

ACCESS PTA
General Membership Meeting
March 17, 2011

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by PTA President David Fikstad at 7:05 p.m.

INTRODUCTION

This was a combined meeting of the Access and Sabin PTAs. David Wynde from the Portland School Board attended the meeting to answer questions. In particular, to address comments or questions regarding the upcoming capital bond and local option levy elections. The capital bond will support capital improvements throughout the district, including at Sabin/Access. The levy may help to save the jobs of hundreds of teachers in the upcoming school year.

Present at the meeting: David Fikstad (Sabin and Access parent), Tou Meksavanh, Lucy Hise-Fisher (Access), Heather Kent (Sabin and Access parent), Debra Clemens (Access), Jen Holcomb (Access).

SPECIAL GUEST DAVID WYNDE

David Wynde explained the following:

The Local Option Levy: Funding for schools in Oregon is primarily determined by the State legislature. The one exception is called the "Local Option" which is a supplementary property tax measure. There is one in place right now. PPS has chosen to remove itself from that existing 5 year local option and instead renew a year early to take advantage of some changes that are going to happen. They know the "funding situation is going to be gruesome." By extending the Local Option they will raise \$19 million, which will save 200 FTE teaching positions. The PPS measure on the May ballot would carry a rate of \$1.99 per \$1,000, 74 cents per \$1,000 higher than the current rate under the local option levy approved in 2006. The replacement levy would cost the typical PPS homeowner just over an additional \$9 a month.

The Capital Bond: PPS has no capital funds. All capital work has to come from the operating budget, which is very tight. After review, PPS has determined that the average age of the school buildings is 60 years. In almost every building the major systems need to be replaced. Rosa Parks and Forest Parks are the only existing buildings needing no work. A case can be made to replace all other 83 buildings. With the funding from the Capital Bond, PPS will make a major investment in 10 sites (rebuilding or remodeling). Across the district, PPS will do priority work on every building. PPS will upgrade all science labs for all schools with 6th-8th grades, will conduct seismic work, will build covered playgrounds, replace oil furnaces, replace wooden play structures, and improve ADA accessibility. PPS knows that it is tough to ask people to raise their property taxes. The measure's rate, about \$2 per \$1,000 of assessed value, would cost just under \$25 a month for the median household, with a home worth about \$275,000 and taxed at an assessed value of \$147,500. Work will begin in summer 2011 if voters pass the six-year, \$548 million bond measure.

The changes needed are not just at the physical plant level. Changes are also needed in the way schools are configured. There are lots of changes that would be made if they were starting from scratch. For example, they would prefer pods of classes as opposed to classrooms off of corridors.

Three high schools (Cleveland, Jefferson, Roosevelt) would be rebuilt and modernized, so that Portland Public Schools students have the same technology, equipment and up-to-date learning environments as students in neighboring school districts with newer buildings. Elementary and K-8 schools to be rebuilt with bond funds are: Faubion, Laurlehurst, Markham, Marysville and Rigler.

All of this money will be "pay as you go," so it will be paid off after 6 years. Then, if folks like what has been done, they can renew the effort and raise funds to take care of more schools.

Q. Why not a 20-year bond?

A. We are saving \$200 million by doing pay as you go. Also, we can state with real specificity what we will do over 6 years, whereas we could not make that commitment if the funding was spread out over 20 years. We also have learned that after the first bond is passed, it is easier to get later bonds passed.

Q. What kind of oversight on the capital bond and spending?

A. Rosa Parks just came in on time, on budget. It has won almost every major school award in the country. We did Rosa Parks in conjunction with the Housing Authority. This time around, we hired new staff. A CFO with total oversight, a manager who has run a capital bond in California and has oversight and management experience. We have really good people and we know what's at stake. We don't get a second chance.

Citizen oversight is built into the proposal, with regular review by the Portland School Board's Finance, Audit and Operations Committee and the school district's Citizens Budget Review Committee. Annual financial audits will ensure accountability, with all reports and audits published on the PPS website.

Q. How have the improvements been prioritized?

A. Every school gets something. There is a list for every school. 3 years ago an outside firm did a comprehensive assessment of all PPS buildings providing a database of the state of each building. With this database, we can compare the cost of fixing vs. replacing. This, in turn, provides a percentage that allows prioritization. There are also buildings with serious over-crowding that needs to be alleviated. High schools were given extra weight. Balancing act to fix things without spending money that will be wasted if the building is rebuilt in 6 years. The database is very powerful.

Q. The index is the cost of repair divided by the cost of rebuilding. For all schools in the district, the index is less than 1. So, why are any schools being rebuilt?

A. The rule of thumb in some states is that once that percentage gets to a certain point you have to replace the school. Repairing only fixes the physical structure, it does change the physical layout. Getting a new building provides intangible benefits. Laurlehurst and East Sylvan were the worst and are getting major remodels.

Q. Why isn't the legislature funding this instead of taxpayers with a levy?

A. The State only has so much money. If the legislature gives PPS more money, it has to get it from somewhere. The advantage of the Capital Bond and the Local Option is that it is money that we raise locally and we get to keep all of it. The money raised from property and income taxes we only get about 81 cents on the dollar.

Q. Why not wait until the economy is better?

A. We can't. We simply cannot wait any longer.

Q. It appears that support for the levy is stronger than the Capital Bond so why not ask for more on the levy?

A. Because we are asking for absolutely as much as we can. That is why we are going out early. This is only the 4th year on a 5 year levy, but we are taking advantage of the increased cap on what we can get by going out early to get more.

Q. Do we need to have a certain percentage of voters?

A. No, for May and November elections it only has to be a simple majority.

Q. What are the chances for a new home for Access?

A. I won't be on the board when this issue gets resolved because I am off the board this May. I think there is a clear understanding that Access needs a place of its own. How soon that can be resolved, remains to be seen. There is "a reasonable chance of that getting resolved." It will not be simple. It really should be a district wide question. The answer may be on the other side of the river or way south of I84. Any district wide program has a preponderance of people who live close and those people may feel displaced.

The Board members in general in well aware of Access and I think in agreement that Access needs a place of its own. I do now know what will happen with Alameda and Sabin. It really is a litmus test of whether people are really true to the values they are expressing.

General discussion regarding potential capital bond.

Recording secretary left the meeting at 8:20 p.m.

