

Tahoe Daily Tribune

## School board votes to go for \$64.5 million bond measure

Several community members say that amount is too high

BY [SARA THOMPSON](#),

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After a long and emotional discussion, the school board approved a \$64.5 million bond for the November ballot - despite comments from several people who said the board should ask for a lesser amount.

The Lake Tahoe Unified School District Board voted 4-1 Tuesday to put the bond on the ballot. Residents would be taxed \$28.70 per \$100,000 of assessed value.

During the discussion, community members gave their suggestions to the board for the November bond.

Patrick Martin said government agencies have made the community cynical about projects. If the board issued a bond just to match the matching state funds, then people could see the projects take shape and get on board for more bonds in the future.

John Upton said he thought a conservative bond would be supported by the community.

"Give them a measure they feel comfortable with," Upton said.

The most important objective is to get the community back in the habit of supporting schools like they used to, Upton said.

Upton added that he would support the bond no matter what the board decided.

Ernie Claudio, South Tahoe Public Utility District Board member, agreed with Martin and Upton.

"Go for a lower amount, get the slam dunk and get people in the habit of supporting schools," Claudio said.

Superintendent Jim Tarwater said if the bond only asked for enough to match the funds, then only South Tahoe High School would receive facility improvements rather than the whole district.

The board decided to stick with \$64.5 million because the amount would garner the matching funds and provide improvements for other schools around the district.

Measure G is the last chance for the district to keep the matching funds from Career Technical Education Grants passed by California voters in 2006. The funds would help finance facilities for a green construction and automotive academy and also an arts, entertainment and media academy.

Besides matching the funds, construction plans need to be approved by the Department of State Architects, and the deadline to submit the plans is September. If Measure G fails, the district must absorb the planning costs.

Tarwater said that's why the district had Measure A on the June ballot. Now, the district must go ahead with creating construction plans, which could cost \$350,000 to \$500,000 and put the district at risk to pay for it.

"But if you don't do it, you lose it," Tarwater said. "It makes me nervous."

Board members voiced their opinions on the amount of Measure G after listening to public comments.

"Dr. Martin and Dr. Tarwater are both right, and that's what's tearing me apart," said board member Larry Green.

Green agreed this is the right time to pass a bond, because improving infrastructure improves the community and the schools.

Board member Wendy David referenced President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal that helped bring the country out of the Great Depression. When times were bad, the country started building.

"This is how we will ride our community through this economy," said board member Angela Swanson.

Board President Sue Novasel said that besides those who spoke at the meeting, she has received phone calls and e-mails from others who thought Measure A was too much.

"We lost," Novasel said. "We've lost twice. We need to get back that community that says yes to our schools."

Novasel was the lone no vote, because she thought the amount should be lower. But she said she supports the board and Measure G.

"We will be walking out of here unified tonight," Novasel said.

Novasel said that before they wrote the language for Measure A, more than \$130 million in facility needs were identified. After the bond survey, the needs had to be whittled down to \$87 million, but that didn't pass.

No other options exist to make these improvements other than asking voters to pass a general obligation bond, Tarwater said.

Much of the discussion focused on how the Measure G campaign should be run differently than Measure A.

"The bigger picture I look at is, obviously, we didn't paint a good one," Tarwater said. "When I look at what we cut, it's tough."

Jackie Nelson, the principal of South Tahoe Middle School, said the project list needed to be more detailed to convey the facility needs to voters.

"It needs to tell the story of what it's like to work in those schools," Nelson said.

For example, Nelson said Building D modernization for the middle school is noted on the project list. But what the list doesn't tell voters is that every time a teacher plugs in the portable laptop cart, the electricity goes out in the 46-year-old wing.