

Bond may bring new area schools

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Three long-discussed but now-dormant proposals for new schools in the South Bay and Harbor Area may be revived if a \$7 billion bond measure is passed by voters in November.

The construction bond plan, the Los Angeles Unified School District's fifth in a decade, is up for a vote today before the Board of Education.

The three campuses - two in the Gardena area and one in the Harbor Area - have been talked about over the years but in October were placed on an "unfunded list" of 18 projects that the board deemed unnecessary to meet the district's goal of ending multitrack, year-round enrollment.

"These are projects that have been previously defined by the Board of Education, and one or more may be built using proceeds from the proposed bonds," said Roderick Hamilton, the district's regional development manager.

The three proposed schools remain on the bureaucratic backburner, but plans could get cooking again if the bond measure is approved and the board moves to allocate funds for the postponed campuses, Hamilton said.

The 18 schools on the "unfunded list" are among those projects named in the bond language before the board today. The projects are listed as eligible to use the proceeds from the potential bond, which is largely focused on the repair and modernization of existing facilities.

The bond - and the inclusion of the three campuses - would give the district the flexibility to respond to future enrollment changes, said school board member Richard Vladovic, who represents the area from San Pedro to Watts.

"As we look at the demographics, it allows us to expand. If you don't have some money, you can't do it," Vladovic said. "Those (three schools) are just where the need was or could be."

Enrollment at LAUSD is expected to continue an ongoing decline through approximately 2013, according to the district's projections. Nonetheless, many campuses remain crowded and reliant on portable trailers for classroom space.

The three local projects have been talked about in the past as necessary for relieving such conditions, but some met community resistance.

South Region High School No. 14 - which was proposed for a number of Harbor Area locations, including land in San Pedro slated for the controversial Ponte Vista residential development - provoked the creation of a community group that opposed the plan, which was dropped.

Vladovic, who has backed an effort to build a smaller high school campus (known as South Region High School No. 15) that's on track for district land near Angels Gate Park, said the No. 14 plan would only be revived if needed to relieve overcrowding at 3,437-student Narbonne High School in Harbor City. The potential campus would be built nearby, he said.

"There's not going to be another San Pedro," Vladovic said. "It's on the books in case Narbonne needs it."

In Gardena, district officials struggled several years ago with plans to build a sixth-to-eighth-grade campus to relieve 2,419-student Peary Middle School. Residents opposed a plan to convert an existing elementary school to a K-8 span school. Plans for a new elementary school also fell apart.

But at the district, the proposed campuses - a middle school in Gardena and an elementary school in the broader attendance area for Gardena, Locke and Washington high schools - still exist, at least in conceptual form.

"They're still looking at overcrowding in Gardena and they needed a placeholder just in case," Vladovic said.

Previous bond funding has been allocated for other new school projects in the region: in addition to the proposed campus near Angels Gate, a K-8 span school in Wilmington, a new high school on district property in Long Beach that would serve students from Carson and Wilmington, and an elementary school at Playa Vista.

The bond measure slated for November, if approved by the board, would also include upgrades for many existing local campuses.

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