

Building a Bond: Reaching A Decision

After months of planning, researching, and extensive discussion—including reaching out to the public, holding monthly meetings, acquiring surveys, and hosting forums—the Teton School District 401 school board has decided to bring to vote a \$30 million bond, with a \$7 million additional option.

What Are We Getting?

After working with GPC Architects to analyze bond costs and various plan options, the board has voted to move forward with Option 2, a model that includes building new Victor and Driggs Elementary Schools and renovating and modernizing Tetonia Elementary and Rendezvous Upper Middle School.

After looking at the need to increase the usable life of Teton Middle School and Teton High School and expand needed space like a practice gym, the board decided to offer an optional bond amount that can only pass if the \$30 million plan passes. When voters go to the polls, they can vote 'Yes' or 'No' for the additional \$7 million that will only pass if the main bond passes. This model is based on the success of Bonneville School District 93 who, after years of unsuccessful bond votes, presented voters with the bond plus an additional option, which both passed.

The bond will address overcapacity and aged buildings that the district urgently hopes to amend. Teton Valley's elementary school buildings are all between 58 and 75 years old, and they are running at capacity. Space issues include hallways that are used for storage and additional classroom space, libraries moved to the back of an auditorium, and overcrowded classrooms. In addition, these older buildings were not designed for modern educational needs. The bond will allow the district to build modern facilities that account for changing safety needs—like a safe entry that requires all visitors to check in with administration—new technology needs, and updated seismic code regulations.

New facilities in Driggs and Victor will allow the district to save on annual maintenance. Each year, the district spends \$30,000 on Driggs Elementary maintenance alone.

Tetonia Elementary will receive safety feature updates and significant updates that will free up classroom space, allowing for 24 percent growth to the student population, or 20 students, according to GPC Architects. It will also receive new technology features.

Rendezvous Upper Elementary will also receive safety updates allowing for safe entry and renovations to classrooms, allowing for 17 percent growth based on a ratio of 23 students per classroom.

The additional bond vote for \$7 million will allow the district to renovate the middle school, high school, and build an auxiliary gym.

Why This Amount?

Construction costs are on the rise. According to School Planning & Management, new elementary school construction costs \$212 per square foot to build. This number has grown over the years since the last bond campaign because of overall construction costs, increased renovations, and additional essentials like new technology. The district is committed to addressing the need now, with the future in mind.

After numerous surveys and focus groups, the district heard from a large majority that they wanted the bond to address needs for the long haul. The option they chose accounts for the next 20 years of growth.

The bond will cost-effectively address lack of space and overcrowding, allowing for 20 percent growth in the school district. For comparison, most district bonds allow for 10 percent growth, according to GPC Architects.

Your Taxes

Based on a \$30 million bond, a residential property valued at \$200,000, minus the \$100,000 homeowner's exemption, will see an estimated \$5 monthly increase in their tax bill, or \$60 annual increase. The homeowner's exemption provide an exemption for a primary residence equal to 50 percent of the full value of the home up to a maximum of \$100,000. A home valued at \$400,000, minus the \$100,000 maximum homeowner's exemption, would see a monthly increase of \$15, or \$180 annually. Look for more details on your taxes in the weeks to come.

The need to address these facility issues will not dissipate. Over the years, the schools have been band-aided to make do. The bond could be a smaller amount and could cover less, but in five years, the district would be asking voters for yet another bond.

This bond is meant to set the schools up for success over the next two decades with cost effectiveness in mind.

In the months to come, the district is committed to answering any questions that arise, provide opportunities to tour current facilities, and be as transparent as possible with plans.

For more information, visit tsd401bond.org.