

# FHS vocational project passes

**By BROOKE WOHLRABE**  
Sentinel Correspondent

**FAIRMONT** — On Tuesday evening, a \$6.73 million bond referendum for an expanded vocational center at Fairmont High School passed with 868 yes votes and 418 no votes or 67 percent in favor of the project.

Jake Tietje, Fairmont Area School District's principal of program development, said, "this is a testament to the need for this type of programming and facility in the area."

The 13,200 square-foot building will be located on the south side of the high

school building, next to the existing vocational area.

The new vocational center will include a classroom designed for HVAC. There also be an expanded woodshop classroom, an automotive shop expansion and a manufacturing lab. The existing lab will become a programming lab.

Fairmont High School currently has five academies: automotive, welding, agriculture, culinary and construction trades. Expanding the vocational programs has been a goal of the district for quite some time as Minnesota currently needs to replace

239,000 skilled labor workers throughout every industry.

Fairmont school administrators began thinking about solutions to this challenge nearly two years ago. They decided to provide space for programming and educate students on opportunities within the Fairmont area in order to prepare students to fill good-paying jobs that are available with Fairmont area employees.

Fairmont Area Schools superintendent Joe Brown, said, "Jake has dedicated multiple months of his career to working on this project and he's done a phenomenal

job. It's a great project but it took a leader like Jake to get it done."

Before the vote, Tietje led two public meetings which took place on Jan. 12 and Jan. 26 so that information could be shared with the public. Mailings with additional information also were sent to residents in the Fairmont Area School district.

For the project to hit the ballots, first, the school's operations committee needed to approve it. Next, the school board supported the idea to submit to the Minnesota Department of Education for review and comment. After the

district received a positive review, the request went out to voters.

When asked if he was worried before the vote, Tietje said there was so much positive feedback as he visited more than 75 businesses in the region so he had a really good feeling going into it.

"The 67 percent sums up the community seeing a need for it. I'm excited to see the programming give back to the community. That's what's going to happen. It's going to create opportunities for employers in our region and help our community grow," said.

Tietje said.

Now that the project has passed, Tietje said the pre-construction process will begin and once the design is fine-tuned, he estimates they will go out for bids in early summer and construction will begin late this summer. Occupancy is projected for the summer of 2022.

"Fairmont Area Schools is fortunate to have support for this bond referendum. This programming will provide educational opportunities for our students in the area and skilled labor workers for employers in our region," Tietje said.