



Lowell Area Schools

2024 BOND PROPOSAL NO TAX RATE INCREASE

ESTIMATED FROM THE CURRENT DEBT MILLAGE RATE

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

On May 7, our community will be asked to consider a bond proposal for \$104 million to fund facility improvements throughout the District. If approved, **NO TAX RATE INCREASE** is expected from the current debt millage rate for property owners in the LAS District.

If you have a question not addressed here, please contact Superintendent Nate Fowler at (616) 987-2501 to have your question answered.

OVERVIEW + FUNDING

What is the 2024 bond proposal?

A school bond election requests voter authorization to sell bonds that will be repaid through a millage which will be levied to pay principal and interest on the bonds. The bond issue requested by Lowell Area Schools would be used to finance projects described in the proposal. These measures are placed on the ballot by district school boards to be decided by the voting public.

The district has a significant opportunity to re-imagine the future, accommodate long-term enrollment projections, and address aging building infrastructure. Proposed projects include:

- Renovating Cherry Creek Elementary to separate shared classrooms
- Updating Lowell High School and expanding the arts wing
- Adding new playground equipment at all elementary schools
- Equipping learning environments with flexible furniture and integrated technology
- Constructing a new auxiliary gymnasium at the Middle School to provide additional practice space for the district and community
- Improving community spaces, including the TOTS program and Wittenbach Center
- Replace systems at the end of their useful cycle, including mechanical electrical, and plumbing systems.
- Replace roofing, parking, lots, and sidewalks
- Playground equipment replacements at each elementary
- Every school building would receive some improvements
- Meet long-range planning goals for site and facility needs

VOTE BY MAY 7, 2024!

Absentee voting begins March 28, 2024.



For more information

Visit: www.lowellschools.com

Call: 616.987.2500

Email: nfowler@lowellschools.com



LOWELL AREA SCHOOLS

2024 BOND PROPOSAL

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Why are we considering a bond issue now?

After obtaining community input through the Board of Education's Planning process, a facility needs assessment, and community and staff input throughout 2023, we determined several facility and site needs that cannot be addressed through current funding alone. We also set an early goal to issue the bonds without increasing the overall debt millage rate from the current year's rate.

More detailed information is available on our district website at www.lowellschools.com. Visit our site and click on the "Bond 2024" tab for more information.

Would my taxes increase if the bond proposal is approved?

If approved, the ballot proposal would allow the district to sell bonds and generate approximately \$104 million with no overall debt millage increase over the current millage rate of 7.0 mills.

What is a mill?

A mill is equal to \$1 per every \$1,000 of taxable property valuation (not the market value of a home; homeowners can refer to their latest assessment for their home's taxable value).

How are Michigan schools funded?

The State of Michigan provides funding to school districts on a per-pupil basis, based on the cost of educating the average pupil per year. The State of Michigan does not provide funding to address facilities, which are funded exclusively through local property taxes. There are two ways that school districts can raise money for facility improvements: levying sinking funds and selling bonds.

What is the difference between a bond proposal and a sinking fund?

Bond proposals are used to finance major capital projects. The district can borrow money upfront and pay back the bond amount over time.

Sinking funds are levied on an annual basis to address the immediate needs of school buildings, facilities, and surrounding school sites. Sinking Funds are generally used for short-term improvements rather than major renovations and upgrades.

What is the School District doing to maintain our buildings?

Our maintenance staff has done an excellent job maintaining our facilities, but some of our equipment is at the end of its useful life. Our sinking fund has helped to make needed building repairs and replace aging equipment, but we are at the point where more costly items need to be replaced.

How will the Bond impact our community?

Most communities are known by the quality of their schools and facilities. Quality school facilities can be a positive factor in attracting and retaining families. Homes are generally more desirable in a school district that provides quality education and a variety of fine arts, technical, vocational, and athletic programs.



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PROJECT SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Much of this bond proposal is for improvements at Cherry Creek Elementary.

What is being proposed?

Cherry Creek Elementary is currently dividing a single classroom with a make-shift divider to host two class sections at a time. These spaces, originally designed for the Middle School in the 1970s, must be right-sized for our youngest learners as noise from the connected classroom can be disruptive and distracting. Improvements at Cherry Creek would create classroom separation and enhance learning experiences with modern, flexible furniture and integrated technology.

Much of this bond proposal is for improvements at the High School. What is being proposed?

Many projects would occur at our high school, where the original building is nearing thirty years old. The bond would fund mechanical and electrical equipment replacement at the end of its useful life and refresh many classroom spaces with flexible furniture and modern finishes. Computer labs would be repurposed into project-based learning environments to cultivate teamwork and foster critical thinking. Safety and security will also be enhanced.

How would the bond affect the district's fine arts and athletics programs?

The district's fine arts and athletics programs are growing. Improvements include renovating and expanding the high school arts wing and Lowell Performing Arts Center. The high school's track would be replaced, and field drainage would be improved. An auxiliary gymnasium would be constructed at the middle school to provide an additional practice space for our students and community.

How will technology needs be addressed through this bond?

The Board expects to use \$3,195,289 of bond proceeds for instrumental technology improvements throughout the district. We have been providing a high-quality of technology education, and this bond issue will allow us to continue directly impacting students in this regard.

What was accomplished through the 2019 bond?

- Projects made possible by the 2019 bond funds include:
- Middle School Renovation
- New Soccer/Lacrosse Complex
- Gymnastics Safety Improvements at Unity High School
- Kindergarten expansion and building renovations at Alto Elementary School
- Renovations and improvements at ALL schools

While all buildings were upgraded through the 2019 bond, some pressing needs remain.



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BOND SCOPE & SCHEDULE

How did this proposal come about?

In 2022, our architectural and construction partners, TowerPinkster and Owen-Ames-Kimball, compiled a district-wide Facility Assessment. It examined district-owned buildings and grounds with regard to safety and security, accessibility, structural, electrical, exterior & interior conditions, mechanical (heating/cooling/plumbing), and general site items. The assessment indicated that some of our buildings are in need of improvements.

Have you asked for community input on this bond issue?

We have. Three community forums were held during the fall of 2023. Based on this input, several changes were made to the plans. A community-wide survey was completed in November 2023, and over 800 responses were received.

The results of this survey were very encouraging in terms of community support of the proposed improvements to our school facilities.

What are the main priorities that have been identified?

- Care for the facilities we have
- Modernize learning environments
- Improve fine arts, athletics + community spaces
- Update aging infrastructure
- Be financially responsible, with no millage increase

Why have a bond vote now?

Due to some of our debt being paid off, we can provide site and facility improvements and not increase the overall debt millage rate from the current millage rate of 7.00 mills.

Our maintenance staff has done a great job in maintaining our buildings using our sinking fund and operational budget, however, we cannot continue to fund large capital improvement projects out of our general fund budget without negatively affecting our current programs and our students.

Who was involved in determining what to include?

We started with our own internal list and combined it with the Facility Assessment, three public forums, a community survey, and input from our Board of Education and staff to review and prioritize the scope of the Bond Proposal.

The items included in this proposal would address our most pressing needs now and should leave the capacity to finance additional needs in the future. Our ongoing goal is to present our needs to our citizens every 5 to 10 years and not to increase our overall debt millage from the current rate.



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VOTING INFORMATION

Who can vote in this bond proposal election?

Residents within the Lowell Area Schools district who will be 18 years of age or older on Election Day and are registered to vote. Please note you can register to vote through election day at your local clerk's office.

Where can I get information about voting (such as how to register, where to vote, and absentee voting)?

Go to the Michigan Voter Information website www.michigan.gov/vote or contact your local clerk.

Where do I go to vote?

If you are unsure of your voting precinct, visit www.michigan.gov/vote or contact your local clerk.

Do I need to update my voter registration?

You need to update your voter registration if you have changed your name or address since the last time you voted. You can do this at any Secretary of State office or at the clerk's office where you reside.

Can I vote by absentee ballot?

Yes. Registered voters do not need a reason to vote by absentee ballot. You can request an absentee ballot application from your Clerk's Office or by going online to www.michigan.gov/vote and clicking on Absentee Voting in the left column.

Absentee ballots should be available to voters after March 28, 2024, and may be cast through Election Day on May 7, 2024.