

Maine 207

September 2018

Report to the Community

A Guide to the November 6 Ballot Question

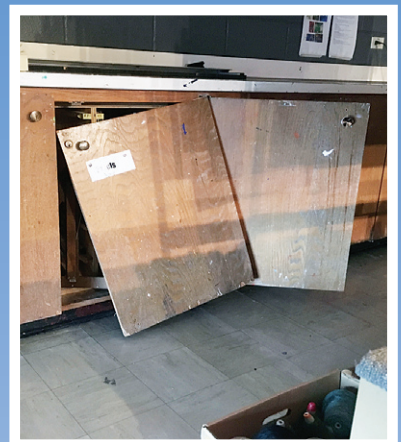
On November 6 when voters go to the polls for the 2018 General Election, residents of Maine Township High School District 207 will have the opportunity to vote on a Maine Township High School District 207 ballot question.

The verbatim ballot language may be found inside this special section, but the the essence of the question is: Will voters approve or reject District 207's request to issue \$195 million in construction bonds in order to renovate, repair, equip and, in a few instances, build additions to the high schools.

This special section provides information for District 207 residents about the proposed Master Facilities Plan; how, when and why this plan was created; why the Board of Education has chosen this time to take the proposal to voters; and what changes will be made to Maine East, Maine South and Maine West if voters do approve the bond sale.

Inside:

- How teaching and learning have evolved and what those changes mean for designing instructional space. (Page 2)
- A visual glimpse at some of the conditions that figured into the Board's decision to put a bond issue on the ballot. (Page 4)
- The path to the referendum: How Maine 207, with community input, assembled the proposed Master Facilities Plan. (Page 5)
- A look at how public schools are funded in Illinois. (Page 6)
- A list of answers to questions that Maine 207 has heard during the past several months. A more comprehensive list appears on the district website, at maine207.org/overview (Page 7)
- A guide to each aspect of the November 6 election. (Page 8)



The proposed work would serve primarily to replace outdated plumbing, electrical and mechanical systems; improve safety by adding secure front entrances and updating classrooms to create flexible learning spaces that promote collaboration.

Students No Longer Quietly Sit in Rows and Listen

Learning Now Includes Interaction and Collaboration

By Dr. Ken Wallace
District 207 Superintendent

In this issue, we highlight the reasons for Maine Township High School District 207's proposal to ask taxpayers to allow the District to borrow \$195 million in construction bonds. These funds would take care of our aging infrastructure, improve security at each campus, and improve our instructional spaces to enhance our ability to support each student to be his or her best. The referendum funds would allow re-designing some spaces to better match how school is done now and how it will be done in the future. It has been nearly 50 years since District 207 has asked voters for permission to issue bonds.

To better understand the thinking behind our proposed school redesign, it is important to consider how we actually operate school today compared to the eras in which our schools were built. A medical metaphor helps illustrate the point: none of us would be interested in having access only to "industrialized medicine" in which all patients, regardless of needs, stood in line for the same prescriptions. Yet the schools that we have in Maine 207 were designed precisely for an industrial type of education model in which students essentially got the same information, on the same days and in the same fashion while being assessed in the exact same ways.

Today's progressive schools are under a transformation toward a much higher level of personal learning environments, supported by much higher levels of personalized service for students. This shift has implications for school design that begins in the classroom but also impacts virtually every space within a modern school. Inside the classroom, the passive model of students sitting quietly in rows of desks listening almost exclusively to the teacher's voice in a classroom is replaced by a much more interactive and interdisciplinary model. Students work in groups, utiliz-

ing technology in real time to find answers that previous generations of learners had to travel to libraries to find.

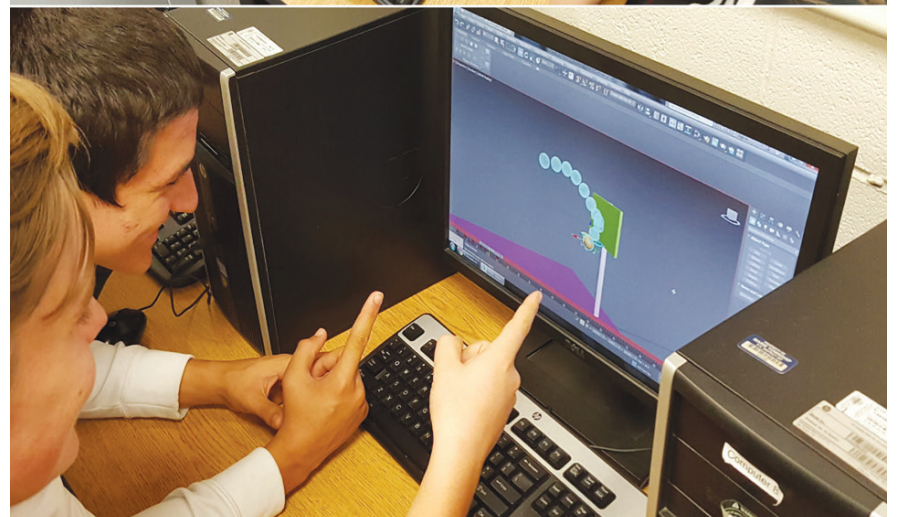
This easy access to information in a searchable format means that students can engage problems much easier in real time within the classroom; they can compare and contrast competing solutions for the same problem, and they can expand the conversation through cloud computing to other students in their class, within their school or elsewhere in the world. The information feedback loop is faster and more robust than ever before, and it is also a two-way loop, which empowers students in ways former generations of learners couldn't imagine. It is through this foundation that we are creating more time and space for students to follow their individual learning paths. This means our students are now running small businesses, inventing digital applications to solve real problems, conducting authentic research with some of our professional partners, redesigning homes at the United Methodist Campground on Algonquin Road, framing Habitat for Humanity homes, raising money for needy causes and volunteering time to help others in need.

In terms of personalized service, each student has an individual career plan in our cutting-edge career and college advisement program. This program is based on a research-supported foundation in which we work to get each student one or more relevant career experience to make better career decisions before leaving high school and spending money on college. This element of our service to students is, along with great classroom teaching, the most important thing we can do. The space designs needed for this include efficiency of location to "common" areas that allow students to meet in small, medium, and large group settings on a regular basis, as well as one-on-one for greater lengths of time.

(Continued on page 3)



Maine 207 schools were built and furnished in an era when education often meant teachers lecturing to students who were sitting in rows and listening day after day. We now know that students, with access to a wealth of real-time information, learn most effectively by working together to ask questions and solve problems. The proposed Master Facilities Plan would update and furnish classrooms to accommodate this mode of learning.



Updated Classrooms Would Be Designed for Flexibility



Just as many contemporary companies and offices are placing increased emphasis on collaboration, educators are discovering that students learn effectively through interaction with each other.

(Continued from page 2)

Our new bell schedule facilitates the time element of this equation by allowing staff to do this important work without pulling students out of class.

Finally, all of our work is centered around a systems approach called Multi-Tier System of Support. This is where the medical metaphor comes to life. Using data that tracks some student variables

in real time, along with a culture, practice and expectation of adults being responsive to student needs on a daily basis, we run a suite of real-time support to meet student academic, social and emotional needs. We do much of this work in “problem-solving” teams. Once a student needs help, our goal is to leverage every resource that we have in real time to help students be successful. Our student success

rates in every meaningful category have never been higher. That has been accomplished in an era when all three of our schools have the highest percentage of students, including minority and low-income students, taking and succeeding in our most rigorous curriculum, including in a wide variety of college courses.

It is this work, above all other, that truly requires a design rethink

in our schools. It is imperative to be able to work with students in group sizes from one to more than 100, and to be able to do it in real time. That means we need the teams of people and services in easy proximity to students. That, above all, is the design change that is most needed to help our schools better serve students and is included as part of this referendum proposal.

Improved Safety is One Main Focus of Master Facilities Plan

If voters approve the ballot question, it will mean visitors must pass through secure entrances at each building that would include two sets of locked doors prior to gaining access to the school. There will be a vestibule between

the doors. Visitors would be allowed into the vestibule and then would wait in the vestibule while their government IDs are checked and a visitor badge issued. Only when a visitor is granted that clearance would he or she be admitted into the

main building and escorted to their destination. Currently, each of the three schools has only one set of secured entrance doors. Many schools in the area already have a secure entry as a safety and security measure.

In addition, the proposal would enhance security by eliminating the need for students to sometimes walk outside between classes during the passing period. At Maine South, this would be accomplished by building a hallway between the

primary academic wing and the rest of the school. At Maine West, this would be achieved by securely enclosing the bus concourse driveway, across which students now walk to reach West's Career and Technical Education wing.



Referendum-Related Photos and Drawings



Several scheduled tours and open houses remain for residents to see the schools first hand. A schedule is on Page 5.

Clockwise from upper left: At Maine South, music students sometimes rehearse in crowded costume storage areas; the facilities plan would add storage space, freeing up room for student use.

The lower-level indoor track at Maine West is both deteriorating and limiting in its small size.

Lower-level boys locker room at Maine East would be replaced with a contemporary and centrally located facility.

Student cafeteria renovations at each of the three schools would create adequate dining space, currently lacking.

The facilities plan would add a second hallway to Maine South's main academic wing, eliminating the need for students to walk outside.

The proposal would build a fieldhouse at Maine West, currently one of the few schools in this area that does not have such a facility.



Evaluation, Planning and Feedback Led to Board Decision

The referendum question that Maine Township High School District 207 residents will see on the November 6 ballot was approved by the Board of Education on August 6, following a lengthy and carefully charted evaluation of the District's three schools and an ensuing community engagement process that enlisted feedback from a Citizens Task Force.

A key part of the story includes the fact that Maine East High School opened in 1930, Maine West in 1959 and Maine South in 1964. While administrators and maintenance crews have taken care of these community assets diligently over the decades, and extended their useful life, administrators have become increasingly aware in recent years that these aging buildings would require a more concerted and costly plan to replace original systems.

To assess these needs more precisely and thoroughly, Assistant Superintendent for Business Mary Kalou recommended that the district hire engineers to evaluate the buildings. They worked

with District 207 maintenance personnel to analyze the mechanical, electrical and plumbing (M.E.P.) systems and equipment throughout all three high schools. Architects from Wight & Co. and analysts from Elara Engineering, evaluated each component and each system's useful life. They determined the estimated cost to replace each of those systems. Ultimately, the process led to identifying approximately \$81 million in mechanical, electrical and plumbing upgrades and replacements that would be needed to extend the life of all three schools. Those are included in the referendum proposal.

That process established a direction for maintaining the District's aging buildings but did not address whether the buildings were well suited for today's evolving instructional programs, which emphasize student engagement and collaboration mirroring the work style found in many contemporary workplaces. Toward that end, the District surveyed students and staff, the individuals who use Maine East, West and

South daily. There were 855 students and 289 staff members who responded to the question about which spaces in the schools suit educational needs well and which do not. In general, students and staff agreed that locker rooms and dining areas were inadequate and that classrooms needed improvements to facilitate student engagement and contemporary modes of instruction and learning.

Pairing infrastructure needs with the necessity for improved security, as evidenced by intruder incidents at schools across the country, administrators began to see a clearer outline of a proposed Master Facilities Plan. Administrators augmented this work by benchmarking against nearby comparable high schools. In addition, administrators and Wight architects toured several suburban schools that have updated instructional spaces in recent years. Administrators carried out these visits with an eye toward instructional space improvements that District 207 might be able to use in a budget-conscious way.

School Tours and Community Presentations Scheduled

Referendum Presentations

In an effort to ensure all voters are informed related to the referendum ballot questions, District 207 is hosting building tours and providing community presentations. A list (at the time of publication) of the referendum tours and community presentations is below.

Referendum Tours

In an effort to ensure that all voters are informed related to the referendum ballot question, District 207 is hosting Referendum Information Tours. A list of tours remaining in October is below. Maine East High School is located at 2601 E. Dempster St., Park Ridge, Maine West High School is located at 1755 S. Wolf Rd., Des Plaines, and Maine South High School is located at 1111 S. Dee Rd., Park Ridge.

- Maine East H.S. - Oct. 5 at 5:30 p.m.
- Maine West H.S. - Oct. 10 at 5:30 p.m.
- Maine East H.S. - Oct. 11 at 7 p.m.
- Maine South H.S. - Oct. 12 at 6:30 p.m.
- Maine West H.S. - Oct. 16 at 7 p.m.
- Maine East H.S. - Oct. 19 at 5:45 p.m.
- Maine South H.S. - Oct. 19 at 6:30 p.m.
- Maine West H.S. - Oct. 23 at 5:30 p.m.

Community Presentations Scheduled

Additionally, the District is providing presentations to local service groups in the coming weeks.

- Des Plaines Chamber of Commerce - Oct. 5 at 7:30 a.m.
- Park Ridge League of Women Voters - Oct. 6 at 3 p.m.
- Centennial Activity Center - Oct. 16 at 10:15 a.m.
- Niles Chamber of Commerce - Oct. 16 at 7:30 a.m.
- Park Ridge Kiwanis - Oct. 16 at noon
- Rotary Club of Des Plaines - Oct. 18 at noon

Community Presentation Requests

Administrators are available to present information related to the proposal. If your organization is interested in a short presentation that can include a question/answer component, please email Maine 207 Director of Communications Brett Clark at bclark@maine207.org with the following information:

- Name of Organization
- Contact Person Email
- Contact Person Phone Number
- Date(s) and time(s) of the meeting
- Amount of time available for the presentation/Q&A
- Is a projector and screen/blank wall available (the presentation includes a PPT presentation)

Want Additional Details?
maine207.org/overview

In Illinois, Property Taxes Pay for Public Education

During the District's open houses and tours of the schools during the past few months, residents often asked why it is that homeowners and business owners are asked to pay for the implementation of the District's proposed Master Facility Plan to repair, renovate and update the schools. That question often comes with these related inquiries:

Is state or federal money available to pay for the work?

Could corporate sponsorships bear part of the cost?

Why can't the District pay for part of the proposed work through its operating budget?

Does Rivers Casino Des Plaines pay taxes and if so couldn't that cover these costs?

Can the District's reserves be utilized for part of the cost?

With a debt limit exceeding \$300 million, why is District 207 bringing this question to voters?

Illinois relies heavily on property taxes

Illinois has relied heavily for decades on property taxes as the primary source for revenue to fund the state's public schools. The Illinois State Board of Education reports that local funding provides, on average, 68 percent of school district revenue, with property taxes constituting the majority of the local source. In District 207, local funding provides nearly 90 percent of revenue, with about 80 percent of the revenue coming from property taxes. While the State of Illinois contribution to school district funding averages 25 percent statewide, that is not the case in District 207 as only about 6 percent of the District's revenue comes from the State. Federal money amounts to less than 8 percent statewide and just under 3 percent in District 207.

In addition, like most Illinois school systems, District 207 relies primarily on its annual budget to cover operating expenses that include: salaries, benefits, materials and supplies. The annual Operations and Maintenance and Capital Projects budgets combined totals approximately \$5-\$8 million, which is insufficient to cover the work proposed through this referendum.

State, Federal Money - Private Donations

Several years have passed since any state or

federal funding has been available to schools for building projects. That is not anticipated to change anytime in the near future. Even the state's most recent school construction grant program, which ended several years ago, utilized a formula that made the limited grant money available only to school districts that could demonstrate the greatest financial need. At that time, District 207 would not have met the threshold for funding. The District will, however, continue to research this area and apply for state, federal or other funds that may become available.

Maine 207 enjoys productive community partnerships with many private businesses in such endeavors as career exploration. However, like the vast majority of public school districts, District 207 has never received substantial or ongoing monetary contributions from the private sector. Even Maine 207's policy permitting sponsorship advertising on scoreboards and athletic venues has generated only modest sums.

Who is Paying Taxes?

All property owners (both individual and businesses) in District 207 provide tax dollars to the school district. Rivers Casino is one the largest taxpayers in the school district paying approximately 1.4% of ALL the property taxes that the District collects. In addition, they provide scholarships to Maine West as the designated local school by the State of Illinois.

Operating Budget and Reserves

Since the largest share of the District's annual budget is earmarked for operating costs, District 207 has been drawing from existing revenue sources to invest in needed facilities work to the extent the budget permits. During the past five years, District 207 has invested \$33 million in the schools.

District 207 has reserves (or fund balance) it uses to avoid short term borrowing and pay for unexpected expenses like emergency repairs. Given the scope of the proposed work, the use of reserves unfortunately will not be able to cover the facilities needs. However, the referendum proposal calls for utilizing up to \$45.7 million from reserves to implement the Master Facilities Plan. That is in addition to the \$195 million in

proposed bond sales. District 207 counts on its reserves or fund balance to pay for unexpected expenses including emergency repairs to the aging infrastructure and to stabilize cash flow to avoid short-term borrowing. One of the reasons reserves are needed for school systems is that tax funds are received only twice each year. With that in mind, the district goal is to maintain reserves of 50 percent of the annual budget. All of these factors combined mean that District reserves cannot be counted on to pay for the entire proposed facilities repairs, renovations and upgrades.

Extending Debt without a Bond Issue

At least one resident, discussing the facilities proposal, noted that District 207 is permitted to generate more than \$300 million in debt. The resident then asked: With that being the case, why is a referendum and bond issue being considered? The reason is that the District has been under a property tax cap since 1994. This cap limits the increase in the District's tax levy to the Consumer Price Index (CPI), which has averaged less than 1.5% during the past five years. In order to extend taxes beyond the CPI, the District must go to referendum.

When the Illinois General Assembly implemented property tax caps in Cook County in 1994, legislators included a provision limiting each local unit of government's ability to access debt to the annual levy for outstanding debt when the tax caps took effect. At that time, District 207 had an annual levy of about \$1.6 million. The amount was arbitrary and varied greatly from District to District. The \$1.6 million level of annual debt payment is insufficient to fund the facilities work in the Master Plan.

Current Situation

All of the above factors - Illinois' system of funding schools; the absence of federal, state or private money; the need to designate most of the budget to operating expenses; and the effect of property tax caps in limiting districts' access to debt - are contributing factors to the Board of Education's decision to place the referendum question on the ballot and let the community decide the path forward.

Want Additional Details?
maine207.org/overview

Frequently Asked Referendum Questions

What is a Master Facility Plan?

A Master Facility Plan (MFP) is a plan to ensure that the facilities at all three Maine Township High Schools, provide a safe environment, maintain the buildings' infrastructure and support District 207's vision for teaching and learning for students today and in the future.

What is included in the District 207 Master Facility Plan?

The full proposed Master Facility Plan is available for review on District 207's website. Planned improvements at all three schools include:

- Improving safety and security by constructing new front entrances at each school with secure vestibules to prevent visitors from entering the buildings before being cleared by personnel. Additionally, the proposal also eliminates the need for students to go outside during passing periods by adding hallways or secured walkways.
- Infrastructure improvements, including replacing outdated plumbing, electrical and mechanical systems to extend the useful life of the existing buildings, reduce costly emergency repairs and improve energy efficiency across the district.
- Updating learning spaces, including classrooms, labs and libraries to leverage instructional technology, enhance current teaching methods and promote collaboration.
- Improving efficiency for students and staff by clustering academic departments and student services areas.
- Health and wellness improvements include renovating and re-locating physical education spaces like locker and fitness rooms to improve safety, supervision and usability. The pools, which are used during the school day for instruction as well as for athletics, will be updated to meet current codes and regulations.
- Updating food service and dining areas by replacing 50 year old equipment in the food serving lines. This work will help ease congestion, improve service and create multi-purpose common spaces. The serving line equipment for the most part is original to the buildings.
- Install fire suppression systems (sprinklers) in the event of a fire.
- Reconfigure special education spaces to better meet the needs of students.

School-specific improvements include:

Maine East

- Create a first-floor, handicapped-accessible hallway to improve traffic flow and access.
- Add an elevator to the east section of the building to provide access to the second floor.

Maine South

- Improve Career and Technical Education (CTE) spaces.
- Create new performing arts storage to free up space in existing rehearsal rooms for performers.

Maine West

- Construct a new fieldhouse to consolidate athletics/physical education space in one location and provide Maine West students with fieldhouse space already existing at Maine East and Maine South. At Maine West, this also will improve security at after-hours events and create space for other educational programs.
- Add a Commercial Foods Lab

How much space do the three high schools cover?

There is more than 1.5 million square feet of internal space in the

three buildings sitting on approximately 206 acres.

Why are so many improvements needed now?

As part of the Master Facility Plan, the report included approximately 50 pages outlining the condition of all our mechanical, electrical and plumbing systems. Most of these vintage systems are original to the building construction and most of these systems have greatly exceeded their recommended useful life.

Are all of these improvements necessary?

While the most obvious need is to address infrastructure issues in aging school buildings, Maine 207 believes that all of the proposed upgrades and improvements are necessary to provide a contemporary learning environment comparable to those of neighboring school districts throughout Chicago's suburbs.

Are the improvements and expenditures similar at all schools?

District 207 is planning to invest an equal amount of the bond proceeds in each high school. The facilities are not identical. One goal of this project is to create parity between the three buildings. Although the proposed work is not identical, the three schools will have similar academic, athletic and arts spaces when construction is completed.

Why wasn't this done sooner?

Maine 207 has been addressing these needs as its annual budgets and the Illinois property tax cap have permitted. The District has invested, for instance, \$33.6 million during the past five years in building repairs and upgrades. However, the scope of the work that is now needed on school buildings ranging in age from 54 to 88 years is beyond the ability of the District to pay for without asking voters to approve a bond issue. Maine East was built in 1930, Maine West in 1959 and Maine South in 1964.

Why not build new schools?

Building three new schools would be extremely expensive as estimates are that each school would cost over \$200 million. This would place a greater burden on taxpayers, would exceed the District's borrowing capacity and would be very difficult to complete as schools need to remain in session.

Is enrollment increasing or decreasing and have you done an enrollment study?

District 207 projections indicate enrollment is expected to remain essentially steady through at least 2026.

When was the last time District 207 passed a bond referendum to upgrade facilities?

The last bond referendum passed by voters in District 207 was in December of 1973.

Can referendum funds be used for other things, like salaries?

By law, the district can only use referendum funds on building, equipping, altering, repairing and reconstructing new or existing school buildings.

(Continued on page 8)

The Who, What, When and Where on the Vote

The Maine 207 referendum question will appear on the November 6, 2018, General Election ballot. All registered voters living within District 207 are eligible to vote. Polling places are open from 6 a.m. to 7 p.m. on November 6. The early voting period is October 22 through November 5.

Passage or defeat of the referendum question will be determined by a simple majority of votes either for or against.

Voter registration

Cook County voters may register in person, by mail, online and even on Election Day.

The Cook County Clerk's Office oversees voter registration and the

most up-to-date information regarding registration is located on the following web page:

www.cookcountyclerk.com/agency/register-vote

Polling places

Voters are notified of their polling place address in a mailing prior to the election. The Cook County Clerk's Office oversees polling places and the most up-to-date information regarding polling places is located on the following web page:

www.cookcountyclerk.com/service/polling-places

Voting questions

The Elections Department of Sub-

urban Cook County is located at 69 W. Washington St., Suite 500. They can be reached at 312-603-0906. The most up-to-date information related to voting is located on the following web page:

www.cookcountyclerk.com

Ballot Language

The Board of Education voted on August 6 that at the general election to be held on Tuesday, the 6th day of November, 2018, the following proposition will be submitted to the voters of Maine Township High School District Number 207, Cook County, Illinois:

Shall the Board of Education of Maine Township High

School District Number 207, Cook County, Illinois, improve the sites of, build and equip additions to and alter, repair and equip existing buildings, including, without limitation, constructing security improvements, increasing accessibility to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act, replacing electrical, plumbing and mechanical systems, renovating classrooms and labs, improving the Library Media Center and renovating special education spaces, and issue bonds of said School District to the amount of \$195,000,000 for the purpose of paying the costs thereof?

Frequently Asked Questions about the Referendum

What is the District's bond rating?

Maine Township High School District 207 has a Aaa bond rating (Moody's Investors Service) - the highest rating available and relatively rare among Illinois school districts - which allows us to borrow at the lowest possible rates. This rating reflects the District's sound financial management.

What financial support is provided by Rivers Casino?

Rivers Casino pays taxes much like any other business within the district boundaries. In fact, Rivers Casino is one of the largest taxpayers within the school district. In addition, Rivers Casino donates \$30,000 annually for Oakton Community College scholarships. Rivers Casino also has donated \$300,000 to create modern food science labs at Maine West High School. By law, all monies donated by Rivers Casino are allocated to Maine West High School.

What financial support is provided by O'Hare Airport?

The airport has provided funds for air conditioning and soundproofing at all District buildings to mitigate the impact of noise on students and staff.

If this referendum passes, when would I see an impact on my tax bill?

The new taxes will be reflected on 2018 tax bills, which are payable in 2019. However, it is not anticipated that all of the money will be borrowed in the first year and likely the borrowing will be staged over several years if the referendum passes. That means the full tax impact on an individual taxpayer is not likely to occur in the first year.

What is the length of the bonds?

The District will issue 20-year bonds. These funds can only be used for the projects specified in the referendum question. When the bonds are paid off, taxes will be adjusted accordingly.

Will there be cost oversight?

All spending from a voter-approved bond measure would be publicly disclosed. Project updates would be presented at meetings, as well as on the District's website.

What is the maximum amount that District 207 could borrow?

As of June 2017, District 207's legal bond principal issuance maximum limit is \$319 million. The \$195 million reflects 61% of our borrowing capacity. When added to the \$18 million of current debt outstanding, the total reflects 67% of the District's borrowing capacity. The bonds would be paid over 20 years. Once the bonds are repaid, the debt service levy (taxes) go away.

How will this impact the average homeowner in District 207?

The impact will be determined for each homeowner based upon the assessed value of their property. Based upon recent home value information from Redfin, the average market value of a home in Des Plaines is \$245,000 and in Park Ridge it is \$384,000. If the ballot question were passed by voters, the impact on the average homeowner in Des Plaines would be \$223 per year beginning with the 2018 tax bill, which is payable in 2019. The impact on the average homeowner in Park Ridge would be \$350.

How will this impact my individual taxes?

The estimated increase on a homeowners total tax bill is 3%. Any homeowner can estimate the individual impact of the referendum by multiplying just the 2016 Maine Township High School District 207 taxes paid on their 2016 tax bill by 12.96%. More information is available on the district's website.

When will more detailed plans and drawings be available?

The project design phase will begin if voters approve a referendum question. Design and buildout would cover an estimated four years.