

Bond Task Force – Frequently Asked Questions

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Past Bond Measures

Q. *When did the District last successfully pass a bond measure?*

A. The last successful bond measure passed in 2006.

Q. *How much was it and what did that bond buy us?*

A. The 2006 Bond Measure totaled \$32.33 Million and included the following:

- Cascadia Elementary – full build
- Ferndale High School projects:
 - Weight facility
 - Conversion of classrooms to science labs and a photography dark room
 - Outdoor learning area to the art department
 - Added restrooms to the Performing Arts Building
 - ADA accessibility upgrades to the Performing Arts Building
 - Replace barrel roof on FHS gymnasium building
 - Install video surveillance system
- Purchase of a piece of land on Church Rd. for a future school site
- Skyline bus loop
- Custer Elementary
 - HVAC update
 - Convert outdoor walkway into an interior hallway
 - Interior finishes
- Beach Elementary
 - Plumbing improvements
 - Upgrades to parking area
- North Bellingham Elementary
 - Portable buildings

Q. *Did all the work planned for that money get done? If not, why not?*

A. No. The bottom line is that the District did not ask for enough money to complete all of the work on the list – this was a mistake. This was a period of extreme cost escalation. While the planned projects were priorities at the time, the District made a mistake by not correctly anticipating cost increases.

Q. *There was a failed bond in 2014. What was in that Bond?*

A. The 2014 Bond Proposal included:

- A brand-new Ferndale High School,
- A renovated Windward High School building
- A new maintenance transportation facility located on the Mt. View site

Q. *What's different about this bond measure from the last one?*

- A. In 2018, we are focused on delivering a cost-effective package that delivers good value and addresses the problem of aging facilities and meets the priorities of our community. As such, we have committed to a long public process led by a diverse group of volunteers. That group, called the Community Bond Task Force, will make a recommendation to the Ferndale School Board.

Managing Growth

Q. *Are any of our schools currently overcrowded? Do we need to build more or bigger schools?*

- A. We experience crowding at Ferndale High School in virtually all shared spaces. Spaces like the cafeteria and the gymnasium are too small to accommodate all current students, irrespective of potential growth in student population going forward. An example: FHS does not have a space large enough to gather the full student body together at one time.

We are also limited in our flexibility for instructional space. All classrooms are being utilized and we are unable to add new programs to our existing buildings.

Q. *Are we adequately planning for growth?*

- A. We certainly hope so. Enrollment projections and the fact that our current enrollment is lower than our past enrollment would indicate that we are. Trends can and do change, so our best available information at this time says yes.

Q. *How does FSD predict enrollment? How reliable / accurate have your predictions been in the past?*

- A. We use several different forecast models that have proven to be quite accurate over time. We consider the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI)'s long range forecast numbers and often consult with the experts at the Educational Service District.

Q. *Why does a 15-year old school (Horizon Middle School) already need a second gymnasium? Did we not build it big enough to begin with?*

- A. Historically, we have been very conservative in our bond requests and this has required us to make compromise to building design. The projects, the Horizon gym included, were often underfunded and built smaller than would be ideal.

Q. *Why don't we build buildings big enough to accommodate growth from the very beginning?*

- A. Cost. Larger buildings typically cost more to build than smaller ones. Historically we have been very conservative in our bond requests and this has put a great deal of pressure on the budget. The 2006 bond is a good example. The projects were underfunded, and compromises had to be made meaning common spaces were built smaller than what would be ideal.



District Needs

- Q. *Why aren't our current schools good enough for our students? Can't they just be maintained better?*
- A. Our maintenance crew does an incredible job maintaining our current facilities. However, you can only repair your old furnace, car or washing machine for so long before it just needs to be replaced. The boiler that heats the gym for instance, was acquired used from a Navy ship in the 1970's. That old steam boiler is still working because it has been maintained very well. However, it's not very efficient in terms of cost to run or maintain. It takes a lot of time and money to maintain old equipment as any of you that like to restore old cars or tractors knows. When you add up all the old boilers, plumbing, and electrical systems across the district, it becomes a huge undertaking that is way beyond the capacity of our regular maintenance budget.
- Q. *How did the district come up with the list of project needs?*
- A. We coordinated three facility assessment processes:
- OSPI Facility Study and Survey, which is a state prescribed methodology for assessing building condition. The study and survey is performed by an architect.
 - Comprehensive building assessment done from an outside firm
 - Ferndale School District Staff Input:
 - Maintenance crew
 - Principals
- Q. *Why did the school board say that Ferndale High School should be a signature project in the next bond measure?*
- A. In addition to the fact that the building itself is in desperate need of significant work, almost all our students will eventually go to Ferndale High School. Our modern workforce has changed. The experience we offer to students in high school must change to meet that demand. Ferndale students must have access to education that will prepare them for college or career. We need to offer facilities that make that kind of education possible so that Ferndale kids are ready for the next step - be it a career in a trade, a four-year college, or any other post-high school option they choose.

The School Board has also identified Ferndale High School as a priority in the 2018 Bond package because they believe it will return the biggest savings in terms of energy and operational costs allowing money to be used on our other facilities.

Options

- Q. *We voted down a new high school in the last bond vote. Why are you still considering one?*
- A. The feedback from voters from the last Bond election was that the package did not fit for a variety of reasons. We heard that message loud and clear. We were in a position of significant need at the last bond package. That need has only grown.

Ferndale High School continues to be our number-one focus because it is the building with the most need.



Q. Why are you closing Windward High School?

A. Windward High School has always been a school of choice. For the past 14 years, this small school has provided an excellent educational experience to the students who have chosen it. During the past few years, however, fewer students have elected the Windward option. Last spring only seven freshmen enrolled in our small high school. When this year's senior class graduates, there simply will not be enough students left to sustain the school. Sadly, that means 2017-2018 will be Windward's final year.

Q. Why aren't you doing something at every school, so the money is shared equitably across the district?

A. We would like to address all the needs at all our schools. But the cost to do that is too high. High schools are very expensive. We have decided to do a really good job on one project as opposed to a partial job on lots. The School Board has asked the Community Bond Task Force to give it advice on how to structure the next Bond measure, with the understanding that Ferndale High School be the signature project.

Note that any investment made in FHS will ultimately be shared equitably across the district because most students will attend our one comprehensive high school and benefit from a good facility. Also, the current high school takes the most of our maintenance resources. By reducing that need we will have more time and money to spend on the other facilities. This will provide benefit to everyone.

Q. What is the District's plan for our two closed schools – Mountain View Elementary and North Bellingham Elementary?

A. We are currently in discussions with an organization that would like to rent Mountain View. We are optimistic we will be able to reach an agreement that will generate some revenue for the District and get the building back into use. For North Bellingham, if it is not re-opened, we will continue to use it to support educational programs we don't have room for in our other buildings. For instance, our early kindergarten program will be located there instead of at the neighborhood schools.

Q. What is the District planning to do with the property on Church Road that you purchased?

A. The property is not costing the District any money to hold onto it. It is fully paid for and the District doesn't pay property tax on it. At some point in the future, the District will most likely need to build another school. By then, large parcels of land may be very difficult to find and most likely very expensive. By holding on the property, it positions us to address future growth in a more cost-effective manner.

Maintenance

Q. Do our schools just need to be maintained better?

A. Our major systems are failing. The energy and resources of our talented maintenance team are often completely occupied by the daily challenge of keeping those systems running.

This bond package is not about maintenance. It is about the need to replace major systems.

Q. How is regular maintenance paid for?

A. Regular maintenance is paid for through the regular general fund – just like text books and teacher salaries.



Q. Why is there such a significant backlog of major maintenance work?

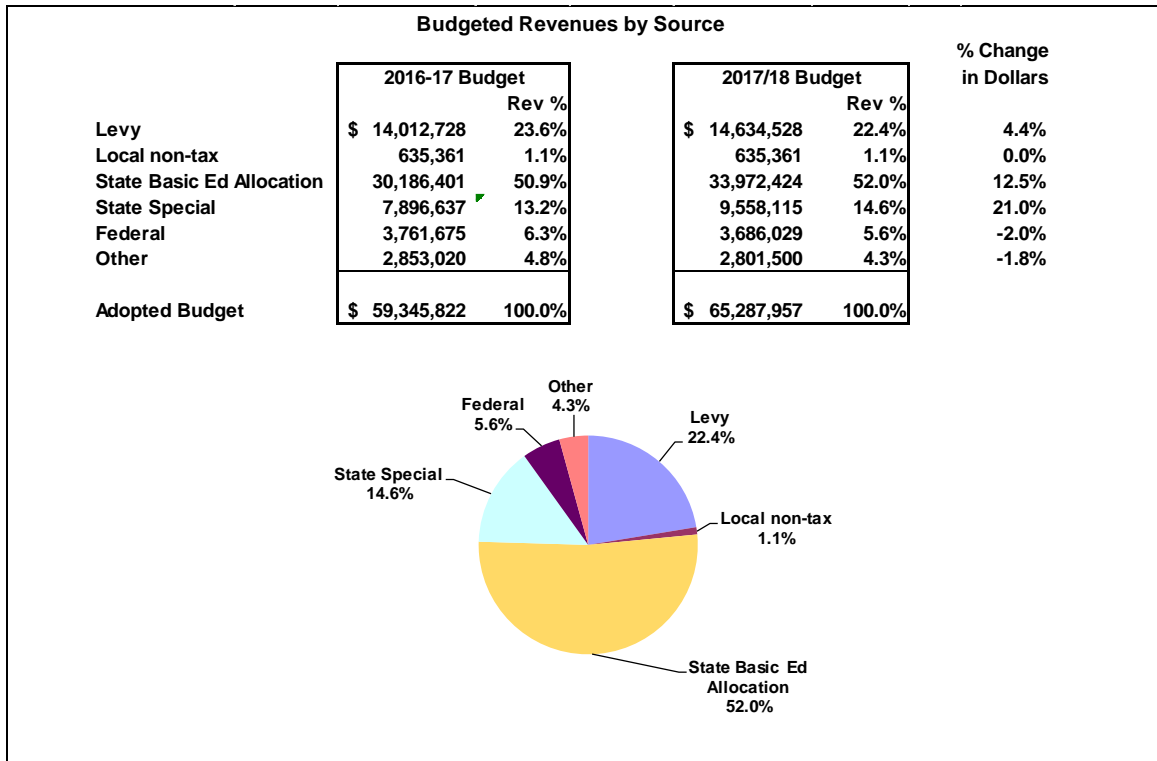
A. There are three reasons for the backlog:

- Past bond issues added space but did not provide for major upgrades of our building systems.
- Ferndale School District has prioritized students and programs despite tough economic times. That prioritization required trade-offs.
- The state funding model is not set up to pay for building renovations out of general operating funds.

Funding Availability for School Facilities

Q. What funds does the district get for schools?

A.



Q. What is the “state match?”

A. “State match” refers to the state’s School Construction Assistance Program, called SCAP. The program can provide funds to qualifying districts to help defray the cost of building school facilities. SCAP funding is not guaranteed, but it has been available most years. It typically funds a small percentage of the total project cost.

Q. How does the district get “state match” for construction?

A. There is an application process that the district must follow to determine eligibility. There is a different formula for each district based on the district’s tax base. The District cannot get any state match money until it has raised its portion of the money needed to fund construction work. In other words, the District must have the money in hand (typically by passing a bond measure) to be eligible for SCAP funding from the state. Once the district portion is spent, the state will release any match monies that we have been awarded.



Q. *Shouldn't impact fees paid by developers for new homes and apartments pay for new schools?*

A. The impact fee process is designed to assign costs associated with the growth that the school district experiences. Since we don't have a need for additional educational space, we can't capture enough money to pay for new facilities. We do collect impact fees and use those funds to make improvements to our facilities, but we can't charge high enough fees to build new buildings.

Q. *How much of school funding is paid for by the local community through taxes?*

A. For the 2017-2018 school year, the local community funds 22.4% of the Ferndale School District budget.

Q. *How will what's happening with the legislature regarding school funding affect our ability to update / replace aging schools?*

A. There is no new funding mechanism being considered for school construction, despite the current discussions related to the McCleary decision.

Bonds and Levies

Q. *What is a bond?*

A. Bonds are like a mortgage on a home. They are a long-term (usually 20 years) loan the district takes to pay for buildings, renovations, and capital improvements. Bonds must be paid back, with interest. Districts pay bonds back by collecting a local tax to pay the loan payments each year.

Q. *What is a levy?*

A. A levy is a local tax that districts use to pay for teaching and learning costs that are not covered by the State. A levy is based on a pay-as-you-go model and is collected and spent during the same year. In this way, a levy is like a magazine subscription that needs to be renewed for continued receipt.

Q. *What's the difference between a bond and a levy?*

A. The easiest way to remember the difference is that bonds are for building and levies are for learning.

Q. *Who votes for bonds and levies?*

A. Registered voters can vote for bonds and levies. Bonds require 60% +1 of voters to approve (vote yes) for a bond to pass. This is called a super-majority vote. Levies require simple majority or 50% +1 of voters to approve (vote yes) to pass.

Q. *How does the District know how much it would cost for the projects on the list of needs?*

A. The project list is based on the assessment done by Zervas Architecture. They used industry standards, state school construction records, and their recent experience in designing and building schools in our region to develop budget estimates for the projects. Their budget estimates include a contingency factor of 3.5 percent, which is again based on their local experience with school projects.



- Q. *The district's list of needs is long. How can the community afford to make all these investments in school buildings?*
- A. That's a difficult challenge for us. We anticipate additional bond requests in the future, as the investment to address all needs at once would be too much for our community to manage.

NOTE: NEED TO TRACK DOWN INFO RELATED TO COST/BENEFIT OF BUILDING SCHOOLS.

- Q. *Will you be coming back to the community for more money in the future?*
- A. Yes. The way the state funding model for schools works we will have to ask our community to fund major facility work.

- Q. *How do we know the District will spend bond dollars wisely?*
- A. That is a question the Bond Task Force has been asking as well. They are planning to recommend to the School Board that a citizen oversight committee be convened after any bond measure passes to provide transparency and accountability to the community for how bond money is spent and to ensure that commitments are kept.

Task Force

- Q. *How did people get invited to be on the Task Force? Who got selected and why?*
- A. We sent out an invite community-side, using email, newsletters, Facebook, Twitter and other methods, inviting anyone in the community who was interested to join the Task Force. We didn't select members – anyone who came to the first few meetings is part of the Task Force. We did consult with those who came to the first meeting to see if we were missing key community representatives, and then reached out to get more voices on the Task Force. No one who wanted to be on the Task Force was turned away.
- Q. *Has the School Board promised to accept the Task Force's recommendations?*
- A. No, the School Board has promised to consider the Task Force's recommendations when they make the choices about what to put in the bond measure.
- Q. *When will the Task Force's recommendations be available to us for review? Will we be able to comment on them?*
- A. The Task Force is scheduled to present and discuss their draft recommendations to a School Board Study Session on February 12. The Task Force will present their final recommendations to the School Board for consideration on February 27.

The Task Force is sharing their work on their website: fsdbondtaskforce.participate.online. The community is invited to comment on the Task Force's work throughout the process.

- Q. *When are the Task Force meetings? Can anyone come to a meeting?*
- A. The Task Force will meet again on January 31, February 12 (at a School Board Study Session) and again on February 26. Meetings are open to the public. All meetings begin at 7:00 p.m., with optional school tours at 6:15 p.m. Check the Task Force [website](#) for meeting locations.

Information

- Q. *Where can I find more information about the district's school facilities? About the Task Force?*
- A. Check the Task Force [website](#) for information about school facilities and the Task Force.

