

## Town hall topic Input sought for new high school plans – Greg Kowalski – O&E



Parents Ellen Tener (left) and Lisa Farris are closely following the school district's proposal for a new high school.  
Written by



Kenneth Macon is among those giving a second look at the Bloomfield Hills high school proposal.

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Are Bloomfield Hills [School officials](#) winning over the public to their plan to build a single new high school? Perhaps.

"I'm tending to agree," said Kenneth Macon, a long-time resident of the Bloomfield Hills [School District](#). Up until now, he said, he had not been in favor of the plan, even though his wife, Debbie, is a former member of the Bloomfield Hills school board. But now he feels there will be "a negative impact if we don't do something."

His view is pivotal. The Macons' last child graduated from the Bloomfield Hills Schools 17 years ago, and it was largely the votes of [senior citizens](#) who sank previous attempts by the district to pass millages to fund building a new high school.

"People in my age group tend to vote," Macon said succinctly.

The district is well aware of that. It also knows that it has a challenge in selling its proposal for a single new Bloomfield Hills High School. In response, a series of a dozen town hall meeting has been scheduled to lay out the district's high school options and seek input from the public.

The first was held Tuesday at the Doyle Center in Bloomfield Township. About 25 people, including Macon, attended and listened to Supt. Rob Glass sell the proposal.

"We've got to do something," Glass said. Andover and Lahser high schools "are in sorry shape. We have to deal with that."

So far the deal includes a proposal to shut down Lahser and rebuild Andover into a state-of-the-art 331,000-square-foot high school to house the district's 1,600 high schoolers. That plan would cost from about \$65 million to \$82 million depending on if the district opts for a basic design or one that includes one or two optional upgrades to the learning and athletic spaces.

And any plan hinges on whether voters in the district will approve a millage to cover the cost.

Also to be decided is just when the millage vote will be held — in May or November. Glass listed the pros and cons for either time, with the pros leaning toward May. The May date, he said, would save money by getting construction started sooner and give parents clear direction of where their kids will be going to school. On the down side, the district would have to pay for holding a May election, at a cost of about \$60,000. Holding a vote in November would bundle it in with the national election, so the district wouldn't have to cover the cost. And a November election would likely have a higher voter turnout.

In any case, the district would like to have the issue resolved to help end the divisiveness that has plagued the district since a new high school plan was proposed nine years ago.

Glass said he wants to "break the cycle of antagonism and build a street of trust."

That antagonism reached a peak last summer and fall, when an effort to recall all seven school board members was launched. Ultimately, it failed as not enough signatures could be gathered.

Also on the table is what to do if the proposed millage fails. Pass or fail, there will be one unified high school, but if the millage goes down, the students will be divided, with ninth-[graders](#) moved to the Lahser or Hickory Groves buildings and 10th- through 12th-graders at the Andover building. Essential repairs to the buildings will be done.

"We will have to fill the classes to the max," Glass said. "It can be done, but it's not as good as (the new high school) plan."

How did this register with those attending?

No sharp criticisms were voiced by anyone attending.

"Just do it right," said Lisa Farris, a parent, who said she supported the options proposed, including the athletic upgrades.

The next town hall meeting will be by 7-9 p.m. Tuesday at Way Elementary School in the Fine Arts Room.

"It's a good start," Macon said of the meeting.