

OSD addresses growth issues with bond referendum

By Eve Gershon

features editor

Over the past 17 years, the Oxford School District has seen more than a 40 percent increase in student numbers.

"I began working at Oxford High School in August of 2000," Principal Bradley Roberson said. "I believe the senior class had approximately 180 students. This year's senior class has 282 students."

To help deal with this growth, the school board voted to approve a Capital Improvement Plan ("Plan") at its July meeting.

According to an OSD newsletter emailed to district parents on July 20, the plan "addresses the adequate levels of student enrollment and shifts in enrollment, along with school facility conditions from an educational perspective."

For the school district to complete the projects detailed in the Plan, the community must first vote to pass a bond referendum.

"The primary objective for the bond was to fund a new elementary school construction project because the current school is not large enough to house all of our existing students," School Board President Gray Edmondson said.

Along with a new elementary school, there are plans to add a fine-arts facility and some athletic buildings to the high school.

"We think we're going to have enough money to possibly build a baseball and a softball field complex," OSD Athletic Director Michael Martin said. "We've started the preliminary job of looking at different complexes and what we would like to build, but it's not far enough along to even talk about."

The Plan also provides for some extra classrooms for the middle school and renovations to Bramlett Elementary School.

"What we hope is that, aside from everything we do, people recognize that it's a need, and they prioritize the public schools in their community," Edmondson said.

According to Edmondson, the school district should not face the issue of running out of funds like the last time a bond was passed to build the new high school.

"We have spent a lot of energy trying to be sure that our estimates we've received are as accurate and complete as possible," Edmondson said. "I have personally sat with our architect and said, 'I want this to include everything. I want it to be the furniture that's going to go in there. I don't want just the building costs. I want to furnish it. I want every light bulb, every everything.'"

A special election will be held for the bond on Sept. 26. Any eligible voter within the Oxford School District can vote on it.

"The monetary goal is \$38,000,000," Superintendent Brian Harvey said. "It will take a 60 percent majority of the actual voters who vote in the bond referendum election [for the vote to pass]."

Although the amount is large, district taxpayers should only see about a \$37.50 (per \$100,000 in property value) increase on their tax bills annually.

"When you break it down even further, the tax increase is only approximately \$1.44 a week on a \$200,000 house," Roberson said.

Should the bond fail to pass, Edmondson believes there are other actions that can be taken to manage the growth.

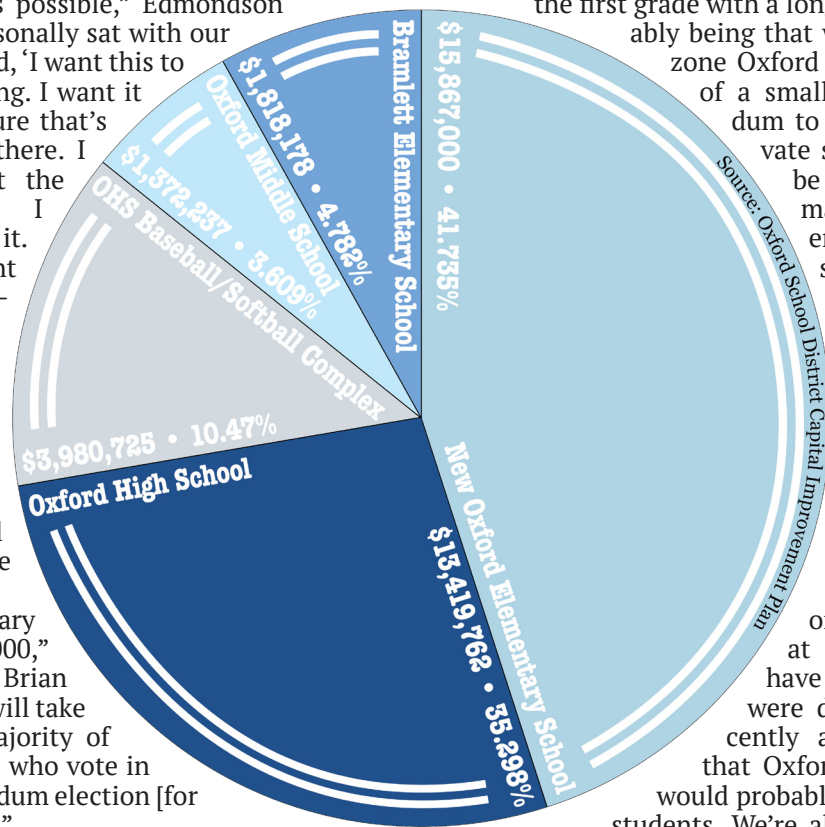
"If this particular bond referendum did not pass, we would have to continue housing some first graders in Bramlett for the time being, and split up the first grade with a long-term plan probably being that we would need to zone Oxford and seek passage of a smaller bond referendum to build or to renovate somewhere that'd be capable of having maybe two different K through four schools for Oxford," Edmondson said.

According to Edmondson, short-term growth in Oxford has been bigger than anyone would have anticipated.

"I wasn't on the school board at this time, but I have heard that there were discussions as recently as 2011 thinking that Oxford School District would probably cap out at 4,000 students. We're already, I think, at 4,400 approximately," Edmondson said.

Keeping enough space for every student may be daunting, but Harvey assures that the students will be cared for.

"If the children are here, we have to educate them," Harvey said. "We don't really have a choice. We'll just have to find a way to do it."



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