

Election 2023: Forest Hills Public Schools' Bond Proposal and Millage Proposal

Residents within the Forest Hills Public School district will have the opportunity to vote in the Nov. 7, 2023, election. Forest Hills Public Schools is asking its voters to consider two ballot questions: a bond proposal and an operating millage proposal. This special edition of the "Focus" is intended to provide you with more details about these proposals.

Bond Proposal Overview

Forest Hills Public Schools is asking voters to consider a \$340 million bond proposal that would fund capital improvements through 2031. **If approved, there is expected to be no tax rate increase from the current rate.** This bond proposal has three key components. First, it is designed to modernize learning spaces and continue to create flexible and dynamic learning environments, modernize classrooms, and add accessible playground equipment. Second, it would improve additional district facilities. This would include building a new aquatic center to replace the aging community pool, expanding athletic facilities at all three high schools, updating the Fine Arts Center, and updating the Community Center. Third, the bond would also address aging systems and, if approved, would allow the district to replace systems at the end of their life cycle, like buses, heating and cooling systems, parking lots, roofing, and security systems. **Again, if the bond is approved, there is expected to be no tax rate increase from the current rate.**

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Bond Proposal Focus Areas

The FHPS Nov. 7 bond proposal would fund projects in three key focus areas. These would impact all FHPS schools.

1.
 MODERNIZE
 LEARNING
 SPACES

2.
 IMPROVE
 ATHLETICS,
 FINE ARTS &
 COMMUNITY
 FACILITIES

3.
 UPDATE
 INFRASTRUCTURE

**No Tax Rate Increase
 Expected Over the
 Current Rate**



Remember to Vote!

- **Vote by Nov. 7, 2023.** Absentee ballots are now available.
- Contact your city/township office to find polling locations.

Election 2023: Bond Proposal Overview

(continued from page 1)

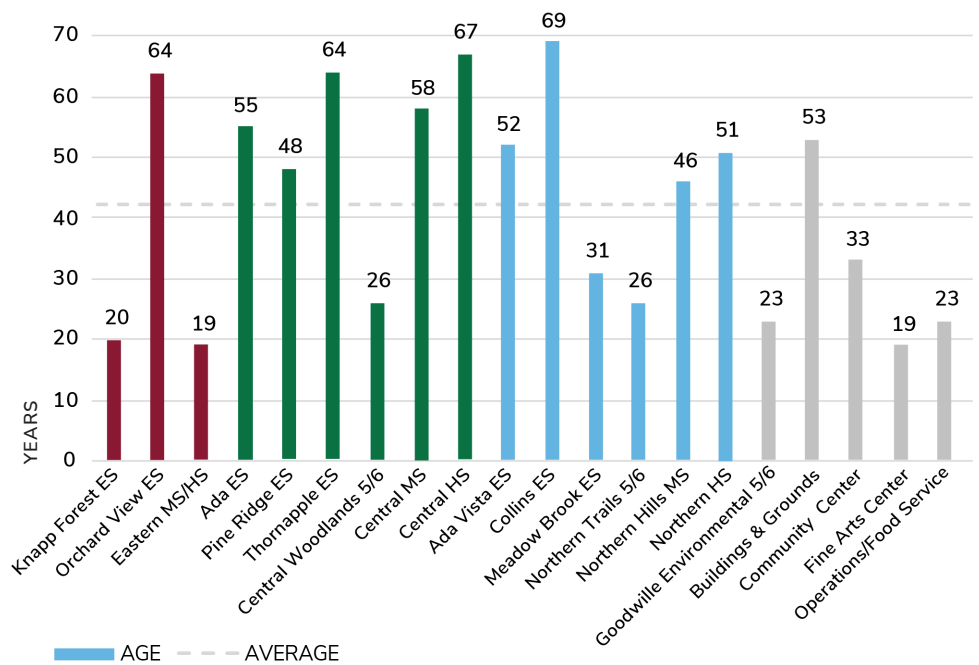
BOND 2023 PROPOSED PROJECTS	Learning Environment	Athletic Facilities	Playground	Mechanical	Paving	Roofing	Modernize	Technology Infrastructure	Instructional Technology
Ada Elementary	X		X	X	X			X	X
Ada Vista Elementary			X	X	X	X		X	X
Collins Elementary			X		X			X	X
Knapp Forest Elementary	X		X	X				X	X
Meadow Brook Elementary	X		X	X	X			X	X
Orchard View Elementary			X	X	X			X	X
Pine Ridge Elementary			X	X	X			X	X
Thornapple Elementary			X	X	X			X	X
Central Woodlands 5/6	X		X	X				X	X
Goodwillie Environmental 5/6	X		X	X		X		X	X
Northern Trails 5/6	X		X	X	X			X	X
Central Middle				X	X			X	X
Eastern Middle	X				X	X		X	X
Northern Hills Middle	X			X		X		X	X
Central High	X	X		X	X	X		X	X
Eastern High	X	X			X	X		X	X
Northern High	X	X		X		X		X	X
Transition Center								X	X
Fine Arts Center				X		X	X	X	
New Aquatic Center		X							
Community Center		X		X	X		X	X	
Support Facilities & Services & Buses				X		X	X	X	

Ages of FHPS Buildings: Average Age Is More Than 40 Years

FHPS operates 26 buildings, totaling more than two million square feet on 650 acres. Within these facilities, FHPS educates nearly 9,200 students, operates the Community and Aquatic Center, the Forest Hills Fine Arts Center, and provides programming for youth, adults, and senior citizens. Our school district is larger than 97 percent of public school districts in Michigan.

Schools and buildings throughout the district range in age from 19 years to 69 years. That does not include the one-room schoolhouse adjacent to Collins Elementary School.

Over the years, FHPS has been able to make improvements to our facilities and this bond seeks to continue to bring learning spaces across the district to similar standards. It is important that students, regardless of which attendance area they live in the FHPS district, have an equitable learning environment. For example, Orchard View, Collins, and Thornapple elementary schools received major renovations and upgrades to their learning environments as a result of the 2018 bond. Ada Elementary, and Meadow Brook Elementary, among others, would



receive similar upgrades should voters approve this bond. Forest Hills Northern High School was the recipient of upgrades to their learning spaces in areas such as their Project Next wing. It is proposed that Central High School would receive building

and classroom enhancements among other upgrades.

If voters approve this bond proposal, FHPS would continue district-wide improvements to modernize learning spaces.

Bond Proposal Overview: Modernizing Learning Spaces

A significant component of this bond proposal is to modernize learning spaces to prepare students for the future. Education and classroom design have evolved over the decades, but most learning spaces have not. In Forest Hills, the average age of our school buildings is over 40 years. Forest Hills Central High School, once known as Forest Hills High School, was designed 67 years ago. While the building was designed as an open campus “California-style” composed of separate buildings between which students walked outdoors from one class to another, the original designers did not consider Michigan winters. While the corridors have since been enclosed and buildings connected, most learning spaces have not seen substantial renovations. Education and school environments have evolved since the days of just one Forest Hills High School.



Northern High's Project Next shared learning space was funded through the 2018 bond.

The 21st century has brought about a significant shift in the way students learn. From laptops, iPads, and the internet, to STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) programs, Advanced Placement courses that allow students to obtain college credit while in high school, language immersion programs, the opportunity to explore educational interests in computers, medicine, the arts, skilled trades, and more, education continues to progress.

The mission of FHPS is, “In partnership with our community, Forest Hills Public Schools will provide all learners with opportunities to acquire the knowledge, skills, and experiences necessary to build meaningful and productive lives.” FHPS recognizes the importance of equipping students with a wide range of skills beyond academic knowledge, such as leadership, stewardship, communication, collaboration, problem-solving, critical thinking, listening,



In classrooms, rows of stationary desks (left) are giving way to more flexible, interactive options (right) made possible through funds from the 2018 bond. If approved, the 2023 bond would continue to create dynamic learning spaces.



Orchard View's multipurpose room was updated using funding from the 2018 bond.

and public speaking, to name a few. This holistic approach to preparing students for success combines academic excellence and the development of essential life skills.

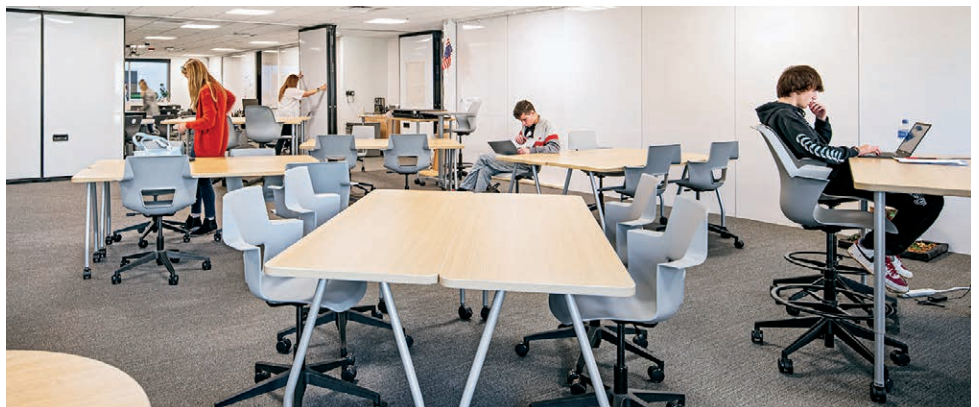
Redesigned learning spaces help support our ever-changing academic world. Traditional classrooms, characterized by rows of fixed desks or sled desks with immovable chairs and desks attached, have given way to open, adaptable spaces designed to facilitate active learning and engagement. Today's learning spaces are flexible to enhance student engagement. With mobile seating options, students are no longer confined to one spot. They can move their workspaces, which promotes active engagement

and participation in class discussions and group activities. These educational spaces help students collaborate, work together in teams, and problem-solve collectively rather than in isolation. Furthermore, education design with flexible furniture considers the needs of all students. Adjustable desks and chairs in various sizes and styles help ensure every student can participate in the classroom, promoting inclusivity and equitable learning experiences.

If approved, this bond proposal would help modernize learning spaces in school buildings that have not seen classroom furniture updates or enhancements in educational design.



Using funds from the 2018 bond, an updated music room has several areas for learning.



Modernized educational spaces contain furniture that can be moved easily into a variety of configurations. Rooms with movable walls help teachers to collaborate across subject areas. These improvements used funds from the 2018 bond.

Election 2023: Bond Proposal Overview

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New Aquatic Center Included in the Proposed Projects

The current pool is 30 years old and is nearing the end of its expected life cycle. The pool is scheduled at all hours, from before school starts to late in the evening, and accommodates a vast array of aquatic programs. Scheduling is a significant challenge.

The new proposed aquatic center would have two pools. It would have a large competition pool to provide the opportunity to host more significant post-season athletic events, and it would meet the Michigan High School Athletic Association's requirements for swim meets, diving competitions, and water polo matches. A smaller, warmer, zero-entry pool would better support our non-competitive aquatic programs, such as our American Red Cross learn-to-swim classes, elementary "WHALE Tales" water safety classes, community lap swim, senior swim, water aerobics, and more. This new aquatic center would support student-athletes and teams, student clubs, swimmers of all ages and abilities, and promote community wellness.

The location of the new aquatic center would be on the campus of the Forest Hills Fine Arts Center, the administration and transition center building, and the current Community and Senior Center. It is



The current pool is nearing the end of its expected life cycle. A new aquatic center would address the growing needs of our student athletes and community.



cost-prohibitive to maintain two aquatic buildings, and staffing shortages bring additional challenges. Therefore, the existing pool would be filled in and the physical space would be reimagined. Site plans for repurposing the space are not finalized and

the district will seek community input for this space. Some ideas include additional community enrichment programming spaces, meeting spaces, or other spaces for community health and wellness activities.

Bond Proposal Adds Accessible Playground Equipment



Part of the proposed bond includes adding playground equipment to elementary schools that is more accessible to all students. Having accessible equipment helps all children feel a sense of belonging and helps those with mobility or motor challenges socialize with peers. Adaptive playground equipment provides a more inclusive and supportive environment so every child can experience the joy of play. Some examples of adaptive playground equipment may include a swing to hold a wheelchair, ramps to help students to different playing surfaces, and sensory manipulatives at lower levels to accommodate children in wheelchairs.

Accessible playground equipment helps all students feel a sense of belonging with their peers. Pictured here are a few examples of accessible playground equipment.

Bond Proposal: Commonly Asked Questions

- **What is a bond proposal and how can funds from a bond be spent?**

A bond proposal is how a public school district asks its community for authorization to borrow money to pay for capital improvements. Voter-approved bond funds may be spent on projects described in the proposal. Funds raised through the sale of bonds cannot be used on operational expenses such as employee salaries and benefits, school supplies, and textbooks. Bond funds must be kept separate from operating funds and must be audited by an independent auditing firm.

- **What are the focus areas of the bond proposal? What are the key projects in this bond proposal?**

The bond proposal focuses on three key areas:

- Modernize learning spaces to prepare students for the future
- Improve athletics, fine arts, and community facilities to enhance experiences
- Update infrastructure to address aging systems and inefficiencies

- **What was the process to determine what is in the bond proposal?**

The district has consistently studied the current and projected needs of school buildings and educational programs to determine a facility plan. Using this information, supplemented with staff input, district leaders and the board of education are now asking voters to consider a school bond proposal on the Nov. 7, 2023, election ballot.



Northern High School's Project Next offers students and teachers shared work areas. For answers to more questions, visit the district's website: www.fhps.net.

- **Didn't we just pass a bond? What happened to those funds?**

- Voters last approved a bond in 2018.
- Many projects were completed or are currently in process, including classroom renovations at Northern High, Eastern High, Central Middle, Ada Vista Elementary, Collins Elementary, Orchard View Elementary, Pine Ridge Elementary, and Thornapple Elementary. The athletic stadium at Central High School was updated, as well as numerous roofing, paving, and infrastructure improvements across the district.
- While many projects were accomplished with the 2018 bond, not all schools received improvements to their building. The 2023 bond proposal seeks to continue district-wide improvements to modernize learning spaces, improve athletics and community facilities, and update infrastructure.
- To look back on the 2018 bond, visit the district website. To see some of the projects that have been completed, visit our construction blog page.

- **How would the bond proposal impact my property tax rate?**

If approved by voters, the combined FHPS debt millage rate is estimated to remain the same as the current levy with no tax rate increase to property owners.

- **What do you mean there is no tax rate increase?**

The current debt millage tax rate of 6.05 mills is estimated to remain the same if the bond proposal is approved by voters on Nov. 7, 2023.

- **Are businesses, second homes (non-homestead property), and primary homes (homestead property) treated the same regarding bond millage?**

Yes, businesses, second homes (non-homestead), and primary homes (homestead) are treated the same regarding bond millage. All properties are assessed for debt millage based on their taxable value.

- **Why are you asking for more money even though the State of Michigan just issued a large public school budget?**

The school aid budget is for day-to-day operating expenditures such as teacher



Central High School's stadium received an upgrade in 2018. Upgrades to Northern High School's stadium is included in the 2023 bond. This bond proposal also includes enhancements to tennis courts, additional turf fields, and more at all three high schools.

and support staff wages, instructional supplies, repairs and maintenance, and utilities.

- **With a successful bond election, what are the typical phases essential to the completion of a project?**

After a successful bond election, bond projects go through a (1) design phase, (2) state approval phase, (3) bidding phase, and (4) construction phase. For new construction, the design phase portion alone could take at least 12 months before moving into state approval, bidding, site work, and construction. It is important to keep in mind that the timeline for bond project site work and construction cannot disrupt the students' schedule and therefore must be coordinated with the district's calendar.

- **What oversights would hold the district accountable?**

If approved by voters, the district's architect/engineer would design the proposed projects and prepare construction documents and specifications for the projects. Once the projects are designed, the district's construction manager will assemble bid packages and publicly advertise to solicit competitive bids for all work. This is required by law, as outlined in the Revised School Code. This process ensures that the district selects the lowest responsive and responsible bidder. All qualified contractors will have an opportunity to attend a pre-bid meeting to obtain additional information and project clarification. All qualified contractors will have the opportunity to participate in the competitive bid process.

For answers to more questions, visit the district's website: www.fhps.net.

Election 2023: Bond Proposal Overview

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Bond Proposal Ballot Language

The following bond proposal language appears on the election ballot:

Shall Forest Hills Public Schools, Kent County, Michigan, borrow the sum of not to exceed Three Hundred Forty Million Dollars (\$340,000,000) and issue its general obligation unlimited tax bonds therefor, in one or more series, for the purpose of:

remodeling, equipping and re-equipping and furnishing and refurbishing school buildings; erecting, furnishing and equipping additions to school buildings; acquiring, installing and equipping or re-equipping school buildings for instructional technology; purchasing school buses; erecting, furnishing and equipping athletic facilities; and preparing, developing, improving, and equipping playgrounds, play fields, athletic fields, athletic facilities, and sites?

The following is for informational purposes only:

The estimated millage that will be levied for the proposed bonds in 2024 is



2.00 mills (\$2.00 on each \$1,000 of taxable valuation) for a 0 mills net increase over the prior year's levy. The maximum number of years the bonds of any refunding, is twenty-one (21) years. The estimated simple average annual millage anticipated to be required to retire this bond debt is 3.46 mills (\$3.46 on each \$1,000 of taxable valuation).

(Pursuant to State law, expenditure of bond proceeds must be audited, and the proceeds cannot be used for repair or maintenance costs, teacher, administrator or employee salaries, or other operating expenses.)



FHPS DEBT TAX RATE HISTORY

Tax Year	Tax Rate (in mills)
2023	6.05
2022	6.05
2021	6.10
2020	6.65
2019	6.65
2018	6.90
2017	7.60
2016	7.60
2015	7.70
2014	7.80
2013	7.90



Bond Proposal: Bond Funds Use Requirements

Bond Funds CAN Be Used:

- To purchase, erect, complete, remodel, and equip school buildings, structures, athletic fields, playgrounds, or other facilities
- To acquire, install, or equip school buildings for technology
- For other capital expenditures
- For costs of bond issuance



Bond Funds CANNOT Be Used For:

- Training, consulting, service contracts, or other software support
- Employee salaries, wages, or benefits
- School operations
- Classroom supplies such as textbooks
- Upgrades to operating systems or applications software except if purchased with qualifying hardware

Election 2023: Millage Proposal Overview

An operating millage is a component of a school's Foundation Allowance, which is a school district's largest source of funding for operations. We are asking our voters to consider a .50 mill tax increase (\$0.50 on each \$1,000 of taxable valuation) for our operating millage for the 2024 and 2025 years. **This tax is levied on non-homestead properties.** Non-homestead properties represent industrial, commercial, and some agricultural properties as well as second homes. **It does not include a family's primary residence.** In regard to the operating millage, the state government assumes school districts are levying 18 mills on non-homestead property when they calculate the amount of state funds a public school district receives. If property tax value growth is greater than the rate of inflation, school districts are required to "roll back" the number of mills they levy due to the Headlee Amendment of 1978. Put in simple terms, currently FHPS is not allowed to levy the full 18 mills the state assumes we are levying, resulting in lost revenue every year. For example, if a non-homestead property has a taxable value of \$500,000,

it is estimated this property would pay an additional \$169 to the operating millage for FHPS. That is slightly more than \$0.46 a day. If the operating millage is approved, we estimate the increase will generate \$395,000 in additional operating revenue in 2024.



Moody's Financial Rating

The Forest Hills Public School District continues to have the highest financial ranking of a K-12 public school in Michigan. Moody's Investors Services and Corporation provides credit rating and research covering debt instruments and securities. They have assigned an Aa2 rating to FHPS. According to Moody's, the strength of our district is a sizeable tax base favorably located and strong financial management with a history of implementing expenditure controls in response to revenue pressures. There is no public school in Michigan with a higher rating.

Millage Proposal: Commonly Asked Questions

- **What is the impact of the operating millage?**
 - The operating millage is a component of the Foundation Allowance, which is the district's largest source of funding for operations.
 - The State of Michigan assumes school districts are levying 18 mills. However, when property values rise faster

- than the rate of inflation, districts are required to reduce the number of mills being levied. A reduction in mills being levied results in lost revenue, even though taxable values increased.
- It is expected that, if approved, Forest Hills Public Schools will collect approximately \$395,000 to support operating costs in 2024 and 2025.
- **The bottom line: If the operating millage is not approved, FHPS will fail to receive approximately \$395,000 of annual operating revenue the State assumes we are collecting.**

- **Does it impact homeowners?**
No. This tax is levied on non-homestead properties. Non-homestead properties represent industrial, commercial, and some agricultural properties as well as second homes. It does not include a family's primary residence.

Impact of Headlee Amendment on FHPS Operating Millage

2022-2023 School Year Funding	State Assumes 18 Mills Levy	FHPS Actual 17.6614 Mills Levy
Per pupil State of Michigan contribution	\$7,015.00	\$7,015.00
Per pupil operating millage on non-homestead properties	+ \$2,135.00	\$2,091.00
Actual Total Per Pupil Foundation Allowance	\$9,150.00	\$9,106.00
Per pupil shortfall due to required rollback (property tax growth greater than rate of inflation)		\$44.00 Per Student or \$395,000 Total Funding Shortfall

6590 Cascade Road
Grand Rapids, MI 49546
616-493-8800

Millage Proposal Ballot Language

This proposal will allow the school district to levy the statutory rate of not to exceed 18 mills on all property, except principal residence and other property exempted by law, required for the school district to receive its revenue per pupil foundation allowance.

The following millage proposal language appears on the election ballot:

Shall the limitation on the amount of taxes which may be assessed against all property, except principal residence and other property exempted by law, in Forest Hills Public Schools, Kent

County, Michigan, be increased by .5 mill (\$0.50 on each \$1,000 of taxable valuation) for a period of 2 years, 2024 and 2025, to provide funds for operating purposes; the estimate of the revenue the school district will collect if the millage is approved and levied in 2024 is approximately \$395,000 (this millage is to restore millage lost as a result of the reduction required by the Michigan Constitution of 1963 and will be levied only to the extent necessary to restore that reduction)?

Vote by Nov. 7
For more info, visit
fhps.net



School Finance: Three Quick Videos to Learn More About School Funding, Spending, and Taxes

Public school budgets are complex. It is important to know how schools are funded, how schools spend money, and how taxes impact schools. That is why we placed three short videos on our website to help our community understand school finance. In addition to these videos, you can also explore our audited financial statements, our budget, operating expenditures,

personnel expenditures, and so much more. After viewing the three videos and other information, if you still have questions, we are happy to help.

Visit www.fhps.net/departments/business-office and then scroll down to the three videos that display the FHPS logo. You may also contact our business office at 616-493-8804.

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Publication Information:

The Forest Hills Public Schools' "Focus" newsletter is published bimonthly during the school year by the FHPS board of education. It is mailed to all residents within the FHPS district, and additional copies are sent to every district school for distribution to staff, new residents, and visitors. FHPS is committed to a policy of nondiscrimination of all its programs in relation to race, religion, sex, age, national origin, disability, and genetic information. Questions and/or comments about this publication should be emailed to the editor at contact@fhps.net.

For Election Facts and to Learn More:

- about the bond proposal, visit www.fhps.net/2023-bond-proposal
- about the operating millage proposal, visit www.fhps.net/2023-operating-millage-proposal
- about school budgets, funding, and spending, visit www.fhps.net/departments/business-office

Call the FHPS administration office at 616-493-8800.