

# PUSD's ongoing makeover

After nearly seven years, most Measure I1 projects have now been completed

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Spring has arrived in the Tri-Valley, which means the Pleasanton Unified School District is getting ready to sell bonds under Measure I – the \$395 million general obligation bond measure passed by voters last November that will go toward funding for school facility upgrades.

But as the district prepares to address key projects under that bond program, such as the construction of new gyms and theaters at both Amador Valley and Foothill high schools, it's also timely to take a look at all of the projects recently completed under Measure I1.

It's been nearly seven years since Pleasanton residents passed the \$270 million general obligation bond in November 2016, which was meant to address some of the \$856 million in identified facilities improvement needs estimated at that time.

And despite having faced certain setbacks due to the pandemic, district officials and other residents said that the Measure I1-funded work done during that time has not only helped create important new buildings and amenities for schools, but it has also set a precedent for how the district will carry out its new Measure I bond.

"I believe after watching the district deploy funds toward projects under I1, I think the district has done a good job," said Arne Olson, chairman of the Citizens' Bond Oversight Committee (CBOC).

The CBOC, which was formed after Measure I1 was passed, is an independent oversight committee that "assists in ensuring bond revenues are expended only for the purposes outlined in the bond project list," according to the PUSD website.

"There's a prime contractor who's been working with the district on Measure I1 and he will continue to be the key entity key person going forward with Measure I," said Olson, who is also a former Pleasanton city councilmember. "He's done a terrific job of providing us over time with new data on the projects.

So what exactly has been accomplished over the past seven years?

According to the 2022 district annual report, along with the reports from the previous two years, much of the district received some extreme makeovers.

About 35,000 square feet of new buildings were constructed including new science classroom buildings at Amador Valley and Foothill high schools and at Hart Middle School.

Amador's new buildings, which officially opened for student use on Feb. 15, 2022, includes six standard classrooms, two special education classrooms with support spaces and three science classrooms. The project also included parking and walkway improvements, new fencing and landscaping, and bathrooms within the building.

"My favorite part of that is within that building are two classrooms dedicated to our special education program," said Ahmad Sheikholeslami, assistant superintendent of business services, during a March 9 presentation. "Prior to this, they were in portables and had to walk over quite a long bit just to access bathrooms."

Foothill's new science building -- also known as the career technical education (CTE) building -- also received new parking, walkways, fencing and landscaping. The new building consists of three engineering classrooms, two computer labs and two science classrooms where students practice with things like flight simulators, computer hacking programs and much more.

The school has also used matching Measure I1 funds along with a state grant to begin the construction of a second CTE building in that same space, which would store things like 3D printers, laser cutters and other equipment that students use already.

"Before this, we were all scattered around campus and we were all in converted classrooms," Joshua Hill, chair of the CTE department, said during a walkthrough of the new space on March 9.

Hill, who helped write the grant that partially funded the second CTE building now under construction, said that the whole reason for these new spaces was to give students real-life job experience.

"We didn't want to just make classrooms ... what we wanted was to create a space that replicated what it'd be like for kids to be working," he said.

Students are already taking advantage of these new spaces by turning bicycles into motorcycles and shopping carts into self driving carts.

"It's been an amazing process to design a space like this," Hill said. "The students love being in here, and what we've been able to do already, and what we will be able to do with (the new building), is going to be kind of off the charts."

Hart Middle School also just recently opened its new science building doors to students after not having the adequate classroom or lab space needed to teach.

The overall scope of work for that project included an 8,000-square-foot building with six fully modernized rooms equipped with LED

But new classrooms were just one part of the \$191 million that the district invested in schools to date using funds from Measure I1.

"We've also expanded in doing some special education modernization projects, water conservation and all the technology -- from the fiber to the cable to the Wi-Fi to all the switches -- were upgraded under this bond measure," Sheikholeslami said.

According to the annual report, 671 classroom smart display boards were also installed, 25,000 square feet of parking and drop off lanes were constructed and 275 heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems were replaced.

Apart from that, Measure I1 funds helped the district make some severely needed safety and infrastructure improvements such as the 500 new fire alarm devices and the 496 security cameras that were installed and eight of the schools getting new fences to help keep dangerous people from easily entering the schools.

"The new districtwide security system is a step that we needed to take just so the environment is safer for students," Olson said.

There were other significant projects such as the 400,000 square feet of roofing work that Olson said benefited from students not being in school during the pandemic, but one of the projects that has been the most significant is the Lydiksen Elementary School rebuild project.

This \$38 million project, while not yet fully completed, has been in the works since February 2020 and includes a newly opened library, administration office and classrooms. Other features of the project include a new kindergarten classroom building and play structure, an outdoor lunch area equipped with a massive shade structure and 700 feet added to the drop-off lane loop.

But while Sheikholeslami said that the district leveraged about \$9 million of savings in projects and built a lot of confidence in their ability to be able to deliver on projects, there are still some stakeholders in Pleasanton who are critical of certain issues like the district not following through with building a 10th elementary school, which was listed as a project in Measure I1 and a key campaign point.

Kathleen Ruegsegger, who served on the Pleasanton school board for three years in the early 1990s, told the Weekly that one of the main reasons she voted in favor of Measure I1 in 2016 was because she supported the 10th elementary school plan. She later openly opposed the 2022 Measure I, as well as the \$323 million Measure M from PUSD that failed to clear the 55% voter threshold in the March 2020 primary election.

The district has the \$35 million that was set aside for that project still available. The school board nixed the 10th elementary school project in November 2020 due to lower enrollment and after seeing demographics amid the pandemic that suggested the district wasn't going to have the student population to justify constructing that new school in north Pleasanton.

But Ruegsegger, while still worried about the possible overpopulation of new families coming into Pleasanton thanks to new housing development projects, said her main concern was how the district plans on using that surplus bond money.

"I am still concerned about the \$35 million, because the promise was if there wasn't going to be an elementary school, they would not bond those funds," she said. "My sense is that they are holding out and will bond the funds and not build an elementary school."

And even though she said that she does support and appreciate all of the other projects that have been completed up until now -- excluding the fencing projects, which don't allow residents to access things like playgrounds on weekends -- she said her main problem with the last bond and the current bond is spending oversight.

"What I do have a problem with is the language in the bonds and the fact that it's so vague that any project can get approved," Ruegsegger said. "When you talk about the CBOC, the committee that oversees the bonds, they are approving things that are already done ... I wish the state would change the rules, so that it would have to come through the CBOC before they build it, not after they build it."