



CAPITAL REFERENDUM: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Updated Feb. 2025

✓ What are the facility needs at Sheboygan Falls Elementary School?

Built in 2000, SFES is approaching its 25-year mark and requires significant updates to its infrastructure and facilities. The key areas needing attention include:

- **Basic systems replacement:** Boilers and chillers have reached the end of their useful life and need to be replaced. There are also leaking windows and doors, and sections of the roof require replacement.
- **Safety enhancements:** The school currently lacks building-wide fire detectors, which are essential for safety.
- **Furniture, fixtures & equipment:** Furniture, flooring, and paint have experienced over 20 years of wear and tear and need repair or replacement.

Since opening, our Elementary building has been adapted in several ways to enhance academic opportunities. In 2007, classrooms were added on the second floor to alleviate overcrowding. In 2015, four classrooms were repurposed for four-year-old kindergarten (4K), which was moved from the middle school. Five-year-old kindergarten (5K) classrooms were then relocated to more appropriate spaces.

These adaptations, along with changes in educational delivery, have increased the demand for space. Specific needs include:

- Dedicated areas to support students with various special needs.
- Enlarging common areas such as the cafeteria and kitchen, which are currently undersized and cramped.
- Expanding and updating the playground, as the current space is too small, the equipment is outdated, and there are safety and accessibility issues due to uneven surfaces and poor drainage.

Additionally, community partners like the YMCA and the Boys and Girls Club use dedicated space within the school for before- and after-school care, further impacting the school's capacity.

Enrollment analysis indicates that the school is over capacity. With a designed capacity of 533 students, the school's 2023-24 enrollment was 588. Projections by MDRoffers Consulting predict an additional 140 elementary-aged students in the next 10-12 years, potentially putting the school nearly 200 students over capacity.

To address these issues, our Elementary School needs significant investments in infrastructure, safety systems, and space optimization to continue providing a safe and effective learning environment.

✓ What are the facility needs at Sheboygan Falls High School?

Sheboygan Falls High School, built in 1969, is facing significant challenges due to its age and outdated infrastructure. The facility needs at the school include:

- **Basic building systems:** Sections of the roof, doors, windows, and mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems are at the end of their useful life and need replacement. Many windows are old and limit natural light in classrooms.
- **Educational areas:** Several educational spaces, such as science labs and technical education areas (woods and metals, agriculture, culinary arts), are outdated, undersized, and inflexible. The science lab layout is problematic and has improper ventilation.
- **Safety enhancements:** The current building design does not allow for partitioning off sections for after-hours use, leaving the entire building accessible. The school also lacks fire sprinkler systems.
- **Outdoor athletic facilities:** Structural and drainage issues are present at the tennis courts, football field, track, and baseball and softball diamonds.
- **Building finishes:** Ceilings, lighting, paint, flooring, and casework throughout the building need updating.
- **Physical education areas:** The gym, locker rooms, and weight room are heavily used. The gymnasium flooring is worn, while the bleachers need updating. The second-floor weight room has structural issues and ADA concerns. And, there is a lack of equitable locker facilities for boys and girls sports, creating potential Title IX compliance issues.

Despite these challenges, enrollment analysis indicates that Sheboygan Falls High School has adequate space to serve students well into the future. With a current enrollment of 512 students and a building capacity for 684, there is potential for maximizing reuse and reconfiguration of underutilized areas.

Addressing these facility needs is crucial for providing a safe, functional, and modern learning environment for students at our High School.

✓ What are the facility needs at Sheboygan Falls Middle School?

Sheboygan Falls Middle School, built in 2018, does not require significant facility maintenance. The school has capacity for approximately 40 additional students, and most classroom spaces are regularly utilized.

✓ How is the April 2025 Referendum question different from the November 2024 Referendum?

Based on the results of the November election, the Board of Education has eliminated the second question, which included building a new auxiliary gym, new multi-sport field, and new track. They have also reduced the first question focused on Elementary and High School improvements by more than \$8 million as well by removing space for childcare and further prioritizing projects at both buildings.

The School Board and administration worked hard with the community and professional resources to identify the most critical needs at both the Elementary and High school. The proposed \$70 million project includes the highest-priority projects, focused on providing space at the Elementary School, investing in existing buildings, and improving learning environments.

✓ What would the tax impact be if approved?

If the proposed referendum question is approved, the estimated maximum annual tax rate increase for debt is \$0.25 per \$1,000 of equalized (also known as fair market) property value compared to the 2024 tax bill.

That means that for every \$100,000 of property value, property owners would see an increase of \$25 per year. For example, a property valued at \$250,000 would note an estimated increase of \$62.50 per year or approximately \$5.21 per month.

Preliminary estimates are based on a phased borrowing approach, with interest rates estimated at 4.75% to 5% for tax-exempt municipal bonds. Taxpayers will note this increase on their 2026 tax bill, which will be sent to property owners in December 2025.

✓ Why is the estimated tax impact so much lower compared to the November referendum?

The reduced impact is caused by both the smaller project size and strategic decisions made by the Board to manage existing debt.

- The project cost has been reduced by approximately \$8,000,000 compared to Question #1 of the 2024 referendum.
- The School Board continues to budget funds to prepay the loans borrowed for the 2016 Middle School referendum with the intent of stabilizing the tax rate.
- The Middle School loans have been reduced by 6 years saving taxpayers \$4.4 million in interest.
- The strategy creates an easier transition to the payments for the proposed 2025 referendum, maintaining tax rate predictability for residents.

✓ What process has the District and Board used to find solutions to these needs?

Over the past two years, the Board of Education and District leaders have been evaluating the district's facility needs and investigating possible solutions. This work is part of the district's long-range facility planning process.

This process has included staff feedback, a third-party assessment, community tours, and conversations throughout our community. The District also surveyed our community members in spring 2024 and again in November 2024 after the unsuccessful vote.

✓ Has the community had an opportunity to weigh in on this issue?

Yes. Over the past two years, the Board of Education has sought the feedback of our community members in a number of ways. This has included community tours, seeking feedback from our staff, and engaging in conversations with parents and community members about the District's needs and possible solutions.

Additionally, a total of 475 community members completed the survey, which was available from April 26 to May 6, 2024. Respondents to the survey provided the District with valuable information and feedback regarding our school facility needs and how we can best address them. Further, nearly 400 community members completed a survey in November 2024, after the initial vote, informing the revised April 2025 referendum question.

✓ What did the District and Board learn through the recent community survey?

A total of 475 community members completed the survey, which was available from April 26 to May 6, 2024. Below are some key takeaways from the input provided:

- More than 74% of respondents indicated they were well informed or had some familiarity with the District's facility needs.
- Just over 75% strongly agreed or agreed that our Elementary School facility needs must be addressed now.
- Approximately 82% strongly agreed or agreed that our High School facility needs must be addressed now.

The survey also provided details on various levels of capital referendum questions and asked respondents to indicate their potential support for each option. The full survey report is available at <https://bit.ly/sfsdfacilitysurveyreport>.

✓ What is the proposed solution to the District's facility needs?

Based on the District's long-range facilities planning process and the input we have received from our community over the past two years, the Board of Education has decided to present one question on the April 1st, 2025 ballot.

If the question is approved, the District will move forward with a \$70 million plan to make the facility improvements needed at both our Elementary School and High School.

✓ What is the question that will appear on the ballot?

The question asks voters to approve general obligation bonds in an amount not to exceed \$70 million. These funds would go toward Elementary and High School improvement projects, including:

Sheboygan Falls Elementary School

- Building a classroom addition (reduced size) for 4-year-old kindergarten and before/after school programs only, freeing up more space in the existing building for kindergarten through grade 4. The childcare program has been eliminated.
- Targeted renovations to the existing kindergarten area and kitchen
- Completing critical capital improvement projects including window and roof section replacements, mechanical system updates, kitchen equipment replacement, new playgrounds, and improving site drainage

Sheboygan Falls High School

- Completing critical capital improvement projects including window, door and roof section replacements, mechanical, electrical and plumbing system updates, flooring, ceiling, paint, casework and lighting upgrades

- Renovations to improve safety and address accessibility issues, including physical security modifications to allow sections of the building to be controlled after school hours, repairing the failing weight room floor and relocating the fitness center away from the middle of the school to control community access, replacing the elevator and existing stairs, adding a fire sprinkler system, and improving restrooms
- Renovations of outdated, existing learning areas, including science labs, former computer labs, special education, and other small group classroom areas
- Building a Career & Technical Education (CTE) addition ((reduced size) with appropriately sized classrooms and flexible labs to meet growing student program demands (culinary, woods, metals, robotics, agriculture, fabrication/grill, engineering/drafting, etc.)
- Building a safer, more accessible student & community fitness center (reduced size) that is no longer in the center of the building and relocating tennis courts displaced by CTE addition
- Renovations to the existing competition gym and locker rooms

If the question is approved by voters, the estimated annual tax impact would be \$0.25 per \$1,000 of equalized property value.

✓ **When is the last time our community approved a referendum for the School District of Sheboygan Falls?**

The most recent referendum approved for the School District of Sheboygan Falls was in April 2016. At that time, our community approved a \$30.9 million referendum to fund the construction of our Middle School, along with some targeted improvements at our High School, including roof and exterior door replacement.

We remain incredibly grateful for the support of our community for the referendum in 2016. As a result, we were able to build our Middle School, which is not in need of any further improvements. Now, the time has come to turn our attention to the needs at our High School, Elementary School, and athletic facilities.

✓ **Would referendum dollars go toward staff salaries and benefits?**

No. The Board of Education is asking voters to approve a capital referendum. The funds generated through a voter-approved referendum may only go toward facility improvements, such as new construction, additions, and renovations. The money cannot be used for staff salaries or other operational costs.

✓ **What is the difference between a capital referendum and an operational referendum?**

In Wisconsin, school boards can ask voters to approve two types of referendums: a capital (or bond) referendum and an operational referendum.

A *capital referendum* is used to fund major building projects and improvements. This can include the construction of new school buildings, significant renovations or additions to existing facilities, purchasing land, or major equipment expenditures.

An *operational referendum* is used to fund the ongoing day-to-day expenses of running a school

district. This can include salaries and benefits for teachers and staff, utilities, classroom supplies, transportation, and other operating costs.

On April 1st, the Board of Education is asking voters to consider a capital referendum for the School District of Sheboygan Falls.

✓ What is the exact question that will appear on the ballot?

The following question will appear on the ballot:

BE IT RESOLVED by the School Board of the School District of Sheboygan Falls, Sheboygan County, Wisconsin that there shall be issued pursuant to Chapter 67 of the Wisconsin Statutes, general obligation bonds in an amount not to exceed \$70,000,000 for the public purpose of paying the cost of a school building and facility improvement project consisting of: construction of additions and renovations at the High School, including for science, career and technical education, special education, and physical education, including a fitness center, and removal of a portion of the existing building; construction of additions and renovations at the Elementary School, including for a secure entrance and elementary classrooms; districtwide safety, security, capital maintenance, physical education and site improvements; and acquisition of furnishings, fixtures and equipment.

✓ When is election day?

Election day is Tuesday, April 1st, 2025.

✓ Where can I cast my vote on election day?

District residents can cast their ballots at their usual [polling location](#) on Tuesday, April 1st. For more information on requesting a mail-in ballot, visit <https://myvote.wi.gov/en-us/VoteAbsentee>.

✓ Can I vote absentee in this election?

Yes, voters may request that an absentee ballot be mailed to them for any reason. However, you must be registered before you can request an absentee ballot.

If you are registered, you can request an absentee ballot by visiting <https://myvote.wi.gov/en-us/VoteAbsentee>. Note that you must [provide a photo ID](#) with your absentee ballot request.

✓ When is the deadline to register to vote?

Eligible voters can register up to election day, and can even register at the polls.

The deadline to register by mail is March 12th, 2025. The deadline to register in person as the Municipal Clerk's Office is March 28th, 2025.

To learn more about registering to vote, visit <https://myvote.wi.gov/register-To-Vote>. Additional information on registration and other deadlines is available at <https://myvote.wi.gov/en-us/Voter-Deadlines>.

✓ Why is fair market value or equalized value used to determine tax impact?

Fair market value, or equalized value, represents the estimated market worth of properties within a municipality or school district. Property assessments are determined by the individual municipality and will vary by municipality. Equalized value is used to standardize these assessments. This ensures that all property owners, regardless of location, are taxed equitably based on the actual value of their property. This approach helps create a more consistent and fair tax system across the district or region. In Wisconsin, schools are required by law to use fair market value, which is clearly indicated on your tax bill.

✓ The City of Sheboygan Falls reassessed property values recently. Will my taxes go up because of the reassessment?

A reassessment will not change the amount of taxes levied, and will not, necessarily, mean a change in tax burden for individual taxpayers. The reassessment may result in a redistribution of property tax burden based on shifts in market value. If a property value increases more than the average increase in the municipality it results in an increase in tax burden, and vice versa.

✓ Why not keep the current E-Wing and renovate the space?

The current space cannot accommodate the number of students interested in these classes. Many of our students who request these classes are turned away or have to defer their participation until they are upperclassmen. Currently, these classes have to be capped. Adding more students to a small space would significantly impact student safety and supervision.

The current space requires significant capital investment (roof, windows, doors, HVAC, electrical, etc...). After analyzing the cost of meeting those capital needs in the current E-Wing, the Board decided to create a new state-of-the-art space that does not require the same capital needs and allows more student participation in these classes.

The High School building is currently under capacity, which means there is more room than there are students who require it. The board decided that keeping this space that has no programmatic value requires significant investment to meet existing capital needs, and the annual expense of maintaining that space is not worth the investment in an unused space. This represents savings in the total cost of the referendum and reinvestment in other projects that will significantly impact our students (band and choir spaces).

✓ Why not add on to the space to increase capacity for these classes?

Our school Board considered this option, and our architects and construction team presented options. However, due to the geographical issues (large hill, ravine) with the north side of the building, the cost rose significantly and was not considered viable. The cost to address capital needs in the current space and add on to the building did not result in a cost savings compared to building a new space. Building a new space would have resulted in the same capacity and supervision issues since many walls are load-bearing and could not be removed.

✓ Why not keep the space and use it for future use?

The option was explored, however it would be a significant and costly investment to maintain a section of the building that would be unused. This includes the cost needed to address the current capital needs in the space as well as keeping the space cleaned and maintained. To keep the space and make room for the new tennis courts (displaced by the CTE (Career and Technical Education) addition) would require significant and costly investment in the building's structure, as well as a significant issue with the new tennis court layout.

✓ What are the benefits of a new CTE (Career and Technical Education) addition?

The new space will have sufficient size to allow more students to participate in these high-demand classes. The new space will include updated capital needs. The new space will be at the forefront of the building, bringing these classes to attention compared to the current location, which is out of significant building traffic. An increase in awareness will attract more students to these classes. The new space will provide an excellent opportunity for connecting with local businesses.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

VISIT

us online
sheboyganfalls.k12.wi.us/o/sfsd/page/2025

CALL

Zach Pethan, District Administrator
(920) 467-7893

EMAIL

Zach Pethan, District Administrator
ztpethan@sheboyganfalls.k12.wi.us

FOLLOW

us on social media
Facebook @sheboyganfallsschooldistrict
Instagram @sheb_fallssd

ATTEND

a Referendum Information Session & School Tour:

- Tuesday, March 4, 6:30pm @ SF High School
- Tuesday, March 11, 6:30pm @ SF Elementary School
- Wednesday, March 12, 6:30pm @ SF High School
- Tuesday, March 18, 6:30pm @ SF Elementary School

Learn more & stay informed

