



Jean Matua "From the Heart"

Exploring the cost and tax impact of the Kimball school district referendum

Our schools need our help (still, again)

The Kimball school district has put together a referendum for the Aug. 9 election. Two questions for voters that, if both are passed, will provide \$10.4 million for needed facilities improvements at both the elementary and high school.

The Eden Valley-Watkins school district is working on an operating levy to put to voters as well. When put to voters, if passed, this will provide funds to continue operations of the district in the face of deficits.

Everyone in the world, quite literally, is facing an economic pinch at every turn. Food, fuel, clothing, utilities ... every single thing we need for daily life. Businesses everywhere face the same challenges.

There is a huge difference between a school district and any household or business, though.

Families and individuals must make tough choices: cut down on consumption of goods and services that are increasing in cost, or tap into savings to pay for them. Simple accounting systems work for families and individuals: Don't spend more money than you have.

Businesses can shift to less costly goods, and/or pass on their price increases to their consumers ... that is, us. Although businesses may have more options to borrow money to meet expenses, or operate in debt, but the same rule can apply to healthy businesses: Don't spend what you don't have.

But schools don't have either option. They are mandated by state and federal programs to provide various services with the promise of reimbursement some time within the coming three years. They can't simply pass on increased costs to their consumers, nor can they eliminate any of these mandated services.

The "system" is rigged to force schools to spend money they won't have for months or years. And then government plays games with those expected funds,

dangling them as a prize, or using them as a threat. Government often uses the promise of additional funds as a cruel tool to try to get schools to stop begging for more funds. It's a vicious cycle, and no one wins.

School districts are the only government bodies (and the only businesses, for that matter) that must go to voters to get the funds that pay for their operations: Taxpayers must vote to increase their own taxes in order to meet the financial needs that the government fails to meet.

For more than 22 years now, I have observed school board meetings. I've seen them during thick and thin, at their best and at their worst. I've watched them make painful decisions, cutting staff and programs for lack of needed funding. But districts can cut programs only so much and still be able to provide the education our students and communities deserve.

The last building project was in Eden Valley-Watkins, making crucial repairs and changes to their original 1927 high school, among other things.

Now it's the turn of Kimball dealing with the remaining "original" portions of the high school from the early '70s, and other facility needs.

These decisions are not made lightly, and our school boards do not seek to increase taxes except as a final resort, when all else – including government – has failed them.

As taxpayers, it is our responsibility to support our schools, to do our due diligence to learn about the needs and the remedies. Go to the open houses, watch the school board video (or attend a meeting), ask questions of the superintendent.

And then vote to support our schools. It's not only in the interest of our students and staff, but it's best for the future of our communities.

The primary election is less than three weeks away, and early voting is available now through Aug. 8. Because the ballot includes an important decision about the future of Kimball Area Public Schools, the district has been working hard to ensure voters understand the details of the proposed referendum, its benefits and, of course, the cost and tax impact.

Community feedback helped the district develop an investment plan to improve building safety and security, provide students with new educational spaces, and update critical infrastructure. To finance these investments, we are asking voters to consider two referendum questions on Aug. 9.

Question One requests \$8.1 million to finance investments in safety and educational space and programming. Last year's indoor air quality project came in \$2 million under budget, and Question One also seeks approval to redirect that surplus towards these improvements.

Question Two requests \$2.3 million for a new playground for preschoolers and resurfaced parking lots at the elementary and high

schools. Question Two cannot pass unless Question One also passes.

If approved, the district would be able to finance these improvements over 20 years. Bonds function like a mortgage on a home, allowing all necessary investments to take place now while paying off the cost over time. The State of Minnesota sets the tax rate for the bonds based on the county's assessment of property values.

Voters in 226 Minnesota school districts have approved bond referenda over the past 10 years. Construction costs increase yearly, so it is less expensive to pay the interest on bonds rather than complete multiple construction projects over many years.

With costs outlined, voters may wonder what property tax impact they would see if these questions are approved. A residential home in the district with a median value of \$200,000 would see an estimated property tax increase of \$8 per month starting in 2023. The school district has provided a tax calculator on the project website, OurCubsOurFuture.org, so that property owners can determine how the plan will impact their

taxes. Minnesota offers a 70% Ag2School tax credit for agricultural landowners on all agricultural property except the house, garage, and one acre surrounding the homestead. This is not a tax deduction – it is an automatic dollar-for-dollar credit with no application required. The state would pay for an estimated 17% of the referendum, or \$1.8 million, using this tax credit.

The district wants to maximize the value the referendum would provide for its cost, so we have focused on our most critical needs as determined by a community survey and feedback from staff, community leaders, and agricultural landowners.

The district wants to ensure our residents and voters have all the information they need to make an informed decision on this referendum. If you have any questions, you can contact me directly via email at erik.widvey@kimball.k12.mn.us or by phone at (320) 398-5585, ext. 1332.

Erik Widvey
Kimball Area School District Superintendent

Proper mowing practices for a healthy lawn

By Kaitlyn Czeck, U of M Ext.

During the summer with warm weather and lots of water, our lawns seem to be growing faster than we can mow them. Mowing is a crucial part of keeping our lawns well maintained. With how much we mow our lawns, it is important that it is being done properly. Proper practice while mowing can help your lawn grow fuller and healthier.

Mowing height and sharpness of the blades greatly impacts how the grass in your lawn will regrow. Mowing too short will add stress to the grass plants making them take longer to recover. It is recommended that grass should be kept at a minimum length of 3 inches. Having taller grass in your yard will shade out weed seeds and keep the soil cooler. In addition, taller grasses tend to have longer roots that will aid in withstanding drought and reaching nutrients.

When mowing grass, it is

recommended that you take off a maximum of 1/3 the length of the plant to avoid shocking the plant. Keeping grasses longer in dry conditions may help with toleration of heat stress and drying winds. Keeping the grass height lower during winter will help prevent diseases that can occur over winter and will also help deter vole activity. Grasses can be mowed up until October. This is usually when grasses stop growing. Dull blades will cause more damage to the grass leaves than sharper blades. Using a dull blade to cut will leave the tips of grass frayed which will leave your lawn brown. Cutting grass with a sharp blade will make them less susceptible to diseases and help the grass to conserve water. Changing mowing directions each time you mow can promote the upright growth of grass and can prevent continuous scalping in areas with a higher ground level.

Leaving the clipping on the lawn can be very beneficial for your lawn. Lawn clippings can decompose quickly which will recycle nutrients back into your lawn. They can also improve your soil quality and minimize runoff. If grass clippings are longer, mulching them by mowing over them will help decomposition.

Practicing proper mowing techniques will help your lawn to grow fuller and greener leaving you with a healthy good-looking lawn.

Information for this article can be found at the University of Minnesota and Colorado State University, visit <https://z.umn.edu/mowingpractices>, <https://z.umn.edu/CSUlawncare>.

Residents of Stearns, Benton, and Morrison Counties can direct questions to me, Kaitlyn Czeck, to either my email czeck020@umn.edu or call my desk phone at (320) 255-6169, ext. 3.

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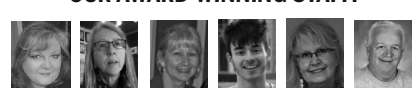
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