

SKSD identifies nearly \$18 million in facilities needs

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(Photo: MEEGAN M. REID / KITSAP SUN)

SOUTH KITSAP — The South Kitsap School District has identified nearly \$18 million in major repairs and renovations needed on existing facilities, according to Superintendent Karst Brandsma.

The school board at its meeting Wednesday approved using more than \$2 million from the general fund to get a start on the most pressing projects, which include the high school pool (also used by the community), the high school baseball field (a soggy mess much of the season), replacement of aging buses and improving access to comply with the federal Office for Civil Rights. Repairs to the high school elevator would be an example of work required by the OCR.

Other high priorities include portable classrooms, restrooms, a generator for food service, key card access upgrades and roof repairs.

The district will host a forum March 28 on facilities, called SK360, where a panel of speakers will present an overview of "funding needs and common misconceptions." In April, the district will host informational tours, and at a future forum (date to be determined), participants will give feedback on facility needs and how they should be funded.

The district tried three times, in 2016-17 to pass a bond for a second high school. In the last attempt on Feb. 14, 2017, the district passed its maintenance and operations levy, revenue from which goes to the general fund, but voters turned down a \$172.6 million bond that included more than \$40 million for renovations at all schools.

The projects Brandsma identified Wednesday are the district's highest priority needs. The list includes an estimated \$3.85 million in projects considered urgent. Projects in the second tier, moderate priority, could cost up to \$4 million, according to estimates, and there are nearly \$5 million in projects that can wait, but not indefinitely. The low estimate to fund all projects is \$12.6 million, but the work could cost up to \$17.9 million, district officials say.

The district receives money in its capital fund from construction impact fees, but the revenue isn't enough to cover all projects.

Other possible funding options include running another bond (with or without a proposal for a second high school), running a capital levy measure, grants, bequests or inter-fund loans.

The district can and has used its general fund for capital projects. Wednesday, the school board approved a transfer of \$1.15 million from the general fund and a loan of another \$1.15 million to be paid back to the capital fund, with interest, within a year.

The interest rate, set by the Kitsap County Treasurer, is 1.45 percent. State law requires inter-fund loans to be paid with interest, which makes up for the money the district would have earned through capital fund investments.

The loan and transfer tap the district's "rainy day fund." Last month the school board approved a change lowering the amount it requires to be held in the district's savings from 6 percent to 5 percent of total revenue. That move allowed for the inter-fund transfer and loan approved Wednesday, following a public hearing.

Former board member Chris Lemke spoke out at the hearing, warning the board not to tap the rainy day fund. Lemke reminded the board that during the Recession the district drew down its savings to a dangerously low level, causing the state to threaten stepping in on its fiscal management.

Jay Rosapepe, another former board member who is now the district's transportation director, said the board's strategy in using the rainy day fund was to keep cuts away from the classroom. They were hoping in part that I-728, the state's initiative to reduce class sizes, would be restored, Rosapepe said.

"We took a gamble, we rolled the dice and we lost," he said. "Right now, we're in a much better financial position."

The public hearing was not required for the board to approve the loan and transfer, but Brandsma said the district wanted to be open and clear with the public. The board unanimously approved both resolutions.

The loan and fund transfer don't fully cover urgent needs, Brandsma said. The district also will use some of its maintenance and operations levy money. The district also receives money for depreciation on its buses to replace vehicles. Those sources together will cover the estimated \$3.85 million in urgent projects.

A voter-approved increase in the maintenance and operations levy in 2018 also was used to fund extra staffing at the high school related to increased enrollment, as well as increased security staffing.

The SK360 facilities review process is open to the public, but space at the March 28 forum is limited and representatives of various school groups — including students, civic organizations and local officials — have been invited. There is also an online forum.

For information, visit skschools.org and search for SK360 or call district spokeswoman Amy Miller, 360-874-7005.

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