

District delves into 'green bond' proposal

Measure would pay for more classrooms, improved energy efficiency at MVLA schools

by Kelsey Mesher in Mountain View Voice August 14, 2009

Local high schools could become more energy efficient if the district board decides to place a "green bond" on the ballot in June of next year.

Trustees of the Mountain View-Los Altos High School District reopened discussion of a bond measure at their first meeting of the school year Monday, and decided to form a committee to see if the idea is feasible.

Such a bond measure, first proposed last February, would be a "no tax rate increase general obligation bond" — meaning that, if approved, tax rates would not increase, though the duration of the current tax may be extended.

The proposal calls for making current buildings and swimming pools more energy efficient, and constructing additional "green" classroom space for a growing student population. Specific plans include updating insulation, adding solar panels and making better use of natural light, especially at Los Altos High School.

According to Joe White, associate superintendent of business services, the district spends approximately \$640,000 each year on electricity, and an additional \$100,000 on gas.

"We think we can cut that by 60 to 70 percent if we do some of the things we're talking about," White said at Monday's meeting.

With the support of board members, Superintendent Barry Groves set a timeline that includes creating a committee to fully vet the proposal. If the committee finds that a bond measure is fiscally and logistically feasible, the district will poll the community to gauge support.

While most bond measures require a two-thirds majority to pass, this particular measure would need only 55 percent approval to pass. Bonds that are passed with 55 percent approval must be managed by an oversight committee, designed to ensure that the exact plans that were approved are carried out.

If the board of trustees determines that a green bond has adequate support, it could decide in February or March to place the measure on the June 2010 ballot.

Students from Mountain View and Los Altos high schools are on board with the idea of making their campuses more environmentally friendly. Both schools have ramped up recycling efforts, and the schools' "green clubs" have sponsored environmental education days, encouraged alternative transportation like biking, and even held a joint meeting to share ideas for the upcoming school year.

The question is, are the voters as enthusiastic about extending a tax to make more permanent changes.

Though trying to get a bond measure approved in an unstable economic climate may seem risky, Rick Kramer, a green consultant who has worked closely on the project, said now may be a good time to ask for voter support due to low interest rates and construction costs.

"There's a tremendous opportunity to save energy costs for the district," Kramer told the trustees.

One example he gave for improving energy efficiency is fixing the old window blinds at Los Altos High School.

"Hopefully that'll perk up the students and save some of your lighting bills as well," he said.

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