

Study Shows Continued Growth For South County

By Michelle Caceres - November 2, 2021



Current long-term growth plans show continued population increases and continued school construction in Southern Hillsborough County, including an addition to Spoto High School.

Hillsborough County School Board members will meet on Tuesday, November 16 to review and discuss the Tindale Oliver Long Range School Planning Study update and the impact of growth on the district.

The study, which is an update to a 2017 study, reviews trends in population, planned and proposed development in the county, existing capacity in schools, the cost of debt and maintenance and the estimated cost of building new schools.

Initial findings show Hillsborough County continues to be a high-growth county, the South County area will require 15 out of 18 additional district schools, there is a high level of available capacity and impact fees are likely to generate sufficient revenues to build the future schools.

There is also an opportunity to repurpose some schools in the central part of the county (including Gibsonton). A repurposing analysis showed underutilized schools, especially at the middle school level, can be converted to better utilize current district schools. Gibsonton Elementary School's current utilization rate is 75 percent. Some middle schools, including Sligh, McLane and Giunta Middle Schools, have utilization rates as low as 51 percent.

It is estimated that Hillsborough County will require 18 schools in the next 15 years, 15 of them in South County. In the near future, four new elementary schools, two new middle schools and one new high school will be constructed in the South County area.

"From a planning perspective, it's important that our long-range plans continue to evolve and not sit on a shelf gathering dust," said General Manager of Growth Management Amber Dickerson. "We want to be ahead of the game and ensure that the school board can start building a 15-year inventory of school sites which we haven't historically been able to do because we haven't had the funding to do that."

School impact fees, charges assessed to new construction for the impact that is created by new development and help support school construction, have increased from \$4,000 to \$8,000, money that has been able to be set aside for property purchases.

The study also shows that a specific plan is needed for Plant City because the study suggests that, as Southern Hillsborough County growth slows, there will be a population increase there.

“South Hillsborough County continues to be a hot growth area,” said Dickerson. “We want to have a robust inventory of sites, so a year or two before we need a school site, we’re ready to move dirt.”

For more information about Hillsborough County Public Schools’ long-range plans, call 272-4896 or visit www.hillsboroughschools.org/domain/2920.

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