

# Town hall meetings lay out options for BHS

*Regardless of outcome, \$35 million-\$82 million will be spent*

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**BLOOMFIELD TOWNSHIP**  
— The first of 12 town hall discussions on high school unification and consolidation went smoothly last week, bringing to light both issues from residents and hurdles the Bloomfield Hills Schools district is facing.

About 30 people met at the Doyle Center Jan. 17 to hear Superintendent Rob Glass explain the project and also gather and address residents' concerns. Residents' questions centered on some of the "optional packages," and the overall differences in cost among current package plans, and also from the 2010 bond.

"I believe in what we've done because it's community developed," Glass said. "After looking at all the data, I believe we need to get past this one way or another. Not doing anything hurts us."

Glass explained that operational savings from having one high school campus would save the district about \$2.4 million per year, as opposed to the one high school spread over two campuses option, which would save \$1 million per year once it takes effect in fall 2013. As the consolidation debate has raged on for eight years, about \$19.2 million in operational costs have been lost that could have been saved, according to the district.

Several options and alternatives were laid out for attendees of the first town hall meeting, each geared at saving money, filling up half-empty programs and moving BHS into the 21st century of learning, the district said.

The current plan proposes a single high school at the current Andover site that would be 64 percent new. The bill would be at least \$65 million, with additional costs for athletic and learning community packages that could be added at a later date. Additional costs of \$1 million and \$2 million-\$2.5 million would be paid for with funds on hand, Glass said.

On top of that \$3.5 million, the district has an additional \$7.5 million of capital improvement funds available to pay for the upgraded school. If the district allocated more than the combined \$11 million toward the high school consolidation, it would have to take away funds currently allocated for the K-eight schools.

"We can take more money and invest it there, but then it won't be used on the K-eight buildings," Glass said. "Anything not spent on the high school can be used on the K-eight buildings."

The smallest bond the district would request from residents would be \$58.5 million, from 1.22 mills over 30 years. The largest, which would be for an \$82 million

plan that includes both package add-ons, would ask for a \$74.5 million bond at 1.56 mills over 30 years. By comparison, the 2010 bond proposal was \$73 million at 1.43 mills for a \$97.5 million project.

"The difference comes from the sinking fund. Those monies weren't yet available," said Tina Kostiuk, assistant superintendent for business services, of the different amounts the district has on hand to contribute. "Things are always evolving, and budgets and estimates are always changing."

Although Glass said he realizes a new bond may not initially be a popular option with some, he said it's necessary to bring BHS up to speed with surrounding districts, such as Birmingham Public Schools, which Glass said spent \$250 million on buildings during the past 15 years.

## Bond failure scenario

If voters were to reject a new bond, officials said, it would cost the district \$30 million to make necessary repairs to both Andover and Lahser while also spending an additional \$5 million for necessary renovation costs.

"It's not that we're going to walk right up and spend \$30 million to fix this," Board President Ingrid Day said. "It's going to come down to priority."

A failed bond would result in sophomores, juniors and seniors being placed at Andover with only seniors allowed to drive to school, while freshmen and the Model High School program would be housed at Lahser. Hickory Groves would become dormant, and several classroom and extracurricular programs would have to be cut "fast and deep," officials said.

Although a bond would be needed to move forward with remodeling and preserve opportunities currently provided by the district, Glass said a new millage would be offset by others ending

soon. He said the current 1.5-mill sinking fund lasts through 2014 before dropping to 0.74 mills from 2014-19. Also, an existing 0.67-mill bond ends in 2015.

"We have the third lowest school taxes in the county," Glass said. "What we're asking for is a tax increase, yes; but they're also coming with a reduction.

"(New residents) came to this community because we have high quality school systems, and it'll help their property values. I believe when we make this community and district the best we can be, we set an example for those around us."

## Options

As for the two package add-ons, they can be done simultaneously with the rest of the project or a few years down the road, but the district would benefit from doing them all together, officials said.

The \$8 million athletic package would flip the current locations of the pool and fieldhouse while upgrading from an eight-lane pool to 12 lanes, and a two-court fieldhouse to three courts with a fourth through the center,

resulting in a 20,000-square-foot fieldhouse with new locker rooms. A new fieldhouse could hold all 1,650 high school students for an assembly, which cannot be done with the old fieldhouse.

"It is old and in need of some serious investment," Glass said of the fieldhouse, noting the least expensive option was selected when the fieldhouse was built.

Glass said the base package is "not an optimal solution at \$65 million-\$66 million, but it is an acceptable solution." He said the larger athletic venue would allow the school to host regional and state meets that it currently cannot, which would create additional revenue.

If voters approve a bond, freshmen would take classes in Hickory Groves during construction, while the upperclassmen would be based at Lahser. Release times would have to be adjusted to avoid traffic congestion, and freshmen would be shuttled to Lahser for gym classes.

Once a package and bond proposal are decided upon at the Feb. 16 Board of Education meeting, the district must decide

whether to place it on a May or November ballot this year.

A May vote would bring closure to the debate sooner, but it would cost \$60,000 and likely draw a lower voter turnout than in November, which will be a presidential election and would draw a much larger crowd, a crowd that some say may or may not be aware of the effects of the bond.

A November vote would mean an additional \$1.4 million in operational costs would be lost, officials said. More meetings would likely ensue and, if the district were to hire an architect to draw up designs in anticipation of a passed bond — in order to keep the schedule on track — the district would risk spending \$800,000 for nothing if the bond failed.

One of Glass' biggest concerns with the November election option is that construction cannot begin until the spring 2013, pushing the construction schedule back for an extra school year and missing the targeted fall 2015 opening date for the revamped high school.

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