



## Willow Lake School Board considering building expansion

A crowd of approximately 60 people attended the Willow Lake School long-term public forum, held last Wednesday at the Willow Lake School auditorium.

Willow Lake School Board president Julayne Thoreson began the special public meeting of the school board by explaining how attempts to solve specific and individual problems triggered talk of the broader and long-term picture, leading up to the current expansion discussion.

Superintendent Chris Lee and Thoreson, along with school board members Trav Bratland, Tia Felberg, Jared Knock and Randy Nelson, plus business manager Melissa Burke laid out that the goal of this public forum meeting was to inform the stakeholders of how this process went and to present and get feedback on the board's plan to initiate a bond issue to finance a substantial building addition plus a partial redesign of the existing school complex.

Architects Tom Hurlbert and Spencer Summers of Co-Op Architects, used a slide presentation to compare the 2011-12 school year with the 2020-21 school year. This presentation covered student data, state aid funding, fund balances, cost per student average daily membership (ADM), tax base valuations and tax levy (per \$1,000 of value).

In the fall of 2011, the K-12 enrollment was 185 students, and in the fall of 2021 the enrollment number was 282, up 97 students, or 52 percent over ten years. The school district's tax base was \$174,000,000 in 2011 and \$446,000,000 in 2020, while the levy in 2011 was three to four times the 2020 levy, depending on the property type classification.

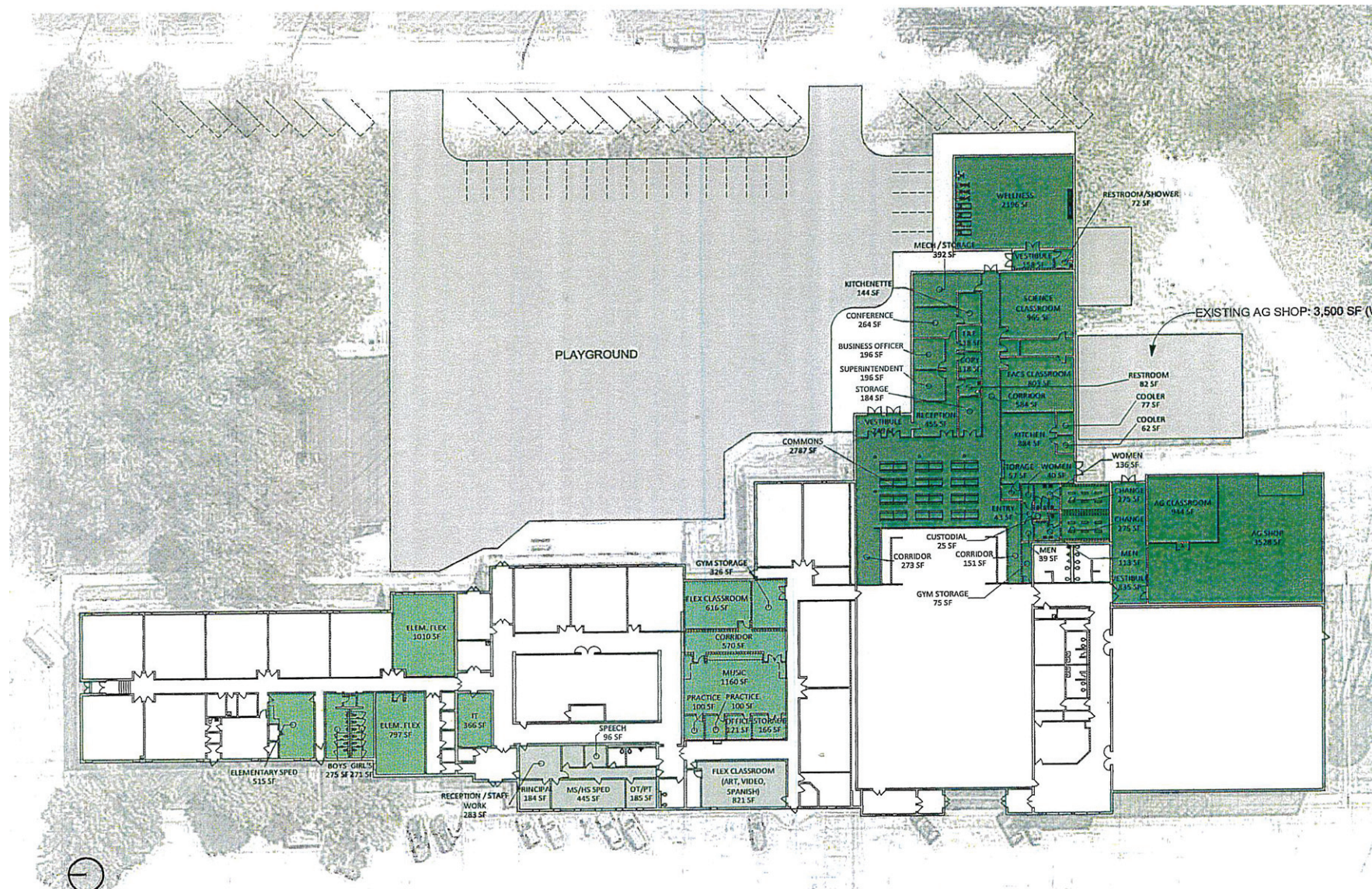
Financial expert Tom Grimmond, of Colliers Securities, LLC of Sioux

Falls, explained that the timing for a bond issue is still good with low interest rates and good markets, but with the caveat of rates rising, it adds some urgency to make a decision soon to take advantage of the relatively low rates.

The process of a bond issue was explained by Grimmond, saying that the school board has the legal authority to proceed with the bond issue and with the construction project, and it will be voted on by the constituents. The next step is for the school board to decide whether to pursue a bond issue to start the process. That could take place at the next regular or special school board meeting.

Grimmond continued that if this project is approved quickly, even with a successful petition, and moves right along, the bond issue could be done this summer, July or August, then detailed planning could start immediately after that, with bid-letting taking place in the winter when contractors are planning for the next season's work. "Getting bids while contractors are planning is important to getting multiple bids and thereby competition into the bidding to keep cost down," said Grimmond.

Construction could start in the spring of 2023 about one year from now, noted by Grimmond. The major construction, meaning the addition and related work, would likely take about one year to compete. Renovation of the existing building could mostly, or even all, be done during summer 2024 while school is not in session, but if it's not finished before school starts in summer 2024, work could continue into the school session without too much disruption of school operations because the new areas would be us-



Willow Lake school plans for a nearly \$10 million expansion and renovation project over the next two years pending a \$9 million bond issue passage. Planning is in the early stages with further development pending the success of the bond issuance. A preferred plan is illustrated and

able by then. In addition to the favored plan, two alternative plans were shown along with cost comparisons. Some pro and con discussion for each plan were offered with a focus on traffic

flow inside and outside the building, parking, playground, aesthetics, drainage and water management, safety, accessibility, and constraints of property available. The image accompanying this story shows the

two alternatives are under consideration as well. A public meeting was held April 20 to present the plans to the stakeholders and ask for support of a bond issue to raise the funding.

preferred plan. One of the proposed major improvements is a new multi-functional commons area that will serve as dining area on a daily basis and as an attractive public area for

multi-use. Being directly behind the old gym stage, that wall could be opened up to allow the stage to be used from the commons side as

**Willow Lake School**  
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## Colors of Spring presented by Clark Elementary musicians at Tuesday's concert

Colors of Spring was the theme of the Clark Elementary Spring Concert held Tuesday, April 19, at the Clark High School gym.

Each class presented one or more songs which included: "Chili Caliente" by the fifth graders, "Nothing Rhymes with Orange" by the preschool and kindergarten classes, "Yellow Submarine" and "Spongebob Squarepants" by the fourth graders, "Green" by the first graders, "Blue Suede Shoes" by the third graders, "Purple People Eater" by the second graders and "Pirates of the Caribbean" and "Pink Panther" by the fifth

grade band. Above left, the first grade class sings "Green." Above right, the third graders are having fun with their 'Blue Suede Shoes.' Pictured left to right are Cohen Stiefel, Payson LaPlante, Ewan Henning and Jayven Dunbar. Tabitha Schmidt is the elementary music teacher.

## Federal money provides much needed boost to capacity of Lewis & Clark water system

Stu Whitney  
South Dakota News Watch

The Lewis & Clark Regional Water System, which serves Sioux Falls and other population centers in eastern South Dakota, has received a record amount of federal funding at just the right time to accommodate surging populations and drought conditions.

The new money will move the original system closer to full completion while also making possible expansion that is crucial in the processing and delivery of fresh water to much of southeastern South Dakota.

Tapping into an aquifer adjacent to the Missouri River south of Vermillion, the wholesale provider serves 15 community members in

South Dakota, Iowa and Minnesota – including Sioux Falls and neighboring cities Harrisburg, Lennox and Tea. Though Sioux Falls has other water sources such as the Big Sioux Aquifer, smaller cities that rely solely on Lewis & Clark such as Beresford, Centerville and Parker exceeded their expected amount of water usage last summer.

That increase in demand could challenge the system's ability to collect, treat and deliver water for residential and agricultural use at a time when nearly half of South Dakota faces either severe or extreme drought conditions, according to data from the National Drought Mitigation Center.

The enhanced system that Lewis & Clark has been trying to com-

plete since breaking ground in 2003 – which treats the water and stores it in wells before distributing it through pipelines – would deliver a total of 44.1 million gallons a day to its members and reach an estimated 350,000 people. But that project is not yet complete.

Last year, Lewis & Clark ran at a maximum capacity of 32.2 million gallons a day and came close to hitting that amount of usage during the summer months, forcing administrators to consider throttling back distribution.

"We put out a plea to members to voluntarily reduce their consumption to the degree they were able," said Troy Larson, director of the water system. "Their collective efforts brought us back from the

brink."

Beyond completing the original blueprint, which could happen in the next few years, expansion of the system is already planned, with increased storage and the goal of pushing capacity to 60 million gallons a day by 2030, a project funded by the system's members.

"That expansion is driven by the drought," said Larson. "But just because we're starting it now doesn't mean it will be done tomorrow. It's not a phased deal. Until we finish, there won't be an additional drop of water beyond those (44.1 million) gallons."

That could make for an interesting summer, especially with construction of a new collector well near the Missouri River south of

Vermillion slowed by shipping delays. The well, built to extract and process groundwater from the aquifer, was scheduled to be completed in early June but could now stretch into September, adding stress not just on residential use but agricultural and economic development.

Jesse Fonkert, president and CEO of the Sioux Metro Growth Alliance, said his group has had to turn away several agriculture-based development projects in the Sioux Falls area over the past year because of the inability to meet large-scale water demands.

"There are several that we got to the final stage on, but the water component is key," said Fonkert. "The state is doing a good job of going out and recruiting these proj-

ects, but the challenge locally is having enough land and utility to

**Lewis & Clark Water**  
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### WEATHER

Robert Cole - Official  
Weather Observer

|                            | HI   | LO | PR   |
|----------------------------|------|----|------|
| April 19 .....             | 49   | 19 | 0    |
| April 20 .....             | 42   | 23 | 0.25 |
| April 21 .....             | 58   | 30 | 0.36 |
| April 22 .....             | 54   | 30 | 0    |
| April 23 .....             | 68   | 47 | 0.07 |
| April 24 .....             | 72   | 34 | 0.12 |
| April 25 .....             | 38   | 26 | 0    |
| 2022 precipitation to date | 2.60 |    |      |
| 2021 precipitation to date | 4.81 |    |      |