensated educators. The excess mill levy is important when discussing the Long-Range Facilities Plan because we must be cognizant of how frequently we put things on a ballot, how to avoid overburdening taxpayers, and its impacts on our Building Fund, which may be vital to implementing the plan in the absence of a bond referendum.

The last major topic we must consider is legislative activity currently happening in Bismarck. There are multiple bills being considered right now that could drastically impact the long-term financial situation of FPS. Our ability to tax may be reduced or eliminated. Our ability to have patrons approve an excess mill levy could be reduced or eliminated. These outcomes could permanently change the financial trajectory of the district, likely requiring us to reconsider our priorities and our facility plans. While ongoing legislative activity has the largest potential to impact the District's financial situation, it is also the factor that we're least able to control. We likely won't know the full impact of legislative activity until May of 2025.



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While it may appear we are in a holding pattern until the legislature decides our financial future, rest assured the Planning Committee continues to work to address the facility needs outlined in the Long-Range Facilities Plan. Regardless of what the future brings financially, the reality of our facilities' condition remains the same. We are actively developing multiple plans, each based on different financial assumptions, so that we are positioned to act when our long-term finances come into focus.

