

Q&A: Information on vote for potential baseball/softball fields



Voters in the Louisburg school district will head to the polls Nov. 4 to decide whether to approve a bond measure that would fund the construction of new baseball and softball fields for Louisburg High School. The proposal has generated plenty of discussion in the community, with supporters citing the need for modern, on-campus facilities and opponents raising questions about costs and priorities.

On the ballot is a vote for new multipurpose baseball and softball fields. USD 416 is proposing to add two new multipurpose fields to the existing infrastructure and upgrade the two current fields.

To learn more about what's at stake, Louisburg Sports Zone spoke with Superintendent Dr. Brian Biermann (BB), school board member Jo Erin Stuteville (JS), and head baseball coach Kade Larson (KL) about the details of the project, why it's being proposed, and what it could mean for students and the community moving forward.

LSZ: What Does This Project Entail?

JS: Two new fields will be added between the high school and middle school. Upgrades will also be made to the current practice fields south of Wildcat Drive, transforming them into competition fields for JV games with dugouts, bleachers, and ADA accessibility.

The varsity fields will be equipped with low-impact sports lighting that directs all light onto the field to reduce any impact on nearby residents. The two new fields will be fully turfed, while the two JV fields will remain natural grass surfaces.

As an effort to keep the project cost as low as possible, this plan allows use of the current parking lots at the middle school as well as the high school staff parking lot. Restrooms and concessions in the middle school will be utilized, eliminating the need for additional electrical or plumbing costs since these facilities are already in place.

LSZ: How Will These Fields Benefit the Community?

KL: These multipurpose fields will serve far more than just the LHS baseball and softball teams.

The LHS Band and Dance Team are especially excited about the new turf space, which will give them a consistent, dry, and level surface for practice – no more dodging soggy, uneven grass or walking to the stadium and wasting valuable practice time.

The PE Departments at both LHS and LMS will also benefit, as every student from sixth through ninth grade will have access to these fields during physical education classes. The middle school and high school football teams can use the space for practices when the stadium is occupied by other events.

The fields can also be utilized for LRC sports, providing additional space for baseball and tee-ball games, as well as opportunities to mark temporary lines in the outfields for soccer, flag football, and other community sports.

Currently, the LHS baseball and softball teams practice at the fields south of Wildcat Drive and play their home games at Lewis-Young Park. The new fields would allow teams to practice and compete in the same location. Presently, baseball doubleheaders require splitting coaching staff because JV and varsity cannot play simultaneously at Lewis-Young.

Additionally, the current practice fields often become unplayable for days at a time due to rain, forcing teams indoors. The lack of shelter at Lewis-Young also poses safety concerns during sudden storms. Bussing students back and forth adds another logistical challenge and cost.

LSZ: How Will This Be Funded?

JS: USD 416 will enter into a 10-year lease-purchase agreement to fund the project, with payments made through the Capital Outlay Fund. The district secured a highly competitive interest rate of 4.24 percent, with no prepayment penalty, and has applied for grants to help offset costs. The district anticipates paying off the loan in as little as seven years, which would reduce overall interest expense.

LSZ: Why Is Now a Good Time to Take On This Project?

BB: This project will be funded with no increase to the mill rate – meaning property taxes will not rise because of it. The Board of Education understands concerns about rising taxes and has created a fiscal plan to fund the project using the existing 8-mill Capital Outlay Fund, which cannot legally be increased beyond 8 mills.

LSZ: Why Turf Instead of Natural Grass for the Two Varsity Fields?

JS: Simply put, turf allows for maximum usage. As long as it's not raining or storming, the fields can be used.

Financially, turf makes long-term sense. The district installed turf at the football stadium in 2019, covering about 96,000 square feet. That field costs approximately \$2,500 per year to maintain. If it had remained grass, maintenance would run closer to \$35,000 per year for mowing, fertilizing, watering, spraying, and general upkeep.

The two new turf fields will cover about 160,000 square feet (1.67 times larger) at a cost of just over \$700,000. With a minimum 15-year life expectancy and a full 8-year warranty, the investment is sound. Maintenance and insurance combined are estimated at \$6,000 per year, roughly equal to what the district currently spends maintaining that same area in its existing condition.

LSZ: Why Not Upgrade the Fields at Lewis-Young Park Instead?

BB: There are several issues with that option. First is ownership – The Lewis-Young fields are owned by the City of Louisburg. Roughly half of the USD 416 tax base resides outside city limits, meaning district funds would be used to upgrade city-owned property.

Second, there are legal restrictions – The Kansas Attorney General has stated that school districts cannot use Capital Outlay Funds to improve facilities they do not own.

Third, is a bond limitation. The only way to use district funds at Lewis-Young would be through a bond issue, which would increase the mill levy for all citizens.

Who Can Vote on This?

KL: Anyone residing within the USD 416 District is eligible to vote – it is not limited to Louisburg city residents.

A “Yes” vote on November 4th will allow the district to move forward with building these multipurpose baseball and softball fields and upgrading the existing fields south of Wildcat Drive.