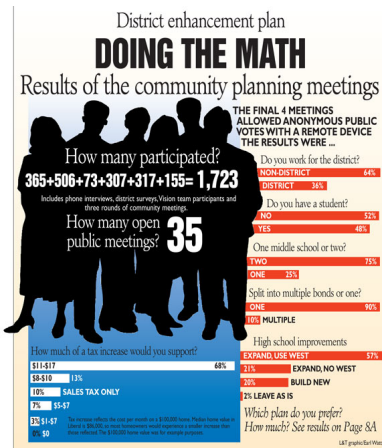


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By RACHEL COLEMAN

• Leader & Times

After literally hundreds of handout papers and slideshows, Liberal residents have begun to sort through the options for an upcoming school bond issue. At last, an answer to the big question that always surfaces in the discussion seems possible. The query? "How much is this going to cost?"

USD 480 representatives and consultants from DLR have not offered dollar numbers, until last week. That is not a stall tactic but a reflection of the commitment to making the project be a true reflection of what voters and taxpayers want. The constantly rolling banner that pops up on the

district's website says it all:

“All information being shared is conceptual and is being studied by the Community. **NO DECISIONS HAVE BEEN MADE.** Stay tuned for further information from the District on upcoming Community Meetings where your involvement and opinions can be heard.”

So, how much is the bond issue likely to cost?

People at the last round of meetings shied away from the most expensive option which proposed a new high school building (though absolutely no new athletic stadium). They also seemed unexcited about the cheapest options, describing them as “Band-Aid” approaches that wouldn't even last five years. The favorite plan's price tag fell somewhere in the middle at \$147.9 million. For the owner of a \$100,000 house, that would mean an increase in property taxes of \$13.42 a month.

The cheapest plan, at a total cost of \$113.4 million, weighed in at \$6.95 per month in added property taxes, because it proposed zero investment in high school renovations or additions — simply taking possession of West Middle School — small additions to South Middle School, and a new, 660-person middle school to replace West. as well as three new elementaries which were included on every plan.

The most expensive plan, which would build a new high school and move both middle schools to the current LHS campus with renovations, totaled \$163.4 million in all, with a price of \$16.29 in property taxes.

Planners kept the cost of repurposing two buildings now used as elementary schools separate. The price for making Lincoln and Southlawn into preschool centers totaled nearly \$8 million, of which half would be paid through state funds. Property owners would see a \$1.53 increase (per month) in taxes to fund the renovations.

All these figures were based on the success of a sales tax initiative. Without successful passage of a sales tax measure, the district will not be able to launch a bond issue, because the

monthly increase in property taxes would be, on average, \$10 higher than the figures listed, increasing the mill levy to an unacceptably high level, planners said.

“It’s going to have to be a ‘yes, yes’ vote in April,” said Nicole Lopez of DLR to community members. “If your sales tax issue doesn’t pass, no bond issue. If your bond issue doesn’t pass, no sales tax. Voters need to understand that.”

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