

Capital Plan Frequently Asked Questions

January 2018

1. **Why is West Chester revising its capital plan?**

Our last capital plan to renovate schools and manage space began in 2010. In 2016, we saw a sudden and unexpected acceleration of residential growth that is producing new students. Most of this growth is in the northern part of the school district. Since 2016, nearly 2,800 units were approved or are under review for approval.

We are currently half way through the renovation plans for our ten elementary schools. We have renovated Penn Wood, Westtown-Thornbury, East Bradford, Fern Hill, and are half-way through the renovation at Exton. Using historically reliable demographic data, it is projected that these developments will generate about 750 new students by the year 2023-24:

- a. **Projected additional elementary students – 505**
- b. **Projected additional middle school students – 56**
- c. **Projected additional high school students - 188**

The district is currently adding space as it renovates schools. For example, we added six rooms at Fern Hill via an addition, and are in the process of adding five additional rooms to Exton and East Goshen via additions to accommodate growth in the northern part of the district. Single-family homes, townhomes and apartments can be built in about 90-180 days, while it takes a school district two to three years to build classroom space because we face three levels of governmental regulations and approvals. We need to accelerate our construction schedule to keep up with space needs.

2. **Didn't we just complete a demographic study and redistrict students?**

Yes, in 2013 we completed a demographic study and the following year we redistricted about 500 students: 342 elementary, 76 middle and 108 high school students. This was about 5% of our total student population (at about 11,400 at the time of redistricting in the 2014-15 school year.) Because enrollment was projected to decline to 11,510 students by 2018, we believed the plan would be good for 10 years unless there was an unforeseen influx of housing projects. That is what we're currently facing.

3. **Did the last demographer's study include future developments?**

Yes, the 2013 Demographer's study included the 1,469 units in the discussion stages for possible approval. The largest included Crebilly Farms, which at the time was being planned for age-restricted homes and apartment dwellings, and would yield fewer than 50 students. The latest plans, which were recently rejected by the township but are likely to be presented again, include more single family home and townhomes, and are estimated to bring nearly 260 new students to the district. The Woodlands at Greystone in West Goshen Township was another large portion of land that developers were considering. That too had many age-restricted homes as part of the initial plans. There are 179 single family and 159 townhomes now approved for this development, expected to bring approximately 280 additional students.

Since 2016, there have been 2,798 living units approved by seven different municipalities in our school district. Other than the Crebilly Farms project, all are approved, under construction, or ready for construction. This now creates a sense of urgency for the school district to plan for space in our schools.

4. Will the changes to the capital plan impact class sizes?

No, it actually will help us to maintain our current class size guidelines. This is part of why we feel it's important to provide additional space. Currently our class size guidelines are:

Kindergarten and 1st grade - maximum of 25

2nd and 3rd grade - maximum of 27

4th and 5th grade - maximum of 30

We have no plans to increase class sizes or change the guidelines.

5. Will we have to redistrict again?

Yes, because we are adding classrooms and a possibly a new school, we will have to move students into those spaces. Redistricting will not take place until space is built, in 2021 at the earliest, and we will do our very best to maintain feeder patterns so that students will not have to change middle and high schools.

7. Did full day kindergarten have an impact on enrollment growth?

Yes, as we experienced five consecutive years of declining enrollment, the board took action to bring back students to fill some of the vacated seats. In March of 2016, it approved a full day kindergarten program to be implemented in fall, 2017. We increased kindergarten enrollment by 162 students, and 85 students returned from charter schools in grades K-3. This influx of charter school students yielded charter school tuition savings of approximately \$1 million to help offset the cost of the full day kindergarten program.

8. When will the board make a decision about addressing space?

The Board will review options at the February 20 Property and Finance Committee meeting. It hopes to make a decision sometime this spring.

9. How soon will space be built?

We estimate the need to build 37 elementary classroom spaces to by the year 2023-24. This includes replacing 12 modular classrooms and adding 25 additional classrooms.

OPTION 1 - Build a new elementary - about 500 - 600 kids (keeps them all about the same size) behind the Wawa on Pottstown Pike in West Whiteland Township - where the heart of new development is taking place. We own the property because 14 years ago our school district used power of eminent domain to purchase land from Greystone as it was sold to developers, since we anticipated this need for space. *This is the administration's preferred option and is our recommendation.*

Option 2 - Build a large 850 student elementary school, close Mary C. Howse and move its students into the new school along with other new students.

Option 3 - Add additions onto existing 10 schools – This is the plan we have been following for the past five years, and it is now inadequate.

10. How will the district accommodate space while the schools are under construction?

As with any construction project, we use temporary space such as modular classrooms, space available in other buildings, and adjust internal space to accommodate needs during construction.

11. How much will the construction cost?

Each option being considered costs the average taxpayer approximately \$6.80 per year for 20 years, or a total of \$138. The staffing costs are estimated to be \$3.3 million annually.

12. How will this be funded?

Initially, the board will need to build these costs into the annual budget and remain within the tax limits established by the Act 1 Index. Once developers have built the homes, the district will realize new tax revenue. If all 2,798 living units are built, we estimate approximately \$7 million in new tax revenue.

13. What happens if the board does not approve new space?

The district will need to add more modular classrooms in order to accommodate growth. We may have to increase class size to accommodate growth. We could also look at other options such as using classroom space at our high schools to house elementary students.