

The November 3, 2015 Referendum and Planning Process:

“The primary ingredient for progress is optimism. The unwavering belief that something can be better drives the human race forward.”

School Board President, Curt McMahon, shared this quote after the referendum passed and said it epitomized the process we used and the Facility Committee’s work.

Facility Committee Members:

<u>Community:</u>	<u>District:</u>	<u>Expert Consultants:</u>
Larry Kalina	Curt McMahon- Board member	Brad Bierman –EPIC Construction
Bill Uppena	Craig Bierman- Board member	Heather Feigum –CESA 10
Bill Whitaker	Rick Kruser- Board member	Rachel Zimmer – Zimmer Architect
Jeannie Udelhofen	Jamie Pierce- Building/Grounds	Dawn Eikamp –Jeffry Morton Associates
Joe O’Connell	Keith Oyen- Technology Specialist	
Ron Blum	Mark Siegert- Athletic Director	
Sharon Adkins	Mike Uppena- K-12 Principal	
Ted Bode	Ron Saari- Superintendent	
Curt Hart		

School Board Members:

Curt McMahon	President
Tina Schroeder	Vice President
Craig Bierman	Clerk
Peggy Udelhoven	Treasurer
Trisha Reuter	WASB Rep
Wayne Weber	CESA 3 Rep
Rick Kruser	Member

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Facility Committee

Standing: Ron Blum, Sharon Adkins, Craig Bierman, Mike Uppena, Bill Uppena

Sitting: Ron Saari, Keith Oyen, Larry Kalina, Jamie Pierce, Bill Whitaker

Not Present: Jeannie Udelhofen, Joe O’Connell, Ted Bode, Curt Hart, Curt McMahon,
Rick Kruser, and Mark Siegert

We identified 9 Factors or Categories that helped to make the Referendum a Success:

1. Facility Committee – “Its makeup, focus and teamwork”
2. Two Year Process – “patient, positive, and focused”
3. Facility Tours – “showing the community our needs”
4. Collaborative Teamwork Approach – “no drama”
5. The Board – “unanimous support”
6. Facility Plan itself – “well thought out and reasonable”
7. Communication with Community and Stakeholders
“Was objective and focused on information, not selling something”
8. Fine Arts Club – “showed the community we were committed”
9. Bonus Factors – things that were beyond our control that contributed

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1. **Facility Committee** – (this group was key to the whole process)
 - Community members and parents made up most of the committee, and it included a good representation or cross section of our District’s stakeholders.
 - Approximately 23 meetings in total with around 12 consistent members attending.
 - Included 3 Board members and 4 key staff members. Having Board members on the committee may have been a first for Potosi. It ensured for the Board that there were no surprises. Having the building and grounds coordinator as a leader on the committee was valuable.
 - The diversity of the committee was commented by many as a positive element.
 - The committee members were invested in the process and the outcome. There were no private agendas.
 - The committee listened to the community. People told the committee what was important and what they prioritized. The plan came from them rather than top down.
 - Initially identified facility needs.
 - Research of new facilities and educational best practice was shared with the committee.
 - Put a plan together to address actual needs and was reasonably priced.
 - Rumor reporting and dispelling was part of the committee’s discussion topics each month.
 - Having a local construction company (EPIC) available to tap into for information during the process was helpful. They provided added value in the planning stages as well with their contacts. They provided free advice which also made the architect’s job much easier.
 - Ted Bode’s (local community member), participation and input was valuable regarding the history of what had been done to the building in the past.
 - The District truly listened to the community, there was no lip service.
 - The amount of work the committee did also contributed to the referendum’s success. There is no substitute for hard work. We had many hours of meetings and presentations. The members were focused and determined.
 - We took a group of diverse individuals that were interested in our school and we molded them into a winning team.
 - The Facility Committee’s discussion of the prioritizing of the plan’s pieces was valuable for the committee members and took a bulk of the time.
 - The voting for the plan was such a “no brainer,” many of us couldn’t believe we had 100 no votes. We learned that we don’t need to get worried about the no votes, they will always be there. They will vote no if their taxes increase by \$1.00 a year. Instead, we focused on the plan and were positive. We will never convince 100% of the people, so don’t worry about them.

2. **Two year process:**
 - Provided time to answer questions from community, build support, and educate community
 - The amount of time allowed the public to gather information
 - The 2 year process was time well spent. Had we pushed for a vote sooner, we wouldn’t have had the high percentage of votes or of voters.
 - Initially there were a lot of people who said we wouldn’t be successful in our referendum work. It took a long time for people to understand that this would happen. It takes people a while to process things and think them through.
 - If we would have hurried the process, it possibly would have created mistrust and people would wonder why we are moving so fast, are we trying to hide something.
 - There was an energy to move through the process faster, but we resisted and it paid off.

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3. Facility Tours:

- Jamie conducted 25 tours of the building showing people the concerns
- Members of the Facility Committee contacted and invited community members convincing them to take tour (approximately 20% of community took the tour).
- Post-tour survey results were taken into consideration by Facility Committee
- Transparency – everything was open to the public. People could attend meetings, participate in the tours, and ask questions.
- The tours showed the District’s willingness to show the building issues, which were appreciated by the community.
- We had trouble getting parents to show up for the tours, but they did turn out to vote.

4. Collaborative teamwork Approach:

- It wasn’t one person trying to lead the charge by themselves. Instead a group of people assembled, worked as a team, and were very transparent. No one felt something was being hid. This was an open book approach and was different from the District’s previous attempts
- Ron, Jamie, and Larry (nucleus team) met weekly to brainstorm and focus
- Nucleus team discussion drove that month’s Facility Committee agenda and that month’s Fine Art Club agenda
- The teams (Board, Nucleus Team, Facility Committee, Fine Arts Club) worked well together, stayed focused, were collaborative, and problem solved in a positive manner with little to no fighting
- Timelines were created and we stuck to them – we didn’t let them slip and we stayed focus on our purpose
- The process that we used was collaborative. We didn’t have two opposing sides or different editorials appearing in the paper. Our process cut out all the drama. It was low key and had people focused to work to get something done. We brought out the best in people instead of the worst. There wasn’t any negativity. The process and the time invested to get it right seemed to solidify the community. This process was educational and informative with no “spin” either way.
- A lot of the people who voted yes felt good about it. They felt they had something to do to make it happen. The process and their vote brought ownership into the referendum for them.

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5. The Board:

- The negotiation process with Mr. Livens regarding his donation was long and difficult. The Board stayed positive, optimistic, and persuasive as they worked with Mr. Livens and his friend Ryan.
- The level of diplomacy and persistence that was used, back channel conversations and assistance from Dave Fritz, a friend of Mr. Livens, were all beneficial.
- Finally, Mr. Livens was informed that he either get the money he promised to donate, or the District was going in a different direction with the facility plan. This ultimatum caused Mr. Livens to act.
- The Board was unanimous behind the committee’s recommendation.
- The Board was 100% behind the process the facility committee was using.
- The Board was very appreciative of the Facility Committee’s work. It made the Board’s work easier. There was no uncertainty on the Board. No contentious Board meetings about the plan or the referendum. A united Board supported the plan and had confidence in the committee.
- Board members attended WASB workshops regarding referendum planning and facility planning.

6. Facility Plan:

- A Focus on safety, health, and energy efficiency resonated with parents and community
- The committee initially included work for the gym area, however we moved away from that due to community input and instead focused on educational issues. The committee had a laundry list of things to do. Over time some of them were discarded. Only the important ones were included on the referendum.

- The plan was the community’s plan or the committee’s plan, not the Board’s plan. It reflected the wishes of the community.
- Reasonably priced. Other area referendum costs were much higher. The referendum attempted in the year 2000 started out too high for the community to accept. That referendum also included several different items and areas that in the end the community didn’t support. The 2015 referendum plan demonstrated the need and the fact that we need to take care of our building. The rationale was strong.
- Made sense – focused on 4 key areas
- No back up plan or plan B. We were asked what we would do if the referendum failed. We told the community that we wouldn’t go back to the electorate again if it failed. We informed the community that this was our one and only attempt. Partly because the \$400,000 gift went back to Mr. Livens if the referendum attempt failed (we only had one “kick at the can”) and partly because everything in the referendum was necessary, there were no frills that we could cut and come back with a lower price.
- The improvements included in the plan were repairs that needed to happen. The auditorium was just a lift. The auditorium may not have been included without the \$400,000 gift.

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7. Communication with Community / Stakeholders:

- a. The plan was the communities plan or the committee’s plan, not the Board’s plan.
- b. The multiple efforts to communicate with the public was important. A number of avenues were used throughout the whole 2 year process.
- c. We didn’t want to be offensive to people or try to sell the plan to people. Our message was to share facts with the community and not be persuasive.
- d. Bottom Line flier from Superintendent’s desk to community sharing information about the plan, process, and referendum
- e. The election date included confusion:
 - 1.) It was a special election
 - 2.) We closed down 3 polling locations due to a history of low voter turnout and an effort to save tax dollars
 - 3.) It was the first election that required voter ID. These first three items were focused on through our fliers and community presentations.
 - 4.) The day before the election one of the municipalities was informed that the road construction work that had been going on since May would receive black top which would close down the street where the town hall (voting location) was located. One of our committee members heard about this change in plans regarding the black top and contacted that village’s supervisor to see if the contractor could hold off for one day. The supervisor also place signs at both ends of the road stating that the road was open and voting could take place.
- f. The letter writing campaign to Mr. Livens (which included letters from community members, his old classmates, parents, students, teachers, administration, board).
- g. 12 newspaper articles (Lancaster Herald Independent, Platteville Journal, Dubuque Telegraph Herald).
 - Articles began in December 2014
- h. Facility Brochures – main brochure, mailed brochure June, mailed brochure Oct.
- i. Facility Fliers – 4 different fliers used to go out to parents
 - The last flier that was mailed was clear, practical, and easy to understand.
 - Flier formats and basic information didn’t change over the 2 year period.
- j. Referendum tab on website sharing information
- k. Addressed parents at Spring Musical about the facility plan
- l. Paragraph about referendum read before football and volleyball games
- m. Addressed parents at Code Meeting
- n. Band letter to Band Parents
- o. FAQ document
- p. Update meetings with the staff so they could positively communicate facts
- q. 10 paid (15 second ads) on radio week prior to referendum.
- r. Facebook pages (School Districts and Fine Art Clubs):
 - Several people (Emily, Kaitlyn, Laura, and Keith) involved in weekly updates
 - Having a recently graduated student lead a social media blitz to get 18-20 year olds registered to vote and to use absentee ballots
- s. 18 community presentations in June and again in October
 - simple conversations touching on the highlights of the plan with Q and A.
 - Going to the community to share information on their turf (we didn’t ask them to come to us), with a clear and consistent message had an impact. The information didn’t change.

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- These meetings may have included 60 different people. However, those people extended the message to their spouses, parents, children, neighbors, and friends.
- t. Automated Skylert email messages, texts, and voicemail messages reminding them to vote
- u. The Superintendent’s Student Cabinet was used to share information with and to solicit input and feedback from. The student Character Council requested to participate by having a mock referendum election the day prior to the real election. All students who voted received an “I Voted” sticker to wear home to remind parents to vote.
- v. We never pushed people or told people how to vote. Instead we objectively shared the information and let the plan sell itself. We focused on letting everyone know we needed their vote, which every way they vote was fine, we just wanted them to turn out to the polls. A lot of people did turn out to the polls even though it was a special election with this only item on the ballot. Parent turnout was high as well.
- w. We intentionally did not put up referendum signs around the community
- x. We intentionally didn’t create a Vote Yes committee, instead we used the Fine Arts Committee to educate through fundraising activities
- y. We intentionally didn’t use kids or staff nor put them in the advertisements

8. Fine Arts Club:

- Fundraising for auditorium demonstrated to community we were serious and that we had skin in the game
- Kept community’s focus on the facility plan due to our education efforts during fundraising events
- Lends itself to positive public relations
- Our willingness to fundraise was intended to keep the cost of the referendum down.

9. Bonus Factors: (Things that we were fortunate happened, or already existed, and we couldn’t control):

- \$400,000 gift from Keith Livens which cut down on the project’s cost
 - Community and staff writing campaign to Mr. Livens
 - 2 different Board member outreach meetings to Mr. Livens
 - Several communications and efforts to Mr. Livens
- QZAB zero interest loan possibility due to the \$400,000 gift
- EPIC construction preliminary pro-bono work with District
- All the other area school referendums were for much larger amounts than ours which made our \$2.3 million figure appear more palatable or reasonable to some in our community.
- The political climate in the State created increased awareness regarding school funding and that school funding as decreased over the last several years. Our facility proposal didn’t ask the taxpayers for “fun” things, but for necessary things.
- Security and safety concerns have occurred nationally for several years. Since we were behind this curve, many people felt we should address this issue.