



Oak Park and River Forest High School Five-Year Facilities Plan and Referendum Overview and Frequently Asked Questions

On Aug. 16, 2016, the Board of Education unanimously adopted a five-year facilities plan. The Board has placed a referendum on the November 8 ballot, which will allow voters to determine if \$25 million in bonds should be issued to finance the project. If the referendum is approved, the \$44.5 million project will be financed with cash on hand (\$20 million) and the bond issue (\$25 million).

What does the pool and facilities project involve?

The work includes replacing the two 88-year old pools with a 40-meter pool and new garage on the site of the existing garage, adding classrooms to accommodate a more than 20% increase in performing arts enrollment, renovating locker rooms to mitigate health and safety issues, and improving learning spaces.

How will this work be funded?

The \$44.5 million project will be paid for with cash on hand (\$20 million, or 45% of the cost) and with voter-approved bonds (up to \$25 million, or 55% of the cost).

How will my tax bill be affected?

Visit facilities.oprfhs.org to use our tax-impact calculator. According to estimates provided by William Blair & Company:

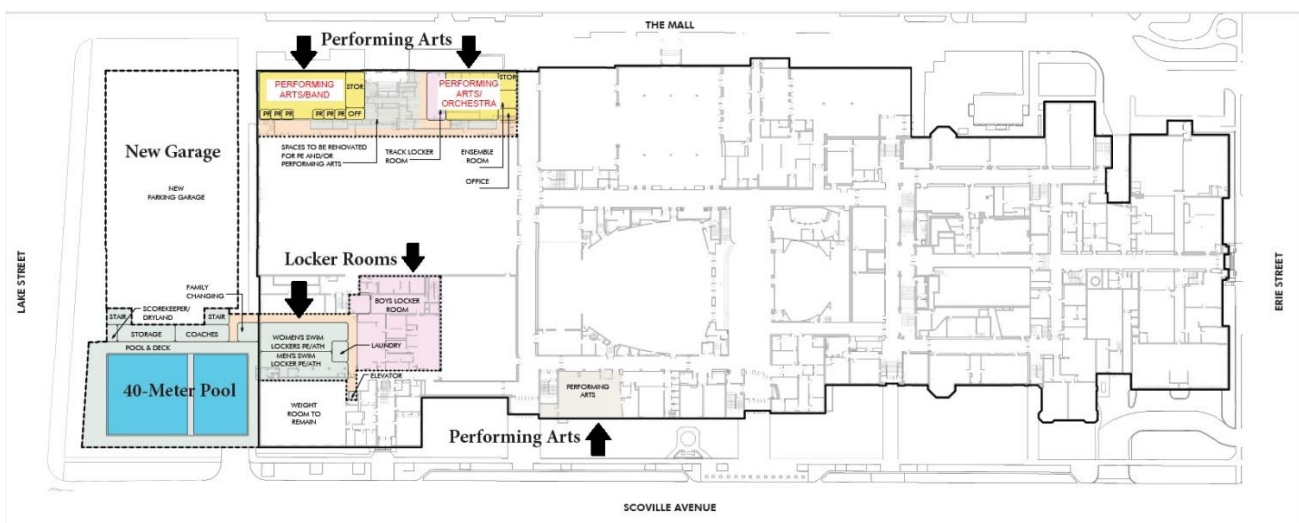
- For an **Oak Park** resident with a median home value of \$362,000, the expected tax impact would be an increase of up to \$90 in property taxes per year.
- For a **River Forest** resident with a median home value of \$530,700, the expected tax impact would be an increase of up to \$136 in property taxes per year.

Why not use more of the reserves and borrow less?

The Board is following the recommendation of its Finance Advisory Committee to budget \$20 million out of the reserves for facilities. If the Pool and Facilities Project were funded only out of reserves, the District would have to go for an operating referendum sooner. In addition, issuing bonds spreads costs over current users as well as those who will use the facilities in the future. Finally, interest rates currently are low, making this a good time to borrow.

Why is replacing the pools necessary?

The two pools are 88 years old and their anticipated lifespan was 40 to 50 years. They do not meet current design safety standards, and the mechanicals are so old that replacement parts do not always exist. The pools currently are leaking 3,000 gallons of water a day, and contractors no longer will guarantee that repairs to the foundation will hold.



Architectural Drawing of First Floor

Why is a single 40-meter pool being built instead of replacing the pools in their current locations?

We currently have two pools because boys and girls were not allowed to take swimming classes together in 1928, when the pools were built. Times have changed, and co-ed swimming classes are now the norm. Repurposing the two former pool spaces will provide much-needed additional classroom space. A single pool will allow three PE classes and their instructors to use the pool simultaneously, making it easier to group students by ability level. And varsity and junior varsity teams will be able to practice in the same space, allowing coaches to teach and mentor them together.

Why can't you use Ridgeland (or another off-campus pool)?

This was explored. But it was determined that the Ridgeland Common Pool, which currently is not covered, is not a viable solution to meet the high school's program needs. Roughly 400 students per day use the pools for physical education (PE) instruction. Class periods are 48 minutes long and would not provide sufficient instructional time in the pool once walking to and from Ridgeland, showering, and changing are factored in. This likely would have an adverse effect on instructional time for other classes following PE as well. Security and inclement weather are also concerns.

Why is additional space for performing arts instruction necessary?

Enrollment in performing arts classes has increased more than 20% in the past few years, and additional classroom space is needed to support band, orchestra, theatre, and choir.

What performing arts spaces are being added?

New band and orchestra rooms will be built on the west side of the building. The district is examining the ways to repurpose the spaces that will be vacated on the east side of the building; accommodating growth in theatre and choir have been identified as priorities.

Why is replacing the garage necessary?

Although a study commission by the Board indicated that the garage was still structurally sound, the Board agreed that a parking garage should not drive decisions about how OPRF will be used for the next several decades. Rebuilding the garage frees up some of our limited space to use for learning and extra-curriculars rather than parking.

Why are there fewer parking spaces when enrollment is increasing?

A garage with 61 fewer spaces than the current garage will cost less and allows more dollars to be devoted to learning spaces.

Where will people park while the garage is under construction?

The District and the village will work together to create a short-term parking plan.

When will construction take place, and how long will it last?

Construction could begin as early as spring 2017 or as late as winter 2018 depending on the timing of a number of components in the construction process, such as completion of final drawings, finalizing a parking plan for construction with the village, approval of zoning variances, etc. Overall, the project is expected to take roughly two years; work will occur in phases so that not all the areas are under construction at once.

Why not fund this project with private donations?

Mounting a capital campaign is a significant undertaking, initially involving research to determine whether such a large investment of time would even be fruitful and who would best lead a campaign, whether the district, a citizens' group, or a consultant. The time required to raise the funds can be lengthy, with no guarantee of the outcome. The district may consider raising private funds for future projects, but given that the facility needs are urgent, particularly replacing the pools, the Board opted to bring the question of funding to the community via a referendum now, without seeking supplemental private donations.

When can I vote?

Election Day is Nov. 8, 2016. Early voting will take place Oct. 24 – Nov. 7, 2016. Additional voting information, including directions for voting by mail are available at cookcountyclerk.com.

Questions about Previously Considered Plans

Why not go with the previously considered plan that had two pools—didn't it meet the same needs?

No. The single 40-meter pool in the Board-approved plan differs in a number of ways from a plan with two smaller pools on opposite sides of the building.

	Approved Facilities Plan with One 40-Meter Pool	Previously Considered Facilities Plan with Two Pools	Current Two Pools
Renovates classrooms for 21st century learning	Yes	Yes	No
Accommodates 20% growth in performing arts class enrollments	Yes	Yes	No
Adds performing arts space within building footprint, without losing campus green space	Yes	No	No
Preserves adaptive gym used by special education students	Yes	No	Yes
Total number of swimming lanes	17	12	11
Provides adequate space for simultaneous use by up to three PE classes	Yes	No	No
Allows simultaneous use by multiple teams/team levels	Yes	No	No
Provides both boys and girls locker rooms next to pool(s) used by both genders	Yes	No	No
Eliminates girls walking through the Field House in wet swimsuits to get from West "Boys" Pool to girls locker room	Yes	No	No
Approximate potential community use during school year, in estimated number of lane hours/week	765	536	498
Includes a girls locker room next to any pool(s) used by community	Yes	No	No
Maintains on-site garage parking	Yes	Yes	Yes
Avoids reducing parking garage capacity by approximately 20% by saving 61 spots	No	Yes	Yes
Avoids disruption by maintaining garage parking during construction	No	Yes	Yes

I keep hearing that the previously considered facilities plan with two pools would cost \$15 million less. Is that true?

No. The two-pool plan that was considered in August 2016 was estimated to cost \$39.9 million. The adopted plan, which includes purchasing the parking garage currently owned by the Village of Oak Park in order to build a new 40-meter pool and a new garage on that site, is estimated to cost the district \$44.5 million. However, more than \$2 million of the garage purchase price is a transfer from one Oak Park taxing body to another to pay off existing debt and is not a new cost to Oak Park tax payers. The net difference in cost to taxpayers between the two plans is therefore \$2.6 million. However, that difference does not take into account the loss of the adaptive gym space. Rebuilding that space elsewhere as part of future projects could cost several million dollars.

Before adoption of the final plan, it was reduced by \$9.5 million from the plan presented to the Board on August 1. Why can't the two-pool plan be reduced by the same amount?

Most of the elements that were cut to create the approved plan were already absent from the two-pool plan, so were not available to be cut. The only exception might have been to leave the black box theater in place. However, because the configuration of the two plans differed significantly, the feasible changes that could have been made to the two-pool plan were not comparable. The new classroom space for band and orchestra would have been roughly 1,000 square feet less than in the approved plan, and theatre programming would not have had any space to expand. Since there are no comparable changes possible, there are therefore no comparable cost reductions available.

I've heard conflicting information about how much the community might get to use the pool in the approved facilities plan. Can you clarify?

Following community meetings to review potential facilities plans in mid-July 2016, we developed an in-depth schedule of potential community use for a single 40-meter pool compared to the facilities plan with two pools that was then under consideration, as well as to the current two pools. (You can see that document by [clicking here](#).) Community use includes the West Suburban Special Recreation Association (WSSRA), the YMCA's TOPS swim team, and the Park District of Oak Park swim lessons, lap swim, etc.

Approximate potential hours for community use

	Approved Facilities Plan with One 40-Meter Pool	Previously Considered Facilities Plan with Two Pools	Current Two Pools
Fall	306 lane hours/week	200 lane hours/week	178 lane hours/week
Winter	323 lane hours/week	208 lane hours/week	184 lane hours/week
Spring	136 lane hours/week	128 lane hours/week	136 lane hours/week
Total	765 lane hours/week	536 lane hours/week	498 lane hours/week

I have been hearing conflicting information about the price of the pool and the other elements of the facilities plan. What are the real costs?

During the analysis and deliberation phase, the Board considered a great deal of information, all of which remains posted on our website. But now that a plan has been approved, we are working to provide clear information about what is in the plan as it was adopted on Aug. 16, 2016. This may differ from earlier information that was included in working documents as the project was being researched and developed.

The total costs remain the same *as approved by the Board on August 16*. You can see the detailed breakdown by [clicking here](#). Below is an overview of that detailed cost sheet. In addition, we've provided a breakdown of costs for the previously considered plan with two pools; the more detailed background document can be found by [clicking here](#).

Overview of Cost Breakdown for Approved Plan with Single 40-Meter Pool

Pool and Support Spaces	\$21.4 million
Garage Demolition and Construction	\$10.0 million
Performing Arts Expansion	\$ 4.8 million
PE Locker Room Facilities	\$ 2.8 million
Model Classrooms	\$ 1.6 million
Other Repurposed Spaces*	\$ 1.2 million
Total Construction Cost	\$41.8 million
Garage Purchase**	\$ 2.7 million
Total Proposed Cost	\$44.5 million

*The plan includes repurposing a portion of the former East Pool space as classroom and Driver Education spaces.

**Purchase price was estimated based on the Village's outstanding debt for garage. For Oak Park taxpayers, who compose about 75% of D200 taxpayers, this will not be a new cost but rather an existing cost transferred from one Oak Park taxing body to another. Oak Parkers will have paid off more than 85% of the costs of the high school's garage since its inception. Approximately 25% of the purchase price will be a new cost to River Forest taxpayers.

Overview of Cost Breakdown for Previously Considered Plan with Two Pools

Pool and Support Spaces	\$22.3 million
Performing Arts Expansion and Other Repurposed Spaces	\$10.7 million
PE Locker Room Facilities	\$ 5.3 million
Model Classrooms	\$ 1.6 million
Total Construction Cost	\$39.9 million
Deferred Maintenance on Garage	\$ 270,000
Total Proposed Cost	\$40.2 million

Questions about Finances

Fund Balance

What is the high school's current fund balance?

The unaudited fund balance at the end of the fiscal year on June 30, 2016, was \$96.7 million, or 116% of budgeted expenditures for the current fiscal year.

How much of the fund balance has been earmarked for the pool and facilities project?

The Board has planned to use \$20 million from the fund balance for this project.

If you subtract that \$20 million out of the fund balance, what would the remaining \$76.7 million equate to?

That would leave 92% of budgeted expenses for this fiscal year.

How much of a fund balance does the district actually need to maintain?

To maintain its AAA credit rating from Standard & Poor's credit rating agency, the high school must maintain a fund balance of at least 25% of its annual expenditures. Only 88 school districts in the nation have earned AAA status, the agency's highest rating, which lowers borrowing costs; most have fund balances substantially higher than 25%.

Even so, doesn't a 92% balance seem awfully high?

Yes, and that's why the district is in the midst of a plan to gradually and responsibly lower the fund balance to between 25% and 40% of expenses by 2023 and has established a policy to maintain future fund balances between 25% and 75%.

How did the district come up with these targets?

The targets were an outgrowth of work by the 2013 Finance Advisory Committee (FAC). This was a Board committee created to examine the appropriateness of the high school's fund balance, which at that time stood at \$130 million, or 173% of expenditures. The Board created the 15-person committee, more than half of whom were community members with financial expertise, out of concern that the fund balance created unnecessarily high tax levels and interfered with trust of the District.

Why not use the fund balance to pay the full cost of the pool and facilities project?

Several reasons:

- If the fund balance is spent down too quickly, we would have to go to an operating referendum sooner.
- There is a philosophical belief that paying partially with bonds is more fair, because a portion of the cost is paid by future users of the assets.
- As of next year, the high school will be debt free and historically low interest rates could make this a wise time to borrow.

Is a bond referendum different from an operating referendum?

Yes. Funds raised from a *bond referendum* go into a district's Capital Projects Fund. By law, these funds are to be used for specific purposes, such as financing facility refurbishment and construction projects. Funds from an *operating referendum* go into a district's Education Fund, which covers the day-to-day costs of running a district. The Education Fund is the high school's largest fund and accounts for most of the instructional, co-curricular,

special education, pupil support, and administrative aspects of the district’s operations. Funds from the Education Fund may, however, be used for capital projects as well.

But didn’t I hear about an operating referendum happening next year?

Oak Park Elementary School District 97, which serves grades K-8, has announced plans for an operating referendum next spring. Oak Park and River Forest High School District 200 is a completely separate school district.

Tax Cuts

How much has the high school cut taxes?

Over the past four years, the district cut its portion of property taxes by more than \$30 million. This was achieved through two methods:

1. Reducing the tax levy by a total of \$20.2 million.
2. Paying \$10.1 million in principal and interest on outstanding bonds from the fund balance rather than collecting new taxes.

So why did my property tax bill still go up during those four years?

The high school is just one of the local entities that collects property taxes, so your overall bill may have been higher. However, your total property tax bill still was lower than it would have been had the district not cut its portion of the taxes. ***In fact, the compounding effect of the reductions was projected to save taxpayers a total of \$72 million over ten years.***

Why didn’t the district reduce its current levy—why not maintain the cuts?

As announced from the beginning, the high school’s tax cuts were always meant to be temporary. Unfortunately, given the way Illinois funds its schools, continuing the tax cuts would not be sustainable.

As background, local property taxes (rather than state funding) make up 86% of Oak Park and River Forest High School’s budget. State law caps annual local property taxes increases—which is beneficial from a property owner’s perspective. However, the challenge for Illinois school districts is that the annual tax cap generally is based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI), or the increase in a “market basket” of consumer goods and services, such as clothing, groceries, and cable television. School district expenses are quite different—for instance, salaries, health care benefits, annual facilities construction—and these typically increase more than CPI each year. Eventually, a district enters deficit spending and must go to the taxpayers for an operating referendum in order to raise revenues to meet the current needs of education.

When does the high school anticipate going for an operating referendum?

At this point, District 200 financial projections show the district returning to the community for an operating referendum in 2021 or 2023. Were the Board to continue cutting taxes each year, or even simply not raise them, the high school would have to go to the community for a referendum much sooner, resulting in an even larger rise in taxes. It has been the goal of the Board of Education to avoid doing so.



The facilities plan would address space needs of Performing Arts classes, which have grown 20% and comprise a third of the student body. *(Clockwise from bottom right)* The new Therapeutic Theatre class, a conference room and an office doubling as music storage areas, Band classroom.



The facilities plan would address pool and locker room needs. *(Clockwise from bottom right)* Supt. Pruitt, touching boys locker room ceiling, is 5'2". Low ceilings prevent ventilation repairs. Deck tiles and ceiling tiles in the pools are deteriorating. Girls taking coed classes in the West "Boys" Pool must walk through PE classes in the Field House in their swimsuits, because that pool has only a boys locker room.

