

# Why KMS Schools is pursuing a referendum in Nov.

**submitted by  
Superintendent Martin  
Heidelberger**

From our elementary students reading over 3,400 books to approximately 140 students participating in Advanced Placement (AP), college-level, Career and Technical Education (CTE), or four-track courses on-site at KMS Secondary, the first few weeks of school have been impactful for KMS Schools. KMS Schools is committed to continuing its success throughout the school year and for decades to come. The environments where students learn are important. School Board Chair Jeremy Winter said "our district must provide spaces to support our educational programs, activities, and more."

On Tuesday, November 7, residents of KMS Schools will decide on two ballot questions to invest \$27.95 million to make critical improvements to address the district's educational and facility needs. Here are a couple of reasons why the district chose to pursue a bond at this time:

•The district lacks the space to support educational programs, athletics, and activities. Programs and services such as Special Education, counseling, and mental health lack adequate space in both

schools. For example, spaces not originally made to support specialized services are being used instead, including the auditorium and coaches' offices. Other programs and activities lack adequate space, including hands-on learning, theater, football, and softball/baseball. Without the additional space, students won't be able to participate in classes due to facility constraints.

•The longer the needs remain unaddressed, the higher the likelihood that the costs to address them will continue to increase. The district has been efficient and wise with spending taxpayer dollars over the last several years and have been able to address critical needs within allotted annual maintenance budgets. However, the proposed improvements cannot be addressed within those budgets, and the costs to implement them will continue to rise.

•The proposed plan meets the needs for their students, staff, and community for decades to come. The district currently has many spaces that are undersized, not centralized, or not configured to meet students' needs. In addition, the plan allows the district to address deferred maintenance needs that they are unable to address within annual budgets.

The district encourages

residents to visit [OneKMS.org](http://OneKMS.org) for complete information about the challenges facing KMS Schools, the plan to address them, the proposed investment, voting, and more. Early voting via absentee ballot is now available. Residents can pick up an absentee ballot application at the district office, located at 302 North 15th Street, Kerkhoven, MN 56252.

Residents can also cast their vote in person on Election Day, Tuesday, November 7. Residents will vote at one of three locations based on your primary residence — the Sunburg Community Center, Murdock City Hall, or the Kerkhoven Civic Center. Visit [OneKMS.org/vote](http://OneKMS.org/vote) to learn more about voting.

Residents are invited to attend a community meeting to learn more about the upcoming bond referendum. This informational open house will be held on Monday, October 23, from 6:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. at the KMS Secondary School in Kerkhoven (302 North 15th Street, Kerkhoven, MN 56252).

Those with questions or suggestions should contact Superintendent Martin Heidelberger by email at [mheidelberger@kms.k12.mn.us](mailto:mheidelberger@kms.k12.mn.us) or by phone at 320-264-1411.

# Questions asked at the KMS community referendum meeting last Thursday in Kerkhoven

by Emily Rotthaler

Around 30 people were in attendance at the KMS school district's third, public informational referendum meeting at the high school in Kerkhoven last Thursday. The meeting included a presentation of ICS representative Chris Ziemer about the scope of the project as well as Baker Tilly representative Ryan Fetters further explaining the project's financing, tax impact, and online tax impact calculation tool.

The meeting also offered the opportunity for community members to ask questions. Here is what people wanted to know:

**Q1: Do the tax impact values on the website already take into account the Ag2School credit? Is the Ag Credit assured for the next 20 years (until the project's bonds mature)?**

**Answer:** Yes, they do. And

no, there is no guarantee but a discontinuation of the state's Ag Credit program due to its popularity is unlikely. Both Fetters and Ziemer said that there has been no talk of getting rid of the credit in the legislature but talk to potentially further increase it.

The Ag2School tax credit is an automatic 70% tax credit afforded to holders of agricultural land and would pay for 55% of the project's bonded debts. As Fetters specified, "The credit is coming from the state. It doesn't mean that residential homeowners are paying that share. It's coming from the metro area."

**Q2: Until old bonded debt matures and more annual debt service capacity opens to the new bonds, will the project debt be like an interest-only loan?**

**Answer:** According to Fetters, it depends on what the interest rates on the day of

sale end up being. The current values are calculated with an interest rate of 5% on the high end but are expected to be lower on the day of bond sale, in which case the district's debt would undergo restructuring.

Either way, the project debt, including interest, will be shifted out and layered into the district's existing annual, bonded debt service, to take up the capacity left behind by old, bonded debts of the district that are maturing. The goal, Fetters said, is to keep a level annual debt service.

**Q3: Are people who own a business in the school district but live outside of it eligible to vote?**

**Answer:** No. As Fetters said, if you don't live in the district, you won't be able to vote.

**Q4: Is there a metric used**  
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Eric Rudningen of Kerkhoven made a point during last Thursday's referendum meeting at KMS High School. Similar informational meetings were held earlier in the week at Murdock and Sunburg.

Also shown are Paulette Johnson of rural Kerkhoven, (far left), Erica Henry of rural Murdock (near left) and Dorothy Broberg of rural Kerkhoven.